

THE BIBLE OF THE MIDDLE WAY

Charles C. Ryrie

A footnote at the conclusion of a less-than-two page section on the Bishops' Bible in The Cambridge History of the Bible says, rather apologetically, "The Bishops' Bible has been less thoroughly studied than the other major versions" (p. 161). Yet it was 400 years ago the 5th of October that a copy of the first edition was presented to Queen Elizabeth. Although by some criteria it had little to commend it, the Bishops' Bible was the only version recognized by the Church of England for 43 years, and it was a vital link in the fascinating history of the translation, printing and annotating of the English Bible. We do well, therefore, to focus on its importance on this anniversary of its first edition, and we shall confine our remarks to four facets of the Bishops' Bible--its production, its translation, its illustration, and its annotation.

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It is safe to say that the production of the Bishops' Bible was motivated by the fear of the Anglican clergy that their people did not possess a "safe" Bible to read. This situation was brought about by the appearance in 1560 of the Geneva Bible and by its immediate and widespread acceptance by the people with resultant embarrassment to the Episcopal bishops. That Bible was the fruit of the labors of Englishmen who went into exile during the reign of Queen Mary and who finally settled in Geneva. There, led by William Whittingham and aided by John Calvin, the Reformation theologian, and Theodore Beza, the outstanding biblical scholar of the day, these men produced the Geneva Bible. The Old Testament was a thorough revision of the Great Bible, the translation being made directly into English from the Hebrew and Aramaic.

The New Testament translation was based on Tyndale's translation revised with the aid of Beza's Latin version and his commentary. The work was based on the best scholarship of the day and was done in good idiomatic English. No less than 150 editions were printed between 1560 and 1644, and the Geneva Bible held its own not only against all the editions of the Bishops' but also for 33 years against the King James.

The superior quality of the Geneva translation over the Great Bible was evident; its notes help satisfy people's desire for a knowledge of what the text meant; and, last but certainly not least, its smaller size and less expensive price tag sold it to most of the people. This popularity was disquieting to the Church of England, particularly in view of the fact that the Geneva Bible was never authorized and because its notes were far too Calvinistic to suit the Bishops. One British historian's appraisal is the kind of understatement typical of the British: "One may surmise that the Geneva Bible, translation and notes together, played no little part in making British Puritanism the strongly veterebrate movement that it was." (F. F. Bruce, The English Bible, p. 90).

Because of the threat the Geneva Bible posed to the doctrine and prestige of the Church of England, Archbishop Matthew Parker proposed in 1561 that the bishops undertake a revision of the approved Great Bible. Apparently, although parts of the Bible were assigned immediately to various ones for translation, the project did not come alive until 1563 or 1566. Even if one reckons that the project was accomplished in 7 years (let alone 5 or 2) that is a remarkably fast production, particularly for group work. The Revised Standard Version required 14 years from authorization to completion. Undoubtedly much of the credit goes to Parker himself, a good and humble scholar who sincerely desired to have a Bible that all English people could support; and who himself translated Genesis, Exodus, Matthew, Mark and 2 Corinthians through

Hebrews. At least 13 other translators can be identified by the initials which appear at the close of the books they were responsible for. It is interesting to know that at his death, Parker was still on affectionate terms with his fellow-workers--even remembering some of them in his will.

As a holder of the Bible patent, Richard Jugge was entrusted with the printing of the new Bible, which was handsomely done. Indeed, the first edition is the most sumptuous of all 16th century folio English Bibles. Supposedly even such a detail as using thicker paper for the New Testament was attended to, though my sense of touch has difficulty confirming this in my own copy--apart from the New Testament title page. Parker attempted to gain the Queen's recognition of the version through her secretary of State, Sir William Cecil, asking that he try to "obtain of the Queens Highness that this edition might be licensed and only commended to the public reading in churches, to draw to one uniformity. . ." There is no evidence that the Queen did this, but the authorization by the church of this Bible could not, obviously, have been done against her wishes. In 1571 the Convocation of Canterbury ordered that copies be placed in Bishops' homes, in every cathedral, and, as far as possible, in every church.

The second edition, a quarto without illustrations, followed in 1569 in which many errors of the first edition were corrected. In 1572 the third edition, a folio, included revisions of the New Testament but, inexplicably, ignored all the corrections in the Old Testament of the second edition. Also in this third edition the Psalter from the Great Bible which the people had become accustomed to using from the Prayer Book was printed in parallel columns with the Psalter as translated for the Bishops' Bible. In all, there were 38 editions of the Bible issued between 1568 and 1633.

The Translation

The instructions given to the translators were these: (1) they were to use the Great Bible as the basis for the translation departing from it only where it did not represent the original; (2) they were to follow the Hebrew of Pagninus (1528) and Munster (1539); (3) they were to add "no bitter or controversial annotations" to the text; (4) they were to mark passages like genealogies which were not edifying so they could be omitted in public reading; and (5) they were to change any offensive expressions.

Though the translators were often willing to learn from the Geneva translation they did retain the words of the Great in many instances. Their Hebrew scholarship was inferior to that of the Geneva translators. We shall look at the annotations a bit later, though suffice it to say here that the notes are openly Protestant. They use elders rather than priests; repentance, instead of penance, congregation (in Matt. 16:18) rather than church, and interpolations from the Vulgate which were introduced into the Geneva Bible are mostly eliminated. The supposedly non-edifying passages are indicated by single quotation marks in the margin (e.g. Gen. 10-11; Numb. 1-10; Lev. 1-9). Offensive words were changed as in I Corinthians 6:9 where the Geneva has "wantons nor buggerers" and the Bishops' "weaklings, nor abusers of selves with mankind."

All in all, the translation is not a work of high merit because it is unequal (the Greek scholarship being superior to the Hebrew). Westcott says, "There is little to recommend the original renderings of the Bishops' Bible in the Old Testament. As a general rule they appear to be arbitrary and at variance with the exact sense of the Hebrew text" (History of the English Bible, p. 237). The New Testament tries to follow Greek faithfully but

often becomes too literal. Revision of the New Testament especially in the edition of 1572 continued to show independence of judgment of the translators, though some changes can be traced to the influence of the Geneva. However, it was the official basis for the revision of 1611, and to it the King James owes such expressions as "fruites meete for repentence" (Matt. 3:8), "middle wall" (Eph. 2:14), "fellow-citizens" (Eph. 2:19); "less than the least" (Eph. 3:8). One can see, as a sample, the influence that the Bishops' instead of the Geneva had on the King James, by comparing the ^{three} translations in a chapter like Ephesians 1. "To be adopted" (v. 5) became "adoption of children" in the Bishops' and the King James; "rich grace" became "riches of his grace" (v. 7) in the Bishops' and the King James; "possession purchased" became "purchased possession" (v. 14) in the Bishops' and the King James; "glorious inheritance" became "glory of his inheritance" (v. 18) in the Bishops' and the King James; "made all things subject" became "put all things under" (v. 22) in the Bishops' and the King James; "filleth all in all things" became "filleth all in all" (v. 23) in the Bishops' and the King James.

The Illustrations

The handsome first edition was illustrated with 143 engravings, woodcuts, and maps. The first title contains a half-length engraved portrait of Queen Elizabeth surmounted by the royal arms. The portrait bears no signature but has been attributed to Franciscus Hogenberg who was a foreign craftsman in Parker's employ. Prefixed to the book of Joshua is an engraving of the Earl of Leicester and at the beginning of the first Psalm forming a handsome initial letter B is a portrait generally assumed to be that of Lord Burghley to which peerage Sir William Cecil was elevated in 1570 or 71. The table of the genealogy of Christ has a large initial T in which are

Parker's paternal arms impaled with those of Christ Church, Canterbury. Cranmer's prologue has a large initial C containing the arms of the see of Canterbury impaled with those of Cranmer.

The wood engraving illustrations of the Bible have an interesting history. They were originally drawn by Virgil Solis for a folio Lutheran Bible published in 1560 at Frankfurt. They appeared next in a 1566 folio Dutch Bible published in Cologne. Then they found their way across the channel to be used two years later in the first Bishops'. But in 1570 they were once more back on the Continent, being used in a folio Latin Bible published in 1570 at Antwerp. Thus the same illustrations were used in a German Lutheran Bible, a Dutch Bible, an English Episcopalian Bible, and a Latin Vulgate--an obvious early trend toward ecumenicity. When Jugge used them for the first Bishops' he carefully removed the pictorial representation of God in the first two woodcuts of Genesis which illustrate creation and the birth of Eve. In its place he substituted the Hebrew characters for Yahweh. Presumably this was done in deference to the fact that any pictorial representation of God was looked on in England as a "papist image." Nevertheless, Jugge was not consistent, for the picture of God remained in some other places such as Genesis 9.

By the time Jugge issued the second folio edition in 1572 he no longer had the woodcuts available. To make up for this he used 114 decorated initials, some of which got him into trouble since they were intended for use in Ovid's Metamorphoses and were in their representations clearly unsuitable for use in any Bible. The third folio edition issued in 1574 contained only 30 illustrations, about one-fifth of the number that appeared in the first edition.

The Annotations

Although one of the principal purposes of producing the Bishops' Bible was to counter the influence of the Calvinistic notes of the Geneva Bible, little study has been done to determine with what success this was accomplished. In an examination of the notes I tried to classify them under various headings which would be expected to show up the Calvinistic de-emphasis, if such was the thrust of the Bishops' Bible. Some of those areas were: salvation, sin, predestination and election.

The total number of notes in the Bishops' Bible is much less than in the Geneva, and many of those in the Geneva which were offensive because of their Calvinistic slant are simply omitted in the Bishops'. In some instances the Geneva notes were taken over into the Bishops' without change (or with very minor changes), and in some cases the Calvinism of the Geneva was removed in a substitute note in the Bishops'. For instance, in Romans 6 the Geneva Bible has 19 notes while the Bishops' has only four, and only one of the four is taken from the Geneva. On the other hand, all the notes which the Geneva appends to the entire book of Galatians are found in the Bishops' except two which concern alternate readings.

It must not be assumed that there is a Calvinistic emphasis in all or even most of the notes of the Geneva version. For example, there are approximately 250 notes in the Epistle to the Romans and perhaps 10 of them may be said to be Calvinistic. But these were the ones which annoyed the bishops and motivated their work of translation. Strangely enough, however, some of the changes do not really de-emphasize the Calvinism at all. An example of such a change without a change is found in Romans 9, the predestination chapter. The note in the Geneva is placed with verse 15 and stated:

As the only will and purpose of God is the chief cause of election and reprobation: so his free mercy in Christ is an inferior cause of salvation, & hardening of the heart, an inferior cause of damnation.

The Bishops', placing the note with verse 11, changed it as follows:

The wyll and purpose of God, is the cause of the election and reprobation. For his mercie and callyng, through Christe, are the means of salvation: and the withdrawyng of his mercie, is the cause of damnation.

While it is evident that the Geneva note is Calvinistic, it must be acknowledged that the Bishops' note can scarcely escape the same label. Indeed, the phrase in the Bishops' "withdrawyng of his mercie" may be a stronger statement of the cause of damnation than the Geneva's "hardening of the heart."

On the other hand, the note in the Bishops' Bible at Romans 11:35 states the doctrine of election unequivocally, whereas the Geneva version's comment is innocuous. The latter simply explains this way the phrase, "or who hath first given unto him": "That is, provoked him by his good works." The Bishops' translators elaborated as follows: "By this, the Apostle declareth that God by his free wyll and election, doth geve salvation unto men, without any desertes of their own."

In addition, many notes were retained and the Calvinism with them. Interestingly, a note in the Geneva on an important predestination verse is retained verbatim by the later version. On I Peter 1:2 "elect according to the foreknowledge of God the father" both Bibles have the same note; namely, "The free election of God is the efficient cause of our salvation, the material cause is Christes obedience, our effectuall callyng is the formall cause, and the finall cause is our sanctification." By way of

comparison, Calvin wrote that the efficient cause of our salvation is the mercy of the Father; the material cause, Christ's obedience; the formal cause, faith; and the final cause, the proof of divine justice and the praise of God's goodness, (Institutes of the Christian Religion, III, 14, 17.)

In addition, the Bishops' Bible also retains many of the chapter headings and descriptions of the Geneva Bible. In particular this is true of the headings to Romans 9 and Ephesians 1.

The chief difference in the notes of these two versions on the subject of predestination and election is not found in the changes or retentions, but in the omissions. The Bishops' omits most of the Geneva's notes on this subject which give that version its Calvinistic emphasis. Here is a sampling from what undoubtedly could be a very long list. The following notes appear in the Geneva Bible but are omitted entirely from the Bishops'.

Proverbs 16:4: "So that the justice of God shall appear to his glorie, even in the destruction of the wicked."

At Luke 10:31: "And by chance there came down a certain priest that way", the Bishops' omit entirely the note which the Geneva translators had to include. Indeed, they also retranslated the verse "It befell, that there came down a certain priest." The Geneva note was as follows: "For so it seemed to man's judgment, although this was so appointed by God's counsel and providence."

John 6:37: "God doth regenerate his elect, and calleth them to obey the Gospell."

John 10:26: "The cause wherefore the reprobate cannot believe" (i.e., because they are not of Christ's sheep).

Acts 13:48: "None can believe, but they whome God doeth appoint before al beginnings to be saved."

Romans 9:7: "The Israelites must not be esteemed by their kindred,

but by the secret election of God, which is above the external vocation."

Romans 11:29: "To whom God giveth his spirit of adoption, and whome he calleth effectually, he cannot perish: for Gods eternall counsell never changeth."

Ephesians 1:4: "This election to life everlasting can never be changed: but in temproall offices which God hath appointed for a certaine space, when the terme is expired, he changeth his election, as we see in Saule and Judas."

Ephesians 1:4: "The principall end of our election is to praise and glorifie the grace of God."

Titus 1:2: "Hath willingly, and of his meere liberalitie promised without foreseeing our faith or workes as a cause to move him to this free mercy."

Thus it was the omission in the Bishops' Bible of notes like these that carried out the purpose of its translators to spare the readers the "diverse prejudicial notes" of the Geneva. By elimination, rather than by change, this purpose was carried out.

These are some of the features of the Bible of the Middle Way, a translation motivated by the theological competition of another Bible, a product sumptuous in its execution, but a work not notable for its scholarship. Its most permanent contribution has come down to us through its successor Bible, for at the direction of King James himself the Bishops' served as the basis for the Authorized Version. This reason alone would be sufficient to justify its claim to fame as an important link in the noble history of the English Bible.

I wish to make one final observation. The Bishops' Bible did of course, serve in its own time to encourage men to study the Holy Scriptures,

and the influence of that by whatever translation must never be discounted. The burden of Parker's unsigned preface could well be urged on men today in this lawless and existential age in which we live. He wisely said, "Of all the sentences pronounced by our Savior Christ in his whole doctrine, none is more serious or more worthy to be borne in remembrance than that which he spoke openly in his gospel, saying, Search the Scriptures, for in them ye think to have eternal life, and those they be which bear witness of me. . .X calleth. . .not only to the single reading of the Scriptures, but sendeth to the exquisite searching of them, for in them is eternal life to be found, and. . .they record his whole works wrought for us to our salvation."

Since this is true, it is no small thing, then, to remember, as we do today, one of the basic links in the chain that has brought this saving message to our generation and in our own tongue.