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King James and the Hampton Court Conference

It could be argued that the Seventeenth century was the 'golden age of English Prose' since it produced 'two of the foundations upon which the modern English language is built': the Authorized Version of the Bible and the Book of Common Prayer. The flowering of English letters under the mighty pens of Francis Bacon, John Donne, John Milton and William Shakespeare were unparalleled. But the burgeoning of England's literature also witnessed the end of an era, for as Shakespeare was penning his tragedy Hamlet earlier in the century "the last of the Tudors and the greatest of queens" neared death. Before she expired the burning issue of her successor was resolved when she declared: "A King should succeed me; and who should that be but our cousin of Scotland?" On March 24, 1603 Queen Elizabeth died and the reigns of government passed to the house of Stuart.

Elizabeth's lengthy reign (1558-1603) steered a middle course between Roman Catholicism on the one end, and a rising, aggressive Puritanism on the other. The establishment of the Anglican church had come to be known in history as the 'Elizabethan Settlement'. During her reign she had repeated the order of her father, Henry VIII, and her brother, Edward VI, that 'one book of the whole Bible of the largest volume in English' should be set up in every parish church. The procurement of the Scriptures in the vernacular had been a costly, bloody affair in the past; now it was an acceptable reality but unanimity still did not prevail. History's best known and best loved translation was yet to come, and the background of how we obtained the King James Version is a little known story. Elizabeth's dying words that "far above all

earthly treasure I esteem my people's love" was exemplary, but above all, above grand monarchs, the English people had come to love the Holy Scriptures translated into their own tongue even more.

The problem of succession over, the English masses were delighted to learn of their new king. James I, who had for many years served as king of Scotland, proceeded slowly toward London in April, 1603, for his coronation. Although his father had been 'mysteriously murdered' and his ambitious mother, Mary, Queen of Scots, executed by Elizabeth sixteen years earlier, he imagined that he would now be able "to live in royal splendour, and entertained the loftiest ideas of what royal supremacy might be made to mean". It was James' intention to predicate his rightful claim to the English throne upon 'theological grounds', namely, the divine right of kings.

While James has been chiefly remembered by posterity in the words of Henry IV's aphorism, 'the wisest fool in Christendom', and by Andrew Melville's quip as being 'God's silly vassal', he was "almost certainly the most learned monarch that ever sat on the English Throne, and his learning was predominantly theological". He had written on such diverse subjects as demonology, the evils of tobacco as well as political philosophy. In Scotland, James had been humiliated by the dominant and domineering Presbyterians. As the king of England he would be the "chief executive, the Supreme Governor of the Church, the possessor of hereditary wealth, the leader of his subjects in war and peace". As early as 1598 and 1599 respectively, James privately published two treatises which developed the divine right theory: The True Law of Free Monarchies and Basilikon Doron. This notion "for all its formidable name, was merely an extreme statement

of a widely accepted idea: that the king is the source of legislation". Later, the English chief justice, Sir Edward Coke, would oppose this position by appealing to the common law and Parliament as the progenitors of what was lawful. However, in 1616 James restated his principle in a particularly offensive way:

That which concerns the mystery of the King's power is not lawful to be disputed...(for to argue about it is)...to take away the mystical reverence that belongs unto them that sit in the throne of God.

To the incessant irritation of all, he prated on this theme declaring that kings 'are breathing images of God upon earth, and sit upon God's throne, but even by God himself they are called Gods'. He likened his subjects to pawns on a chessboard; however, the king was "like a father as compared with his children or like the head as compared with the body. Without him there could be no civil society, for the people is a mere 'headless multitude', incapable of making law, which proceeds from the king as the divinely instituted lawgiver of his people".

John Knox, the leader of the Scottish Reformation in the sixteenth century, had advocated the doctrine of rebellion against tyrannical rulers which caused James no little consternation. Knox had written approvingly of 'the zeal of Jehu in killing wicked kings' and his writings inspired John Milton's regicide tracts during the Civil War of the seventeenth century. Arguing that "subjects might lawfully reject and kill wicked kings", Knox exceeded the teaching of his mentor, John Calvin, resulting in his writings being publicly burnt by Oxford University with the prohibition against members of the school reading them.

With this background James was determined to become a 'universal king'-- king of the whole nation and beyond the power of factions. This view conflicted with the 'Two Kingdoms' theory of Andrew Melville, another leader in the Scottish Kirk, and the Presbyterians, which meant that the secular kingdom of the state should not interfere with the spiritual kingdom of the church. James aimed at the 'One Kingdom' which would rule under God alone. James finally adhered that he was responsible in the highest degree, which meant responsibility to God only and not to his subjects.

In the summer of 1603, in addition to fighting a plague which struck London and its environs, James soon learned that England was seriously divided in its ecclesiastical allegiances between three factions: (1) there was a small but dangerous Roman Catholic party, which had suffered from the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588 and the execution of Mary, Queen of Scots, the year before. Initially James gave them hope when he referred to Rome as our 'mother church', but the Gunpowder Plot of 1605 sealed the fate of Catholicism; (2) the Puritan party was active, self-confident and aggressive. It advanced from the restrained conservatism of the Elizabethan Settlement to much greater liberty in both worship and in church government. They disliked both the Prayer Book and episcopacy because each put a curb on the liberty of the individual. They further adhered that despotic power of the king should be broken and sovereignty given to the people as represented in Parliament; and (3) the conservatives which rallied behind the Anglican church and loyalty to its king. The leadership of this wing was led by Richard Bancroft, Archbishop of Canterbury, Richard Hooker, author of the celebrated Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity, and Lancelot Andrewes, a scholarly preacher and poet. Collectively, they were scholarly, devout, dignified, conservative, and as leading

representatives of the Church of England they stood for the ideals which appealed most to the new King.

While en route to London to claim the throne, the Puritans had presented James with the Millenary Petition calling for purification of the established Church, or as the document reads, they were

desiring and longing for the redress of divers abuses of the Church...the ministers of the Gospel that desire not a disorderly innovation, but a due and godly reformation.

Puritan grievances were fivefold: Anglican ceremonies were reminiscent of the old popish faith discarded at the Reformation, e.g., making the sign of the cross at Baptism and bowing at the name of Jesus; preaching was perfunctory; Anglican bishops were 'pluralists', holding too many livings at once, thus scanting their pastoral duties; the Anglican church was omnipresent and too severe, using its power of excommunication to excess; finally, the Anglicans neglect of the Sabbath urgently called for correction.

At first James was sympathetic. But when the University of Oxford successfully brought to his notice that the framers of the Petition were men who wished to limit the power of the monarchy, the King's sympathies moved toward the anti-Puritan views of Whitgift, then Archbishop of Canterbury, and of Bancroft, the Bishop of London...It at once became clear, however, that the ceremonial demands of the Puritans were only a cloak for introducing into England Presbyterian government. This discovery very quickly alienated James from the Puritan cause, and he delivered a sermon on his favorite text, 'No Bishop, no King', in the course of which he stated, 'A Scottish Presbytery... as well agreeth with a monarchy as God and the Devil'. He further concluded that while he was in England he would have bishops. At the Hampton Court Conference he made it perfectly clear to the Puritans that he was on the side of the church party and expected the others to conform, crying out that if

they failed to do so, he would 'harry them out of the land, or else do worse'.

In response to these demands, King James called the Hampton Court Conference in 1604 in which he presided. Hampton Court, located within 20 miles outside London, represents one of the interesting ironies of history, for it was in Hampton Court that Cardinal Wolsey had a century earlier opposed translation and printing of the Bible into English. Now it would become the site of the instigation of the greatest translation hailed by history.

There were present at the meeting members of the Privy Council, nine bishops and five deans, Reynolds, Dean of Lincoln, being the spokesman for the Puritan party. James had summoned this conference of churchmen and theologians 'for the hearing, and for the determining, things pretended to be amiss in the Church'. After hearing the Puritan cause James granted them some of their demands: he promised to check pluralism and to see to better preaching. He agreed also to secure a 'uniform translation' of the Bible--this was the germ of the irreplaceable Authorized Version, the 'King James Version', of 1611, but the king had no intention of reorganizing the Anglican church on Presbyterian lines. Nevertheless, a resolution was passed

That a translation be made of the whole Bible, as consonant as can be to the original Hebrew and Greek; and this to be set out and printed, without any marginal notes, and only to be used in all Churches of England in time of divine service.

The proposal for a new translation came from Dr. Reynolds, President of Corpus Christi College, Oxford, a leader of the Puritan side in the Church of England, and one of the greatest scholars of his day. It did not meet with unanimous approval; Richard Bancroft, Bishop of London (soon to be Archbishop of Canterbury), complained that 'if every man's humour were followed, there would be no end of translating'.

James seized eagerly upon the proposal. 'I profess I could never yet see a Bible well translated in English; but I think that, of all, that of Geneva is the worst. I wish some pains were taken for an uniform translation, which should be done by the best-learned men in both Universities, then reviewed by the Bishops, presented to the Privy Council, lastly ratified by Royal authority, to be read in the whole Church, and none other'.

In particular James had had trouble with the marginal notes of the Geneva Bible (1560), which had been inspired by Calvinists in the city marked by the influence of John Calvin. These notes which he thought were 'very partial, untrue, seditious, and savoring too much of dangerous and traitorous conceits', impinged on his theory again of divine right. Two passages of Scriptures marked by these questionable notes were Exodus 1.17, which suggested that the Hebrew midwives were right to disobey the Egyptian king's orders, and 2 Chronicles 15.16, which stated that King Asa's mother should have been executed, and not merely deposed, for her idolatry. Another great irony is that over two hundred years before this, the great reformer John Wycliffe attempted to translate the Bible without notes and was vehemently opposed by the Church of his day.

Six panels of translators, forty-seven in all, had the work divided between them. The Old Testament was entrusted to three panels, the New Testament to two, and the Apocrypha to one. Respectively two panels each were to meet at Oxford, Cambridge and Westminster. The Bishop's Bible of 1568 was to serve as the basis for a new translation. Imprinted in London by printer Robert Barker, the King James Version was dedicated to the king, his 'most Excellent Majestie'. The Authorized Version set a standard of 'Bible English' (going back in essence to Tyndale) which has exercised a profound literary influence. Completed in 1611 the King James Bible went through many printings and editions in becoming the standard for Bibles which has never been abated by popular demand.

The great Biblical scholar F. F. Bruce makes this notation regarding the Authorized Version:

For all its merits, the Authorized Version could not be expected to remain unchallenged for ever. Apart from gradual changes in English usage, which have made its language seem increasingly remote and archaic to many people to-day who have not the literary equipment to appreciate it, the advances which have taken place during the past three and a half centuries in knowledge of the original languages and text of the Bible have made its revision imperative. Yet it is well recognized that, throughout the English-speaking world, there are hundreds of thousands of readers by whom this version is accepted as 'The Word of God' in a sense in which no other version would be so accepted. Such an attitude towards what is but one among many available translations may be open to criticism, but its persistence is a tribute to the sound workmanship of the men to whom we owe the version of 1611.

Finally, we will attempt to recapture the background of how we arrived at the completed King James Bible with the following admonition that history still has many secrets, as well as ironies, and the person who is chiefly responsible for the thought, language and style of the King James Bible has been one of its best kept secrets. In the history that follows you will unlock this great secret.

The Medieval Shroud

The classics of medieval Englishmen were to be found in the Bible. It existed in a learned language, accessible to an elite. As a physical collection of books it was truly bibliotheca--often at least two or three large volumes in folio--ponderous, rare and very expensive.

The moderately educated man, usually a monk, a cleric by definition, seldom saw the Bible as a whole. Many clerics, probably most parish priests up to Wycliffe's time, were unable to construe even the Latin of the Mass. Of the clergy who could read, most would still know the Bible in single books and extracts, primarily of course in the extracts of the service books. Medieval liturgies are bewildering mosaics cut and shaped for a purpose out of the Scriptures; and if this process gives a prodigious enrichment to meaning; it obscures almost completely the flow and scope of the original. But if our medieval cleric had at any time submitted to a course of intensive education--and such a training was comparatively rare--he would probably have known individually some of the Wisdom and Poetical books, some of the Pauline epistles, perhaps the Song of Songs or the book of Revelation. Often he would come to the Scriptures through the commentaries. Indeed, by the thirteenth century in a good center of learning the range of commentary and homiletic material would be extensive.

Otherwise the medieval man was surrounded by the great nexus of popular interest in the sacred story: the Creation, the Fall, the Prophecies of the Old Testament, the Incarnation and Passion of Christ, the 'Harrowing of Hell', the life of the Virgin Mary from the Conception to the Assumption, the lives of the apostles, and the Last Things of Revelation. These

central motifs were presented to everyman in as vivid and sensational manner as possible, especially noncanonical writings: for example, the medieval representation of hell^{was} as much pagan as biblical.

It was believed by the learned and unlearned that the very order of words was meaningful. All words, not only biblical words, had an 'innate force and mystery' for these people. In fact, the art of writing itself was considered to be of divine origin. Therefore, the words and books of Scripture possessed miraculous power. The Anglo-Saxons adhered to three sacred languages, namely, Hebrew, Greek and Latin; however, the latter alone was accorded the highest acknowledgement.

It was the great educator Alcuin who explained to Charlemagne that the whole core of Christian wisdom was centered in the seven pillars of the Latin liberal arts just as they had been taught in the schools of Rome. "Culture and learning for the Anglo-Saxons meant Roman culture...they saw their own situation as a prolongation of the past. Scriptural history, Roman history, and their own all fall into the same scheme. For them, there was no clash between Cicero and Virgil and the Scriptures".

The art of letters found its ideal and absolute in the Latin Bible, the Vulgate as translated by Jerome. "In our century, we have been urged to read the Bible as literature. In dealing with the early English, we must turn the phrase about: the Anglo-Saxons tended to read all literature as the Bible and judged all writing by the standards that they found implicit there". Hebrew and Greek texts were simply not available, nor were they sought since the paradigm of revelation was symbolized and congealed in the Latin Vulgate.

Now success in translating the Bible depends on the conjunction of two factors. No translation is possible before an acceptable interpretation of the original has been established, but an interpretation of Scripture implies the existence of a theology (precisely Thomas More's objection against Tyndale). New words imply that a new theology has occurred. "But the pressure of theology on translation always exists. The corollary, of course, is that existing translations in turn continue to exert control over theology". In the Medieval period of history, the shroud that hung over its people was a theology extracted and abstracted from Latin culture and ideology, namely, the Latin Vulgate as interpreted by a clerical elite.

The vernacular, or the Scripture in Anglo-Saxon, appeared simply and totally inadequate. Its use was thought to devalue meaning and values. "Not until a vernacular is seen to possess relevance and resources, and, above all, has acquired sufficient cultural prestige, can we look for acceptable and successful translation". As one historian critically relates:

And the times at which a language possesses this cultural prestige may not coincide with the times at which theology permits its basic terminology a certain fluidity. It happens occasionally. The desirable conjunction occurred in late-sixteenth century England. It had occurred in Jerome's time too.

But the full conjunction did not occur in England before the sixteenth century. It was still only partial in Wyclif's time. But the history of early vernacular treatment of the Bible in England must keep these regulating principles in view. Over the six hundred years separating Bede from Wyclif, both the theology of the Bible and the prestige of the vernacular submitted to change. If, in the eighth century, the Bible tended to be looked upon as oracle, by the fourteenth it was already being presented as a plain rule of life. By the middle of the eleventh century, on the other hand, the vernacular had slowly won and already begun to lose a literary standing and serviceableness which were not fully regained for another five centuries.

The medieval church in England never clearly envisaged even the possibility of what we should call translation of the Bible. The teaching policy as

regards the Scriptures conformed in general with the twin aims set out by Augustine in De Doctrina Christiana, First, it was necessary for the preacher to understand the full meaning of the Scriptures; secondly, it was necessary for him to learn how to communicate this special knowledge. The very complexity of the first process, however, was thought to demonstrate the unsuitability of any attempt to achieve the second by mere translation. To translate the Latin Bible would have represented a transformation of the whole culture, both in sociology and theology.

Early examples of the Bible being expressed in the vernacular rarely instanced a 'true translation'. For example, the Venerable Bede thought the lay poet Caedmon had a 'divine gift' that resulted in a free but effective means of conveying the kernel of spiritual truth. This earliest Christian poet of the seventh century, as translated in modern English, sings of the 'appearance of Christ to His disciples after the resurrection':

What time the Lord God
from death arose
so strongly was no
Satan armed
though he were with iron
all girt round
that might that great
force resist;
for he went forth
the Lord of angels,
in the strong city,
and bade fetch
angels all bright
and even bade say
to Simon Peter
that he might on Galilee
behold God
eternal and firm,
as he ere did.
Then as I understand, went
the disciples together
all to Galilee,
inspired by the Spirit
The holy Son of God,
whom they saw
were the Lord's son.
Then over against the disciples stood
the Lord Eternal,
God in Galilee

so that the disciples
thither all ran
Where the eternal was,
fell on the earth,
and at his feet bowed,
thanking the Lord
that they should behold
the creator of angels.
Then forthwith spake
Simon Peter and said,
Art thou thus, Lord,
with power gifted?
We saw thee
at one time when
they laid thee
in loathsome bondage,
the heathen with their hands.
That they may rue
when they their end
shall behold thereafter
* * * * *

He on the tree ascended
and shed his blood,
God on the cross
through his Spirit's power.
Wherefore we should
at all times
give to the Lord thanks
in deeds and works
for that he us from thraldom
led home
up to Heaven,
where we may share
the greatness of God.

Likewise, but on a higher plane, Lord Alfred, the ninth century King of Wessex, "gives expression to his wish that 'all the free-born youth of his people, who possess the means, may persevere in learning, so long as they have no other affairs to prosecute, until they can perfectly read the English Scriptures'". "At head of his 'Book of Laws' he places the Ten Commandments, not indeed rendered with verbal accuracy, but differently arranged and somewhat abridged".

Alfred's Dooms

'The Lord spake these words to Moses, and thus said: I am the Lord thy God.
I led thee out of the land of the Egyptians and of their bondage.

1. Love thou not other strange gods above me.
2. Utter thou not my name idly, for thou shalt not be guiltless towards me, if thou utter my name idly.
3. Remember that thou hallow the rest-day. Work for yourselves six days, and on the seventh rest. For in six days Christ wrought the heavens and the earth, the seas, and all creatures that are in them, and rested on the seventh day: and therefore the Lord hallowed it.
4. Honour thy father and thy mother, whom the Lord hath given thee, that thou mayest be the longer living on earth.
5. Slay thou not.
6. Commit thou not adultery.
7. Steal thou not.
8. Say thou not false witness.
9. Covet thou not thy neighbour's goods unjustly.
10. Make thou not to thyself golden or silver gods'.

Yet this sort of vital approximation of the Scriptures was abridged by a dominant and pervasive theology.

The Christian layman was saved a life of good works. If he desires to know more about the Scriptures, then he must first justify this ambition by a goodly life. He was informed that God is concerned primarily with good works; indeed, the Bible itself if the record of God's good works and these provide the spiritual meaning of the scriptural narrative. Blatantly, the Church proclaimed that Christ loves deeds more than smooth words. 'Words pass, works stand'. Furthermore, it was important^{to} observe degree and status. "Society (was) built on three pillars: laborers, warriors and men of prayer. If one order fails, society collapses".

Even more impressive in development were the West-Saxon Gospels which were observed to be "a full, accurate, readable, if literal, translation"; however the 'precarious and unstable position in which ecclesiastical policy would find itself, accustomed as it had become over centuries in the West to withholding Scripture from those ignorant of Latin', led to further obscuring of a genuine translation.

Now already in England at the end of the tenth century, the vernacular was reaching out to grasp at the sacred text. Kings and bishops and men of state cared for

vernacular writings. Great books were made in English and ceremoniously donated. Yet this request for the vernacular went forward in a world where ecclesiasticism was hardening and where intellectual leadership was being drawn more narrowly into firmer monastic molds.

The Norman invasion of 1066 altered affairs, although 'five hundred years of organized Christian life in England were not cancelled'. The West-Saxon Gospels and various paraphrases sustained continued popularity after the conquest. 'But the spirit came to inhabit new forms'.

The monasteries remained the instruments which determined intellectual development but the Norman ecclesiastical system was very different from the Anglo-Saxon. It had short if strong roots, and no vernacular culture was attached to them. It was fiercely and proudly grounded in contemporary latinity. The native learning of England was unacceptable to the new order, not because it was the learning of a subject culture, but because it had the wrong tone. It appeared old-fashioned, unpractical, diffuse, unsuitably attached to the old precedent and forgotten sentiment. At its worst it was hopelessly dreamy or fantastic.

By the end of the eleventh century nearly all the great monasteries of England had been brought under Norman control, such that English traditions and language 'ceased to be consciously preserved and as a cultural medium was all but destroyed'. An old cleric laments, 'These (Bede to Aelfric) taught our people in English...Now is the learning lost and the people forlorn...Those who teach the people now are men of other tongues...' While there was a brief twelfth century revival of Anglo-Saxon, the Anglo-Norman tongue prevailed and eventually formed the basis of the English works of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

While writings in Anglo-Norman were more sophisticated, all vernacular works concerned with Scripture were mainly mere attenuations of contemporary Latin literature on the Bible. All serious work was done in Latin, and biblical scholarship during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries was drawing further and further away from the vernaculars. It was becoming specialized and

technical to an unprecedented degree. Not unlike the profusion of books and knowledge in our own day, by the end of the twelfth century it would be more than even a well-trained cleric could manage to keep up with the development of advanced scholarship and the successive refinements in method. The elaboration of scholarship is illustrated by the vast apparatus produced: the succession of Sentences, the Summas, the book of Questions, the concordances, biblical dictionaries, collections of allegories, etymologies and ambiguities. Little that Paris or Oxford taught could be easily transferred to the edification of the unlearned. As John Locke would complain in his own day, the universities were not made for life.

Plus the free speculation possible in a university made many who participated decidedly unwilling to communicate with untrained minds. Heresy was the almost inevitable result of free speculation. The Bible became a dangerous rather than a liberating book. To handle the text directly, as would be necessary in providing translation, would have courted disaster. Censorship was prevalent. It was much safer for all, much better for the salvation of all concerned, to stick to the accredited expositions of the Church. This echoed the general trend on the Continent as well.

If a layman or monk wanted to know the Bible he should listen to sermons, attend confessional, study wall-paintings and watch plays. If this were not enough then the crucifix, or some other symbol, could be used as a substitute for a direct knowledge of the Scriptures. Even the Franciscans contributed to this atmosphere. Francis himself deprecated the possession and private use of any books. In his sickness he declined the offer to be read to from the Bible.

A new movement of devotion and mysticism emerged. Individuals began, like

Richard Rolle, to seek God through mystical experience. Reading came to be regarded as superfluous, even distracting to the spiritual life. What mattered most was direct contact with God. By the fourteenth century, hearing without understanding Latin services was accorded a sacramental value. From this time too following the lives of the saints was considered more orthodox than reading Holy Scripture. Few churchmen took their suspicion that the Bible was a good only to the extent that it was not understood, but a Friar Claxton, doctor of divinity, said that Holy Scripture was a false heresy.

During the fourteenth century the friars, whom Wycliffe opposed so strongly, were the bitterest and most active opponents of an English Bible. Knowledge was expanded outside the pale of Scripture anyway. Aristotelian philosophy and natural science were gaining ascendancy. The Bible had come to be exposed to scientific inspection. The unlearned had plainly no place in this work. "It took fifteen years of hard study by the keenest mind to become a doctor of theology". As a result it was commonplace that mysticism and the emphasis on personal experience became center stage. Preaching and expounding Holy Writ was considered an activity inferior to self knowledge. When viewed in these terms, it is amazing how modern the medieval period seems.

As it stood until the late fourteenth century, the plain text of Scripture and a basic knowledge of its teaching of the forgiveness and grace of God had been obscured and shrouded in a medieval labyrinth from the average person, and not a few 'learned'.

John Wycliffe: The Morningstar of the Reformation

Two great events in the fourteenth century occurred which served to break up the hard ground of medieval obscurantism: the writings of Chaucer and the English translation of the Bible by John Wycliffe.

The verbal achievement of an English translation of the Bible had as its essential prerequisite the enfranchisement of English. Geoffrey Chaucer was celebrated among his contemporaries and successors for his achievement in high style above all else. Following a line of fourteenth century literary activity, Chaucer translated non-scriptural Latin books into English. As far as is generally known he had no direct connection with any of the biblical translation of Wycliffe and his collaborators, "yet his very achievement as a layman shows that the charmed circle of clerical learning is broken". A writer of the Canterbury Tales is 'not bred in one generation'. The English language had slowly acquired cultural standing and was seeking to become coterminous with contemporary life. While its range was still limited, Chaucer's success was emblematic sign of the literary conditions which made the limited success of the Wycliffite translation of the Bible possible.

However, the culmination of the movement for the translation of the Bible into English in the middle ages is found in the activities of that group of men who surrounded John Wycliffe at Oxford, then later at Lutterworth up to the time of his death in 1384. Two versions of the so-called Wycliffe Bible have survived in manuscript form, the earlier text more literal and translated, of course, from the Latin Vulgate, and the later which was probably embellished by the hand of Wycliffe's associate John Purvey. The latter was considered much more readable and lively.

We know that such a translation was attributable to Wycliffe by several testimonies: for example, Archbishop Arundel wrote to Pope John XXIII in 1411 to the effect that

This pestilent and wretched John Wycliffe, of cursed memory, that son of the old serpent...endeavored by every means to attack the very faith and sacred doctrine of Holy Church, devising--to fill up the measure of his malice--the expedient of a new translation of the Scriptures into the mother tongue.

Likewise Henry Knighton's Chronicle, slightly later, is more direct:

This Master John Wycliffe translated from Latin into English--the Angle not angel speech--the Gospel that Christ gave to the clergy and doctors of the Church... so that by his means it has become vulgar and more open to laymen and women who can read than it usually is to quite learned clergy of good intelligence. And so the pearl of the Gospel is scattered abroad and trodden underfoot by swine.

Finally, we have the testimony of one who paid for his life because he defended and embraced the teachings of Wycliffe. John Hus of Prague observed from those he had been in contact with that "by the English it is said that Wycliffe translated the whole Bible from Latin into English".

But ironically translations of the Bible, and in particular those of the bare text without explanatory comment were regarded with suspicion by the Church, and those produced by the heretic Wycliffe were specifically condemned in 1407. The opposition of the Church to translations was based on several grounds by the late fourteenth century standards. First, the understanding of Scripture, with its fourfold interpretation, was felt to be possible for the priest only by virtue of the grace of his priesthood, and was therefore altogether too difficult for the layman who would be most likely to read a translation. Second, in any case, the earthly hierarchy should be a model of the heavenly one, in that grace should be mediated from the higher ranks to the lower, from upper clergy to lower, and from lower clergy to laymen.

This sort of thinking was reflective of the medieval 'great chain of being', in which all reality approximated a descending scale of relationships from God to the lowest creature. That which was precious and valuable, the Holy Scriptures were to be screened and reserved for a higher order than lay people. Finally, private Bible reading by laymen or priests not intellectually equipped to follow Jerome's Vulgate themselves was liable to lead to heresy. An accurate translation was regarded as an impossible work of subtlety that only the universities under the auspices of the Church could guarantee.

While there were these general objections, no universal and absolute prohibition of the translation of the Scriptures into the vernacular had been enjoined upon the church at large by any Church council or any pope. There are, however, a number of surviving papal letters which could reasonably be taken to represent condemnation of translations, e.g., the Waldensian translations by Innocent III in 1199. On the other hand, those responsible for the day-to-day administration of the Church, particularly those responsible for the extirpation of heresy, diocesan bishops, papal commissioners and inquisitors, all seem to have worked on the principle that possession of vernacular Scriptures was in itself sufficient evidence to warrant the presumption of heresy. It was, after all, necessary to have a license to possess a vernacular translation.

But the aim of the Wycliffite translators was undoubtedly to set up a new and all sufficient authority in opposition to the Church. By now the Church had sanctioned much that was unbiblical, transubstantiation, images and relics, pilgrimages, papal authority, etc., which all fell short of Wycliffe's criterion for knowing and practicing truth: that the Church should conform to the practice of Christ as recorded in Scripture. The Wycliffites appealed to 'Goddis lawe' and 'Christis lawe', their regular names for the Bible and

the New Testament. Moreover, they asserted that these laws were open to the direct understanding of all men on the points most essential to salvation. For such understanding it was necessary that all men should be able to study the Gospels in the tongue in which they might best understand their meaning. In his De Veritate Sacrae Scripturae (1378) he is already appealing to the Scriptures as his prime authority. As Lechler relates:

Wycliffe laid down the principle that, in preaching, God's Word must be taught before everything else, because it is the indispensable bread of life, the seed of regeneration and conversion. Nor was it only in theory that he laid down this principle... The same principle led him also to the work of Bible-translation... The principle that God's Word should be preached to the people, he expanded into the principle that Scripture must become the common property of all.

Whereas previous renderings were partly to furnish aid to the clergy or to the educated classes, the fact is certain that Wycliffe was the first to conceive the great idea of a translation of the whole Bible, and that for the use of the whole people. In a tract of the times, most likely attributable to Wycliffe, it reads:

Blessed are they who hear the Word of God and keep it... Christians ought to travail day and night upon the text of Holy Writ, especially the Gospel in their mother tongue... And yet men will not suffer it that the laity should know the Gospel, and read it in their common life in humility and love... But covetous clerks of this world reply and say that laymen may soon err, and therefore they should not dispute of Christian faith. Alas! alas! what cruelty is this, to rob a whole realm of bodily food because a few fools may be gluttons, and do harm to themselves and others by their food taken immoderately. As easily may a proud worldly priest err against the Gospel written in Latin, as a simple layman err against the Gospel written in English... What reason is this, if a child fail in his lesson at the first day, to suffer never children to come to lessons for this default? Who would ever become a scholar by this process? What Antichrist is this who, to the shame of Christian men, dares to hinder the laity from learning this holy lesson which is so hard (strongly) commanded by God? Each man is bound to do so, that he be saved, but each layman who shall be saved is a real priest made of God, and each man is bound to be a very happy priest.

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During this whole period the opposition to Wyclif had been growing within the Church. Some points in his teaching were condemned by a bare majority in a commission specially appointed by the chancellor of Oxford in 1381, and more decisively in May 1382 by a special synod summoned by the new Archbishop of Canterbury, William Courtenay, and meeting at the house of the Black Friars in London. Wycliffe's influence was strong within the university, and it was only by exerting powerful pressure that Courtenay ensured the publication of these condemnations. He did not relax his pressure until the best known of Wycliffe's supporters within the university had recanted or been shattered; by the end of 1382 the university had been purged so thoroughly that it ceased to be a center of heresy. Yet for many years individual Lollards, as Wycliffe's followers were called, were pursued and brought to trial; in 1397 the Church authorities pressed for the death penalty for heretics; in 1401 the statute de heretica comburendo introduced such a penalty, and in 1407, alarmed by rumors of a renewal of heresy in the university, Archbishop Arundel made a visitation, secured the condemnation of a number of points of Wycliffe's teaching and brought forward a number of 'Constitutions' against Lollardy. One of these reads:

We resolve therefore and ordain that no one henceforth on his own authority translate any text of Holy Scripture into the English or any other language by way of a book, pamphlet or tract, and that no book, pamphlet or tract of this kind, whether already recently composed in the time of the said John Wyclif or since, or to be composed in the future, be read in part or in whole, publicly or privately, under pain of the greater excommunication, until the translation shall have been approved by the diocesan of the place, or if need be by a provincial council.

This constitution provided for England what had not till now existed, a clear prohibition was sternly enforced. The number of prosecutions recorded for owning or reading English Bibles is considerable. Thus the very possession of an English Bible was a potential danger; if the Bible contained any evidence of Wycliffite authorship or recent date the danger would be increased.

The nobleman's fine copies of the English Bible were meant for, and doubtless remained unused upon, his library shelves--a conversation piece; but smaller and cheaper copies were intended for common use among the lower classes. Reading them together in small groups, as the evidence at trials shows that they did, they were in danger of prosecution and even death, but read them they did!

The Bible which permeated the minds of later generations shows no direct descent from the Wycliffite versions; at most a few phrases from the later version, particularly of the Psalms, seem to have found their way into the Tudor translations, and Tyndale's return to the original languages meant that translations based on the intermediate Latin of the Vulgate would soon be out of date.

But in their insistence upon the immediacy of 'Goddis lawe' for every man and their efforts to present it to him in an accurate and understandable form, the Wycliffite translators showed themselves to be true precursors of the English Protestant traditon.

Erasmus and the Renaissance

"After Wycliffe there is an interval of a hundred years before we come to the next great version of the Bible, but in that interval occurred what, more than any other event that ever happened, has affected the history of the English Bible and, indeed, the history of the English nation altogether. Up to this time, in wild Iona, in the monasteries of ancient Britain, in the great homes of learning through the continent of Europe, men and women sat in the silence of their cells slowly copying out letter by letter the pages of the Scripture manuscripts, watching patiently month after month the volumes grow beneath their hands. But with Wycliffe's days this toilsome manuscript period closes forever.

"About twenty years after the death of Wycliffe there was living in the old German town of Mainz a boy bearing the not very attractive name of Johann Gensfleisch, which means, put into plain English, John Gooseflesh. His mother was a dresser of parchments for the writing of manuscripts. One morning--so runs the story--he had been cutting the letters of his name out of the bark of a tree and, having been left alone in the house soon after, amused himself by spreading out the letters on a board so as to form again the words:

J O H A N N G E N S F L E I S C H.

A pot of purple dye was beside the fire and, by some awkward turn, one of his letters dropped into it. Quickly, without stopping to think, he snatched it out of the boiling liquid and as quickly let it drop again, this time on a white dressed skin which lay on a bench nearby, the result being a beautiful purple "H" on a deep yellowish white ground. Whether the boy admired the beautiful marks on the skin or meditated ruefully of future marks on his own

as a possible consequence history does not record, but it would seem as if somehow that image rooted itself in his mind, to bear rich fruit on a future day. For, thirty years afterward, when all Germany was ringing with the name of Johann Gutenberg and his magical art of printing, the good people of Mainz recognized in the inventor their young townsman Gensfleisch, who had meantime taken his maternal name. Whatever truth there may be in the legend, certain it is that Gutenberg's printing press was working in Mainz about the year 1450 and the first completed book that issued from that press (was) the Latin Bible.". The cost and the speed with which books could be printed increasingly made feasible that the layman would finally possess the Scriptures, but who would translate?

"At the very same time, almost in the very same year, occurred another event which in God's providence largely influenced the history of Bible translation.

In November 1454 came the invention of movable type in printing. In May 1453 came the fall of Constantinople and crowds of Greek scholars were driven for refuge to Western Europe, teaching the language of the rediscovered classics and, more important...the language in which the New Testament was written. The great movement of 'The Renaissance' had come, the revival of learning in Europe freeing men's minds from ignorance and men's spirits from blind obedience to despotism, and one its most important factors was this revival of Greek learning...For many centuries Greek had been practically unknown in Western Europe, but now, as has been finely said, 'Greece rose from the grave with the New Testament in her hand' and before the close of the century had become an important part of University education in Europe.

"And with it came the revival of the study of Hebrew. The first Greek grammar was published in 1476 and the first Hebrew grammar in 1503. Then came Erasmus,

a great Greek scholar, a friend of Sir Thomas More, and set himself to the study of the best old manuscripts he could find and so gave to the world in 1516 his famous Greek New Testament"

There is no relationship at all between Erasmus and the medieval biblical tradition. So far as biblical studies are concerned, his knowledge of the middle ages was pretty well limited to some of the schoolmen, wrenched from their contexts. He acknowledged rather distantly Thomas Aquinas' exegetical principles; but so far as traditional exegesis is concerned he applied himself closely only to the Church Fathers, to Jerome especially, and then more and more to the Greek Fathers, notably Origen.

His chief interest was textual criticism of the New Testament. He set himself to give new life to meditation on the divine word, and the preaching of it. This meditation and preaching owed their chief inspiration to the *Devotio moderna*, John Colet and Sir Thomas More.

As a monk he was formed in the most austere and most puritanical traditions of the last great spiritual school of the Middle Ages, making his first appearance as an enthusiastic and slightly intoxicated disciple of Italian humanism, "the most continuous motif in Erasmus' life". At the Steyn Monastery the *Devotio moderna* was ineradicably impressed upon him; it formed and inspired him. This movement was a reaction against the formalism and irrelevance of scholasticism, but it more importantly established the depth and inwardness of the religious life as sought in meditation of the gospel.

The critical studies of the humanist Lorenzo Valla were crucial to Erasmus' development. It was Valla's philological criticism of texts that he used as a springboard for renewal of biblical studies along a spiritual and evangelical

orientation. Certainly the Dean of St. Paul's, John Colet, helped more than anyone else to restore and fortify Erasmus' faith, strengthening it by his own familiar example of what humanism could bring to a spiritual search freed from the narrow, suffocating bounds of a decadent religious tradition. Likewise, he was profoundly assisted by More's understanding, balanced as it was between real humanity and a most real Christian piety.

As early as 1507 in a letter written to Aldus Manutius he demonstrated what an important place a critical edition of the Greek New Testament had taken in his plans. Erasmus' design was to reform the Church from within by a renewal of biblical theology based on philological study of the New Testament text, supported by a knowledge of patristics and nourishing that chiefly moral and spiritual reform already quite clearly conceived in the Enchiridion militis Christiani, published in Antwerp in 1504. Nowhere was he more typical of his caustic assessment of the medieval Church than in his Praise of Folly (1509) where he wrote of bishops and popes:

...bishops fare very well because they look after themselves. As for the sheep, the bishops either leave their care to Christ, or turn it over to suffragans, as they are called, or to other substitutes. They never give a thought to the meaning of the word bishop--labor, vigilance, and solicitude--, except when money is to be made, and then they are bishops indeed, overlooking nothing...

Finally, if the Supreme Pontiffs, who are the vicars of Christ, tried to imitate His life, His poverty, labors, teaching, His cross and contempt for life; if they stopped to consider the meaning of the title of Pope, a Father, or the epithet Most Holy, who on earth would be more overwhelmed? Who would retain it by the sword, by poison, and by every other way? If wisdom should come to Popes, what comforts it would deprive them of! Did I say wisdom? Even that grain of sense which Christ speaks of would do it. It would deprive them of all wealth, honor, and possessions; all triumphal progresses, offices, dispensations, tributes, and indulgences; the many horses, mules, and retainers; in short, it would deprive them of all their pleasures...In their place wisdom would

bring vigils, fasts, tears, prayers, sermons, studies, sighs, and a thousand similar trials. And think of the hardship on all those copyists and notaries, all those advocates, promoters, secretaries, muleteers, grooms, bankers, and pimps...In short, all those who bring shame--I mean fame--to the Roman See would have to beg for their bread. This would be terribly inhuman, and, even worse, those very princes of the church and true lights of the world would be reduced to a staff and a wallet.

Erasmus had firmly believed that the ascension to the throne by Henry VIII would usher in a golden age for England. He came to England first in 1499 at Oxford where it had created a circle of Greek enthusiasts: William Grocyn, Thomas Linacre and most notably John Colet. Colet had gone to Italy and dipped into the Renaissance well and had returned to his homeland filled with a passion for biblical studies. He lectured on Paul's epistles to the Romans and Corinthians, receiving wide interest as well as condemnation. It should be borne in mind that Henry had appointed him the Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral.

Colet's most memorable sermon was preached before Convocation of the church called in 1511 to consider heresies and other matters. Colet showed them another kind of heresy, very unpleasant to their ears, the heresy of their own evil lives. He preached on Romans 12, "Be not conformed to this world, but be ye reformed in the newness of your understanding, that ye may prove what is the good will of God, well pleasing and perfect". He warned them against false pride, carnality, covetousness and worldly pursuits. Colet proclaimed, "We are also nowadays grieved of heretics, men mad with marvellous foolishness. But the heresies of them are not so pestilent and pernicious unto us and the people, as the evil and wicked life of priests; the which... is a certain kind of heresy, and the chief of all and most perilous".

This brand of message and life was a tremendous influence upon Erasmus,

whose crowning masterpiece was his Greek New Testament, printed under the provocative name Novum Instrumentum. Originally dedicated to Pope Leo X, it eventually went through five editions, and became the basis for both Martin Luther's and William Tyndale's translations into German and English, respectively. His Greek text was to remain the principal source for the great editio regia of the printer Robert Estienne (1550), and hence of the textus receptus that he was to establish. It corresponds to the manuscript tradition which in fact prevailed in the Greek church; and not until the end of the nineteenth century were editions proposed that differed other than on points of detail.

For all this, Erasmus finally rejected the Protestant Reformation under the leadership of both Luther and Tyndale. However, neither could he accept a purely conservative Catholic attitude of reaction. For him, true theology remained no mere matter of intellectual technique. It required to experience a changed life. "In fact, theology is to be considered", he wrote, "a work of prophecy. It demands the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Its end must be to make saints, not dialecticians".

Although he established sound hermeneutical principles (e.g., never a quotation out of its context; nor out of the general way of thought of its author; and nor yet out of the thought of the Scripture as a whole), he strongly reacted against a dead, medieval theology in which speculation had gone over into pure abstraction. He was the quintessential representative of a Christian renaissance, bringing the Christian and the Church back to original sources.