

Book Review for *Albion*

David Daniell, *THE BIBLE IN ENGLISH: ITS HISTORY AND INFLUENCE*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003.

When I first set out to read David Daniell's new book, I was looking forward to seeing how the author of a very fine biography of William Tyndale would handle the entire history of the English Bible. Unfortunately, the present work is a major disappointment. Daniell's judgments are often tendentious and his scholarship poor. The work is filled with errors of fact.

First, the tendentiousness. David Daniell writes as a man of faith, and he has high praise for Calvin and Calvinism. "Calvinist divinity," he contends, "is the most New Testament, indeed the most Pauline, of all" (p. 716). Well, maybe. Daniell makes no effort to demonstrate his thesis, but he continually praises those works that to his mind exhibit Calvinism – the Geneva Bible, obviously, but also Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton, Bunyan, and Harriet Beecher Stowe.

But this also means that Daniell has little use for Catholics and their versions. For instance, regarding the suppression of the Lollard Bible in the fifteenth century, Daniell concludes, "Controlled by Rome, what was orthodox Christianity in the English Church from 1409 until the 1530s was unique in Northern Europe in its narrowness and terrifying restrictions" (p. 110). "*Controlled by Rome*"? Where does Daniell get this? He offers no proof; and, in point of fact, the papacy of the fifteenth century, weakened by schism and under assault from conciliarists, was in no position to control the Church in England and it didn't.

Regarding the New American Bible, produced by Catholics in 1970, Daniell writes, "[It] gives the impression that the work was done by people who did not actually *like* the Bible [emphasis original]" and dismisses a criticism of the Greek of John's gospel with the gratuitous remark, "Any stick, it seems, will do to beat the Gospel of Love" (p. 754).

But maybe it's really a case of "any stick" to beat Rome. For in his discussion of the Catholic edition of the Revised Standard Version (1966), he charges the revisers with a "silent alteration" of "sexual perverts" into "homosexuals" (1 Cor. 6:9) in the Catholic version – presumably for the sake of "gay" bashing (p. 742). But what this really is is Catholic bashing, since the original 1946 RSV has "homosexuals." Of course, it is also bad scholarship, since it was the 1971 edition of the RSV that used "sexual perverts" – five years *after* the Catholic revision.

Which brings us to our second point: this book is filled with mistakes – so many that one hardly knows where to start. Already on page 2, Daniell writes that “Christians in the West are divided about fourteen additional books.” Not quite, since Catholics as well as Protestants *reject* three of the fourteen, two books of Esdras and the Prayer of Manasseh. A small matter? Perhaps, but it’s only the beginning.

Daniell has many incorrect dates. For instance: The Council of Constance condemned Wycliffe in 1415, not 1425 (p. 73). Tyndale was arrested in 1535, not 1531 (p. 153). Coverdale’s Bible was first printed in 1535, not 1525 (p. 213). The Geneva Academy began in 1559, not 1555 (p. 291). The final Latin edition of Calvin’s *Institutes* came out in 1559, not 1599 (p. 308). George Whitefield was not preaching in Newbury in 1727 (p. 509) – he would only have been 13. Origen lived in the third century, not the fourth (p. 680).

But dates are not the only problem. Daniell is wrong on many of his facts. Here are some examples. Erasmus did not *reprint* Valla’s *Adnotationes* in 1505 – he *printed* them for the first time (p. 115). Pius V, not Gregory XIII, excommunicated Queen Elizabeth (p. 122). The Book of Common Prayer used the Psalter of the Great Bible, not Coverdale’s 1535 version (p. 219). There are three (not two) modern facsimile editions of the Geneva Bible (p. 319). Cyril and Methodius perhaps invented the Glagolitic *alphabet*, but certainly not the language (p. 659). Lincoln did not run for the presidency in 1858 (p. 720). The first edition of the Revised Standard Version did not use double columns but printed the text across the page in a single column (pp. 740, 748). The first 17 presidents of the United States did not all have “as one of their names” a biblical one (pp. 591-92).

The editors of this work must also bear some responsibility for its weaknesses. Someone at Yale University Press should have caught contradictions like the following. Twice Daniell asserts (incorrectly) that the “metrical Psalms [Sternhold and Hopkins] were printed in some form at the back of *every* Geneva Bible after 1560 [emphasis mine]” (p. 323; also p. 526), but on page 527, he says, “Sternhold and Hopkins was printed as an integral part of *most* English Bibles [emphasis mine].” On page 648, Daniell incorrectly identifies Socinianism along with Arianism as an “ancient” heresy; but on page 689 he says that Socinians were followers of two *sixteenth-century* theologians. From August, 1870, to October, 1871, is more than a year not “nearly a year” later (p. 696). On page 737, Daniell says that the copyright of the American Standard Version passed to the International Council of Religious Education in 1919; on the very next page, he gets it right, 1928. On page 755, Daniell offers two dates for the Revised Standard Version – 1952 (correct) and 1956 (incorrect).

In addition, on eight different occasions, the references to the illustrations in the text are numbered incorrectly.

These are some of the errors that I noticed in reading this book. There are several more I could have included; and there are probably still others that escaped me. I do not understand how this happened. David Daniell has done some very good work in the past, and Yale is an excellent publisher. But I cannot recommend *The Bible in English*. It simply has too many mistakes.

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