

# Selling the Word of God

## The Early Commercial History of the English Bible

By Harry Spillane

Foreword by Diarmaid MacCulloch

24 September 2026

This is a history of the English Bible as a book. A book that in order to be read had first to be sold.

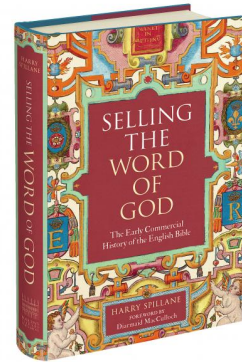
- Tells the story of how printers developed new and exciting strategies for producing, marketing and selling bibles to make them accessible to all, from the rich to the poor, from the educated to the illiterate
- Foreword by prizewinning author Diarmaid MacCulloch

The Bible is the most published text in history and the story of its publication in the English language is extraordinary. This book traces its evolution from the first printed English New Testament of 1525 to the much celebrated King James Bible of 1611. By this date, readers could already choose from over a dozen English versions, each of them printed in vastly different ways. Behind each edition are stories of rivalries, mistakes, bankruptcies and bestsellers. Far from being fixed, stable publications, Bibles were consistently undergoing change and development in the early modern period.

Creativity and enterprise were at the heart of the English Bible market, something that the usual focus on Bible translators has often overshadowed. Illustrated with early editions, this book considers how printers created new markets for Bibles, how they advertised them, and how they commissioned innovative forms of illustration and decoration to attract buyers. How, it asks, did the English Bible become a bestseller?

**HARRY SPILLANE** is a historian at the University of Cambridge where he has been the Munby Fellow in Bibliography.

**DIARMAID MacCULLOCH** is Emeritus Professor of the History of the Church, University of Oxford.



**Hardback, £25.00**

**ISBN:** 9781851246625

**Extent:** 304 pages

**Size:** 234 x 156 mm

**Illustrations:** 32 Black & white illustrations; 18 Colour illustrations

Bodleian Library Publishing  
Broad Street  
Oxford  
OX1 3BG  
Tel +44 (0) 1865 283850  
publishing@bodleian.ox.ac.uk  
Instagram @BodleianLibraryPublishing