

## Judging English Bibles

The English Bible from KJV to NIV, by Jack P. Lewis (Baker, 1981, 408 pp., \$16.95), is reviewed by D. A. Carson, associate professor of New Testament, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, Illinois.

**T**HE CASCADE OF NEW English translations of the Bible has finally been reduced to a trickle. Most are still in print, making reliable introductions to the strengths and weaknesses of the most common ones of value to the church. Jack P. Lewis, professor of Bible at Harding Graduate School of Religion since 1954, provides just such a guide.

Lewis's first two chapters survey the history of the Bible prior to the English versions, and the English versions prior to the King James Version. The third chapter focuses on "Doctrinal Problems in the King James Version," and the remaining 11 chapters examine the strengths and weaknesses of the ASV, RSV, NEB, NASB, JB, NAB, NWT (Jehovah's Witnesses), LB, TEV (the Good News Bible), NIV, and the New KJV. The book concludes with a 40-page bibliography: two pages on Bible history and translation and the rest a catalogue of most of the principal discussions of the versions treated in the book.

This work does not compete with more comprehensive one-volume *histories* of the Bible (such as F. F. Bruce's *The Books and the Parchments*). It does go over almost the same ground covered by Sakae Kubo and Walter Specht in *So Many Versions? Twentieth Century English Versions of the Bible* (Zondervan, 1975), albeit in considerably more detail. (Kubo/Specht discuss 15 English-language Bibles in 240 pages; Lewis treats 12 in 400 pages). The stance, theological and linguistic, is as careful and "neutral" as could reasonably be expected. Lewis tries to be even-handed, and the plethora of examples he cites insures that disagreement with him on some detail rarely jeopardizes his larger case. Nowhere does he self-consciously formulate the criteria by which he assesses "good" and "bad" in translation (unlike, for instance, the work of Eugene H. Glassman, *The Translation Debate: What Makes a Bible Translation Good?* [IVP, 1981]). But his *practice* of assessment reveals Lewis as a sympathetic and sensitive

supporter of "dynamic equivalence."

Lewis does not come out unequivocally in favor of any one translation. But he insists that although he is hard on some of them, God's Word can be heard in any translation if it is read prayerfully. He tellingly draws a comparison between English versions of the Bible and dictionaries, for, as Samuel Johnson once said, "Dictionaries are like watches; the worst is better than none, and the best cannot be expected to go quite true." This is an admirable book, one that quietly masks long hours of careful study behind readable prose and mature judgments. □