

Sunday, May 23, 2021— Grace Life School of Theology—*From This Generation For Ever*
Lesson 149 The Rheims New Testament: Protestant Reaction & The Martin-Fulke Controversy

Introduction

- Last week in [Lesson 148](#) we concluded our consideration of the Rheims text. All told over two lessons we have considered the following points related to the Rheims text.
 - Wycliffe-Rheims Connection
 - Latinisms
 - Dark Phrases
 - Fashionable Words
 - Catholic Renderings
 - Catholic Annotations
 - Rheims & Tyndale: The Dirty Little Secret
- In this lesson we will consider the following points related to their impact on the Rheims New Testament.
 - Protestant Reaction
 - The Martin-Fulke Controversy
 - Rheims Influences the King James

Protestant Reaction

- Historian and Bible collector Dr. Donald L. Brake discusses the Protestant reaction to the Rheims New Testament in his book *A Visual History of English Bible*.
 - “The Roman Catholic Rhemes met the same opposition under Elizabeth as the Protestant translations under Mary. The Rhemes New Testament was produced during the reign of Protestant Queen Elizabeth (1558-1603). Like Tyndale New Testaments just thirty years earlier, the Rhemes New Testament had to be smuggled into England. English Catholics faced the same dangers experienced by Protestants earlier. The English desire to spread the Bible to the common people did not, of course, include the Catholic Rhemes New Testament.” (Brake, 175-176)

- Blackford Condit also discusses the Protestant reception of the Rheims New Testament in his 1882 publication *The History of the English Bible*.
 - “The publication of the Rheims New Testament with its outspoken papistical notes created quite a sensation. The question among Protestant divines was, Who shall refute these bold assumptions and popish slanders? It is said that Queen Elizabeth applied to Beza to review both the text and notes of this version, but that he declined and suggested Thomas Cartwright as the man most capable for such a service. In 1583, after having been urged by his friends, and specially encouraged by the Earl of Leicester and Sir Francis Walsingham, Cartwright began the work under the title of “A Confutation of the Rhemish Translation, Glosses, and Annotation on the New Testament.” By a mandate from Archbishop Whitgift he was prohibited from prosecuting it. Though somewhat discouraged by this, he went forward and nearly completed the work. But it was not published as a whole till 1618, some years after his death. Thomas Cartwright was not only a learned man, but a stanch Puritan and a famous preacher. . . . When Cartwright’s Confutation was published, it added fuel to the controversy. Previous to this, however, an Answer to the Rhemists Annotations was published by George Withers. Also in the same year (1588) Bulkeley put forth An Answer to the Rhemists Preface. But chief among the opposers of this version was Dr. William Fulke. . . .” (Condit, 312-313)

The Martin-Fulke Controversy

- In addition to releasing the Rheims New Testament in 1582, Gregory Martin also wrote a scathing attack on the Protestant Bible in his *A Discovery of the Manifold Corruptions of the Holy Scriptures by the Heretics of Our Days, Specially the English Sectaries*. Gerald Hammond discusses Martin’s work at length in *The Making of the English Bible*.
 - “Time and again in this tract Martin challenged the Protestants to justify the Hebrew text of Psalm 22:17, where traditional Christian interpretation has always read the verse as if it contained the verb *kā’arū*, that is ‘they pierced my hands and feet’, while the Masoretic text reads *kā’arī*, ‘like a lion, at my hands and feet’. If even the Geneva Bible renders it ‘they pierced’ (as it does) then the English Protestants have laid important doubt upon the ‘Hebrew verity’ they prize so much. As Martin puts it, ‘thus you see how easy it were. . . to show by your own testimonies the corruption of the Hebrew that yourselves do not nor dare not exactly follow it’. Worse, in Martin’s eyes, was where the Protestants had followed the Hebrew, and hence Jewish corruption, rather than Jerome’s truth. One example he gives is Isaiah 2:22, where he quotes an English version (it is the Geneva Bible) as rendering the verse ‘Cease from the man whose breath is in his nostrils; for wherein is he to be esteemed?’ and says that although this is in agreement with the Hebrew vowel pointing of the words, ‘you know very well by St Jerome’s commentary upon that place, that this is the Jews’ pointing or reading of the word against the honor of Christ; the true reading and translation being as he interpreteth it, “For he is reputed high, and therefore beware of him”.’

The Christological emphasis of Martin’s comments I shall come to shortly, but the chief point here is the attack on the fundamentals of Protestant Bible translation, the knowledge and love of the original Hebrew and Greek. Once Martin had demonstrated the superiority of the Vulgate’s Latin he could press the matter further by showing that the Protestant translators’ interpretations of Hebrew and Greek were at best crude, at worst deliberately misleading. He took them to task, for instance, for translating Isaiah 26:18 like this: ‘We have conceived, we have born in pain, as though we should have brought forth wind.’ The closeness of this rendering to the idea of breaking wind makes it unacceptably gross: ‘I am ashamed to tell the literal commentary of this your translation. Why might you not have said, “We have conceived, and, as it were, travailed to bring forth, and brought forth the spirit”?’ And Martin adds that this is the rendering supported by the Septuagint, the ancient fathers, and by Jerome.

Martin likewise ridiculed the Protestant—in the case of the Great Bible—rendering of the title of the Song of Songs as “The ballad of ballads of Solomon. . . as if it were a ballad of love between Solomon and his concubine’;’ and on a more detailed point, he attacked their rendering of the Hebrew word ‘*achat* in the Song of Songs 6:8:

Again, it cometh from the same puddle of Geneva, that in their bibles (so called) the English Bezites translate against the unity of the Catholic Church. For whereas themselves are full of sects and dissensions, and the true Church is known by unity, and hath this mark given her by Christ himself, in whose person Solomon speaking saith . . . ‘One is my dove’, or, ‘My dove is one’; therefore, instead hereof the foresaid bible saith, “My dove is alone’; neither Hebrew nor Greek word having that signification, but being as proper to signify *one*, as *unus* in Latin.

After twenty-two chapters of such detailed criticism and invective, Martin closed his account of the English translators with a list of epithets:

. . . are not your scholars, think you, much bound unto you, for giving them, instead of God’s blessed word and his holy scriptures, such translations heretical, Judaical, profane, false, negligent, fantastical, new, naught, monstrous?

Not the least of these was ‘Judaical’, hitting at what Martin saw as the Protestants’ belief in the superiority of a corrupt Hebrew text to an inspired Latin one.” (Hammond, 147-149)

- Martin takes issue with the word choices of Protestant translators calling them heretical and direct attacks against the church.
 - “Now then to come to our purpose, such are the absurd translations of the English Bibles, and altogether like unto these. Namely, when they translate “congregation” for Church, “Elder” for Priest, “image” for idol, “dissension” for Schism, “General” for Catholic,

“secret” for Sacrament, “overseer” for Bishop, “messenger” for Angel, “ambassador” for Apostle, “minister” for Deacon, and such like: to what other end be these deceitful translations but to conceal and obscure the name of the Church and dignities thereof mentioned in the Holy Scriptures: to dissemble the word “schism” (as they do also “Heresy” and “Heretic”) for fear of disgracing their schisms and Heresies, to say of Matrimony, neither Sacrament which is the Latin, nor mystery which is the Greek, but to go as far as they can possibly from the common usual and Ecclesiastical words, saying, “This is a great secret” (Eph. 5:32): in favour of their heresy, that Matrimony is no Sacrament.” (Martin, 36)

- At one point in his diatribe against Protestant English Bibles, Martin went so far as to call English Bibles translated by Tyndale and others as “the devil’s word.”
 - “If they appeal here to their later translations, we must obtain of them to condemn the former, and to confess this was a gross fault committed therein, and that the Catholic Church of our country did not ill to forbid and burn such books which were so translated by Tyndale and the like, as being not indeed God’s book, word, or Scripture, but the Devil’s word. Yea they must confess, that the leaving out of this word Church altogether, was of a heretical spirit against the Catholic Roman Church, because then they had no Calvinistical church in any like form of religion and government to theirs now.” (Martin, 39)
- The following year in 1583, William Fulke responded to Martin’s attack on the English Bible by writing *A Defense of the Sincere and True Translation of the Holie Scriptures into the English Tongue Against the Cavils of Gregory Martin*. According to David Daniell,
 - “William Fulke, Master of Pembroke College, Cambridge, and prolific Protestant polemicist, produced in 1583 a defence of the English versions, dedicated to the queen, attacking, and reprinting, Gregory Martin’s . . . *Discovery . . . 1582*, and including in places a line-by-line, word-by-word refutation of the Rheims New Testament in parallel with the Bishops’.” (Daniell, 366)
- Dr. Brake offers the most succinct summary of the controversy.
 - “The Reformation divided the Roman Catholic Church from the Protestant Church, but the battle over the Bible in English took the battle to pen and ink. The Fulke-Martin controversy over the Roman Catholic Rhemes and the Protestant translations became intense. Later, the King James translators could not avoid the “blood spilt” over the issues of notes added, language used, and methods employed. Martin used disparaging language to discredit Protestant translations, such as: “manifold corruptions,” “foul dealing,” “false translations,” and “heresies.” He said, “[Translators were] corrupting both the letter and sense by false translation, adding, detracting, altering, transposing, pointing, and all other guileful means.”

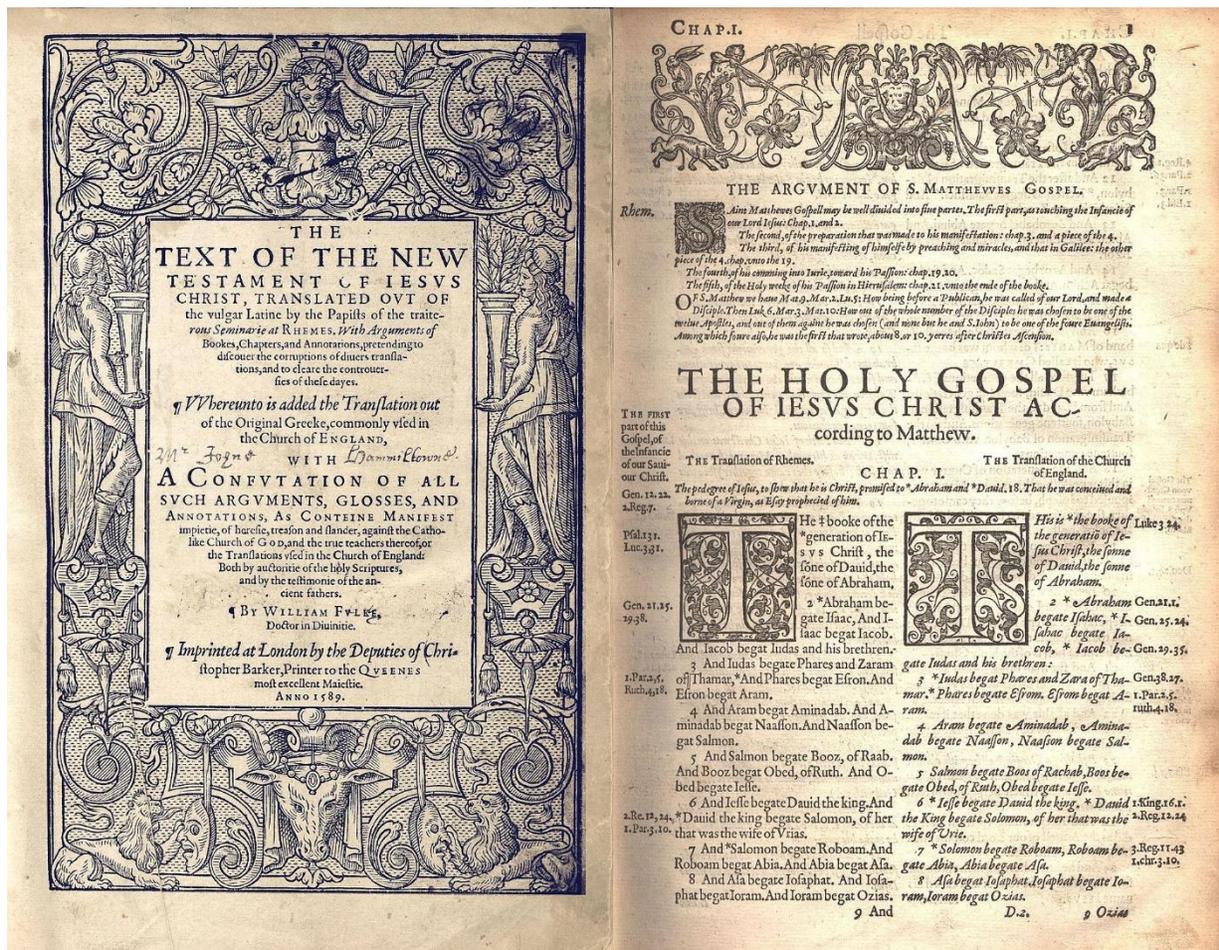
As might be expected, Fulke was ready to respond. He shot back equally inflammatory accusations about the Rhemes translators: “They [translations, glosses, and annotations] contain manifest impieties, heresies, idolatries, superstitions, profaneness, treasons, slanders, absurdities, falsehoods, and other evils.” (Brake, 174-175)

- The Martin-Fulke controversy ranged over a host of topics that are too tedious to discuss in detail in these lessons. Interested parties are encouraged to read the sources themselves by following the links provided in the Works Cited at the end of this Lesson. Another option would be to read Hammond’s lengthy discussion of the topic on pages 147-159 of *The Making of the English Bible*.
- The controversy between the two men reached a climax in 1589 when Fulke published *The text of the New Testament of Jesus Christ, translated out of the Vulgar Latin by the Papists of the Traiterous Seminary at Rheims. With Arguments of Books, Chapters, and Annotations, pretending to discover the corruptions of divers translations, and to clear the controversies of these days. Whereunto is Added the Translation Out of the Original Greek, Commonly Used in the Church of England. With a Confutation of all such Arguments, Glosses, and Annotations, as Contain Manifest impiety, of heresy, treason and slander, against the Catholic Church [that is, the worldwide, not the Roman] of God, and the true teachers thereof, or the Translations used in the Church of England: Both by authority of the holy Scriptures, and by the testimony of the ancient fathers*.
- Regarding this massive volume, Bible collector and historian Dr. Brake states the following:
 - “Dedicated to the Protestant Queen Elizabeth, this prodigious work laid side by side the text of Bishops’ and Rhemes New Testament. Fulke blasts both the translation and the notes in the Rhemes New Testament. He refers to the pope and the church in the most vulgar of terms: “The Babylonical harlot and the spouse of the Antichrist.”

. . . In four editions . . . (1589, 1601, 1617, and 1633), Fulke attempted to set the Rhemes New Testament against the Bishops’ New Testament refuting each argument, gloss, and annotation point by point and word by word. . . one major target for Fulke was Martin’s use of the English language. He consistently accused Martin of using ecclesiastical terms instead of words used by common people. To Martin, as to most Roman Catholics of the time, the English language was not capable of fully expressing the theological language, as was the sacred Latin. Martin argues, “As when you affect new strange words, which the people are not acquainted withal, but it is rather Hebrew to them than English” [e.g., Jeshuah for Jesus].

Fulke responds, “Seeing the most of the proper names of the Old Testament were unknown to the people before the Scripture was read in English, it was best to utter them according to the truth of their pronunciation in Hebrew, rather than after the common corruption which they had received in the Greek and Latin tongues.” (Brake, 174-175)

- The following image is of the Title Page and the opening to Matthew's Gospel in Fulke's Rheims-Bishops interlinear.



- Brake concludes his discussion of the Martin-Fulke controversy by suggesting that Fulke's efforts backfired in the following manner.
 - "The strategy employed by Fulke clearly backfired. It was Fulke's intention that his rather inane and ad hominem arguments would destroy the credibility of the Rhemes. Instead, the interest in the Rhemes New Testament increased and ultimately influenced the Protestant King James Version." (Brake, 176)

Rhemes Influences the King James

- Robert Barker was the Queen's printer in 1589 who published Fulke's Rheims-Bishops' interlinear. He also served as the King's printer in 1604 when King James sanctioned the production of what would become the King James Bible. In order to fulfill Archbishop Richard Bancroft's request that the translators follow the Bishops as their base text, Barker provided forty unbound copies of the 1602 Bishops' Bible. As the printer of both editions there is no doubt that the King James translators were aware of Fulke's interlinear edition.

- Many observers believe that it was Fulke’s Rheims-Bishops’ interlinear that placed the Rheims New Testament into the consciousness of the King James translators. Dr. David Daniell quotes the work of Darlow, Moule, and Herbert on this point in *The Bible in English: Its History and Influence*.
 - “The ‘counterblast’ to Martin, by printing the Rheims Testament in full, side by side with the Bishops’ version, secured for the former a publicity which it would not otherwise have obtained, and was indirectly responsible for the marked influence which Rheims exerted in the Bible of 1611.” (Daniell, 367)
- Following the above citation Dr. Daniell offers the following commentary.
 - “That may be so. Perhaps without Fulke’s parallel Testaments, the Rheims version would have been ignored as, eventually, was Taverner’s of 1539—which, incidentally, had three times the number of editions that Rheims achieved. . . Whether Fulke guaranteed the presence of Rheims in the KJV is a more open question. The standard, and exhaustive, study is that by Carleton. He appears to have shown great dependence by King James’s workers on their choice of vocabulary and phrase; but his vision was limited.” (Daniell, 367)
- Recently, Dr. Lawrence M. Vance has released Chapter 4: The Rheims New Testament and the Authorized Version of his larger work *The Text of the King James Bible*. As the title suggests, this covers the impact of the Rheims New Testament on the King James Bible. Dr. Vance states the following regarding Fulke’s interlinear.
 - “In this work of over 1,000 pages, Fulke replied to the numerous end-of-chapter annotations found in the Rheims New Testament. The text of the Rheims New Testament is given in Roman type on the left side of the page in parallel with the texts of the Bishops’ Bible in italic type on the right. After each parallel chapter are reproduced the annotations of the Rheims and the confutation of Fulke. The unintended consequences of this work was that the people became more familiar with the Rheims New Testament than they would otherwise have been. Fulke’s work was printed in 1601, 1617, and 1633.” (Vance, 317-318)
- In the next study we will endeavor to ascertain the Rheims influence on the King James translators.

Works Cited

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