

Sunday, May 2, 2021— Grace Life School of Theology—*From This Generation For Ever*
 Lesson 146 The Rheims New Testament: Understanding Its Origin & Aims, Part 2

Introduction/Review

- Last week in [Lesson 145](#) we began our consideration of the 1582 Rheims New Testament the final Bible that influenced the production of the King James between 1604 and 1611. Since we did not cover all the intended information last week, we need to review some of the highpoints this morning.
- In the Introduction we discussed the traditional placement of the Rheims New Testament in the corrupt stream/tree by advocates of the two streams of Bibles model of transmission. We observed that this is inconsistent for the following reasons:
 - The Wycliffe Bible and the Rheims New Testament are both translations of the Latin Vulgate. How then can the Wycliffe be in the pure stream while the Vulgate and Rheims are relegated to the corrupt stream? This is logically inconsistent.
 - The Rheims New Testament is textually better than the NIV, NASV, and ESV because it retains traditional readings that are missing from the Critical Text and modern versions.
 - Matt. 17:21, 18:11, 23:14
 - Mark 7:16, 9:44, 46, 11:26; 15:28, 16:9-20—traditional long ending of Mark
 - Luke 17:36
 - John 5:4, John 7:53-8:11—the woman taken in adultery.
 - Acts 8:37, 15:34, 24:7, 28:29
 - Rom. 16:24
 - I John 5:7
 - The Rheims New Testament contributed readings to the King James and was referenced in the notes of John Bois.
- After the Introduction, Lesson 145 considered the following two points, the second of which we did not finish discussing.
 - Queen Elizabeth, Catholicism, & The Bible
 - Rheims New Testament: What Saith the Preface?
- In the first point we considered the fate of English Catholics under Queen Elizabeth and its impact upon the English Bible. English Catholic exiles translated their own New Testament from Rheims France in 1582.

- Regarding point two, we observed the following in summation:
 - Four men are generally credited for the creation of the Rheims New Testament: William Allen, Richard Bristow, William Reynolds, and Gregory Martin. That Gregory Martin was the primary mover and shaker of the project is agreed upon by all historians.
 - According to the Preface, the purpose of the Rheims was “for better understanding of the text, and specially for the discovery of the Corruption of divers late translations, and for clearing the Controversies in religion, of these days:”
 - Due to a lack of means only the New Testament was printed in 1582 despite the claim that the Old Testament had also been completed.
 - The Rheims New Testament is best viewed as a Roman Catholic countermeasure to the popularity of the Protestant English Bible. Regarding this point, Blackford Condit stated the following:
 - “From this open confession [the Preface], it seems that this version grew out of the necessity of the times. That it was a war measure, resolved upon in self-defense. By episcopal authority of the Church of England, the Bible is now placed in the churches; and by the desire of the people it is welcomed in the family circle and individual closet. Yea the word of God is entrenched in the hearts of the people; and to drive it out old methods must be laid aside and new methods adopted. Having learned by observation at least, the power of the English Bible, the papists would resort to the same weapon to defend themselves, and if possible to inflict a deadly blow upon their foes. English Catholics were reading heretical Bibles, which the hierarchy denounced as “prophane translations.” To remedy this the Rheims version was published with the expressed hope that it would prove the occasion of these Catholics putting away the “impure versions as hitherto you have been forced to occupie.” Besides Rome was hopeful, and indefatigable in her efforts to win back England to the papal fold. And prominent means to be used were; the founding of the English Seminary at Douay for educating English priests, and the publishing this Romish Bible with its obscure text and papistical notes.” (Condit, 296)
- In this Lesson we will conclude our consideration of the Rheims Preface in order to understand the origin and aims of this controversial Bible.

Rheims New Testament: What Saith the Preface?

- So, the Rheims New Testament is best viewed as a Roman Catholic countermeasure to the popularity of the Protestant English Bible. To this end, the following extracts from the preface presented by Mombert should not be ignored.

“Now since Luther’s revolt also,” they say, “diuers learned Catholikes for the more speedy abolishing of a number of false and impious translations put forth by sundry sectes, and for the better preservation or reclaime of many good soules endangered thereby, haue published the Bible in the several languages of almost al the principal prouinces of the Latin church: no other bookes in the world being so pernicious as heretical translations of the Scriptures, poisoning the people vnder colour of diuine authoritie, and not many other remedies being more soueraine against the same (if it be vsed in order, discretion, and humilitie) then the true, faithful, and sincere interpretation opposed therevnto;

“Which causeth the Holy Church not to forbid vtterly any Catholic translation, though she allow not the publishing or reading of any abso-

lutely and without exception, or limitation: knowing by her diuine and most sincere wisdom, how, where, when, and to whome these her Masters and Spouses giftes are to be bestowed to the most good of the faithful; and therefore neither generally permitteth that which muste needs doe hurt to the vnworthy, nor absolutely condemne that which maye do much good to the worthy. Where vpon, the order which many a iust man wished before, was taken by the Deputies of the late famous council of Trent in this behalfe, and confirmed by supreme authoritie, that the holy Scriptures, though truly and catholically translated into vulgar tonges, yet may not be indifferently readde of al men, nor of any other then such as haue expresse licence therevnto of their lawful ordinaries, with good testimonie from their curates and confessors, that they be humble, discrete and deuout persons, and like to take much good, and no harm thereby.

- “After stating the occasion of putting forth the translation, as noted above, the author sets forth, at length, the policy of the papacy in its past history in respect to the Scriptures, smoothing the rough places, but asserting at the last, the doctrine of Trent [Council of Trent].” (Condit, 298)
 - “. . . that the holy Scriptures, though truly & Catholically translated into vulgar tongues, yet may not be indifferently read of all men, nor of any other then such as have expresse licence thereunto of their lawful Ordinaries; with good testimonie from their Curats, or Confessors. . . Which prescript, though in these days our ours it cannot be so precisely observed, as in other times and places, where there is more due respect of the Churches authoritie, rule and discipline; yet we trust all wise and godly persons will use the matter in the meane while with such moderation, meeknesse, and subjection of heart, as the handling, of so sacred a Booke, the sincere senses of Gods truth therein, and the holy Canons, Councils, Reason and Religion doe require. . . the Governours of the Church . . . have taken more exact order both for the Readers and Translators of these later ages, then of old; yet we must not imagine, that in the Primitive Church, either every one that understood the learned Tongues, . . . might without reprehension reade, reason, dispute, turne and tesse the Scriptures; or that our fore-fathers suffered every Schoole-master, Scholler or Grammarian, that had a little Greeke or Latine, straight to take in hand the holy Testament: or that the translated Bibles into the vulgar Tongues, were in the hands of every Husbandmen, Artificer, Prentice, Boyes, Girls, Mistresse, Maid, Man; that they were sung, played, alledged, of every Tinker, Taverner, Rimer, Minstrell; that they were for Table talke, for Ale-benches, for Boats and Barges, and for every profane person and company. No, in those better times men were neither so ill, nor so curious of themselves so to abuse the blessed Booke of Christ; neither was there any such easie means, before printing was invented to disperse the copies into the hands of every man, as now there is.” (Condit, 298-299)

- In addition, the preface spells out several reasons for translating the Latin Vulgate. Condit summarizes these reasons as follows:
 - “Among them it emphasizes the great antiquity of the Vulgate, “that it was used in the Church of God above 1300 yeares ago;” also its general use during all these ages in the “Churches service.” But the most important reason urged is that “The holy Council of Trent . . . hath declared and defined this onely of all the other Latine translations, to be authentically, and so onely to be used and taken in publike lessons, disputations, preachings, and expositions, and that no man presume upon any pretence to reject or refuse the same.” (Condit, 299)

- Mombert summarizes the reasons stated in the preface for utilizing the Latin Vulgate in the following list.

1. It is so ancient that it was used in the church above 1300 years ago.
2. It is that by all probability, which St. Jerome afterward corrected according to the Greek.
3. It is the same which St. Augustine so commendeth.
4. Which for the most part ever since hath been used in the Church's service, and used and expounded by the Fathers.
5. Which the Holy Council of Trent hath declared and defined only of all other Latin translations to be authenticall.
6. It is the grauest, sincerest, of greatest majestie, and the least partialtie.
7. It is so exact and precise according to the Greeke, both the phrase and the word, that delicate heretics therefore reprehend it of rudeness. . . .
8. The aduersaries themselues, namely Beza, prefer it before all the rest.
9. In the rest there is such diuersitie and discussion, and no end of reprehending one another, and translating every man according to his fancy.
10. It is not only better than all other Latin * translations but than the Greek text itself in those places where they disagree.

- Mombert notes that, “Their way of proving on critical grounds the superiority of the Latin translation to the Greek original is certainly very unique. As a rule, they say, the Latin agrees with the Greek; if it differs from the common Greek text, it agrees with some copy.” (Mombert, 299)

“As may be seen in Stephens’ margin,” and that the adversaries frequently concede the superiority of the marginal readings; that where the Greek goes against the Latin, quotations from the Greek fathers are sure to sustain it; and where these fail, conjecture may come in to adapt the Greek to the Latin; that where conjecture and the Greek fathers fail, the Latin fathers are almost sure to sustain the Vulgate, and if they should have a different reading the cause is to be sought in “the great diuersitie and multitude” of the Latin copies. Admit the validity of these *critical* principles, and the superiority of the text of the Vulgate to the Greek text is established.

The notes are simply furious, and in the words of a Roman Catholic writer, “the translation is accompanied with virulent annotations against the Protestant religion, and manifestly calculated to support a system, not of genuine Catholicity, but of transalpine popery.”

- A final point to consider from the preface is their explanation of the process utilized in doing the work of translation. As one might expect, the Rheims New Testament is viewed as having slavish devotion to Latin syntax and word order even if it makes for awkward English renderings.
 - “In this our Translation, because we wish to be most sincere, as becometh a Catholike translation, and have endeavored so to make it; we are very precise and religious in following our copie, the old vulgar approved Latin; not onely in sense, which we hope we alwaies do, but sometime in the very words also and phrases, which may seeme to the vulgar Reader, and to common English eares not yet acquainted therewith, rudeness or ignorance; but to the discret Reader, . . .wee doubt not but our consideration and doing therein shall seeme reasonable and necessarie; yea, and that all sorts of Catholic Readers will in short time thinke that familiar, which at the first may seeme strange, and will esteeme it more, when they shall otherwise be taught to understand it, then if it were the common knowne English. . . We presume not in hard places, to mollifie the speeches or phrases, but religiously keepe them word for word, and point for point, for feare of missing, or restrayning the sense of the Holy Ghost to our fantasie. . . And why should we be squamish at new words or phrases in the Scripture, which are necessarie; when we doe easily admit and follow new words coyned in court and in courtly and other secular writings.” (Condit, 299-300)

- We will conclude this lesson by considering the conclusory remarks of Professor David Daniell on the Rheims Preface in *The Bible in English: Its History and Influence*:
 - “To sum up this is one of the extraordinary documents in the history of Bible translating. There is nothing like it anywhere else. Large parts of the twenty-six pages are written in bile. To find a way through the maze of Latinate clauses is hard enough, without the way being made so unpleasant. As well as playing the deafening music of a whole brass band of self-righteousness in his constant assertion of the correctness of the Church and the Fathers, Martin harps on one string, of his detestation of Reformation scholars, particularly Beza, until the eyes and ears protest. . . Martin wrote in his Preface ‘. . . Penance, Doing Penance, Chalice, Priest, Deacon, Traditions, altar, host, and the like (which we exactly keep as Catholic terms) proceed even from the very words of Scripture.’ He is being disingenuous. His ground is always that the Latin tradition of the Church comes first, and if ‘the Heretics’ say that a Greek reading is different, then the Greek reading is wrong. Certainly, the Church made the Vulgate. But there can be no question that the first Christian documents were written in Greek, which must have priority.

In 1963, S.L. Greenslade, whose account of English translations in the sixteenth and early seventeenth century in the third and final volume of *The Cambridge History of the Bible* has remained definitive ever since, wrote:

‘If ever a vernacular Bible was combative and tendentious, this was—in its Vulgate basis, the version itself, the marginal notes, the lengthy annotations.’

Greenslade, though he did not mention the Preface, did not exaggerate.” (Daniell, 367-368)

Works Cited

- Condit, Blackford. *The History of the English Bible: Extending from Earliest Saxon Translations to the Present Anglo-American Revision*. New York & Chicago: A.S. Barnes & Company, 1882.
- Daniell, David. *The Bible in English: Its History and Influence*. New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2003.
- Mombert, J.I. *Hand-Book of the English Versions of the Bible*. New York: Anson D.F. Randolph & Company, 1883.