

Sunday, October 17, 2021— Grace Life School of Theology—*From This Generation For Ever*
Lesson 153 Assessing the Contents & Impact of the Millenary Petition

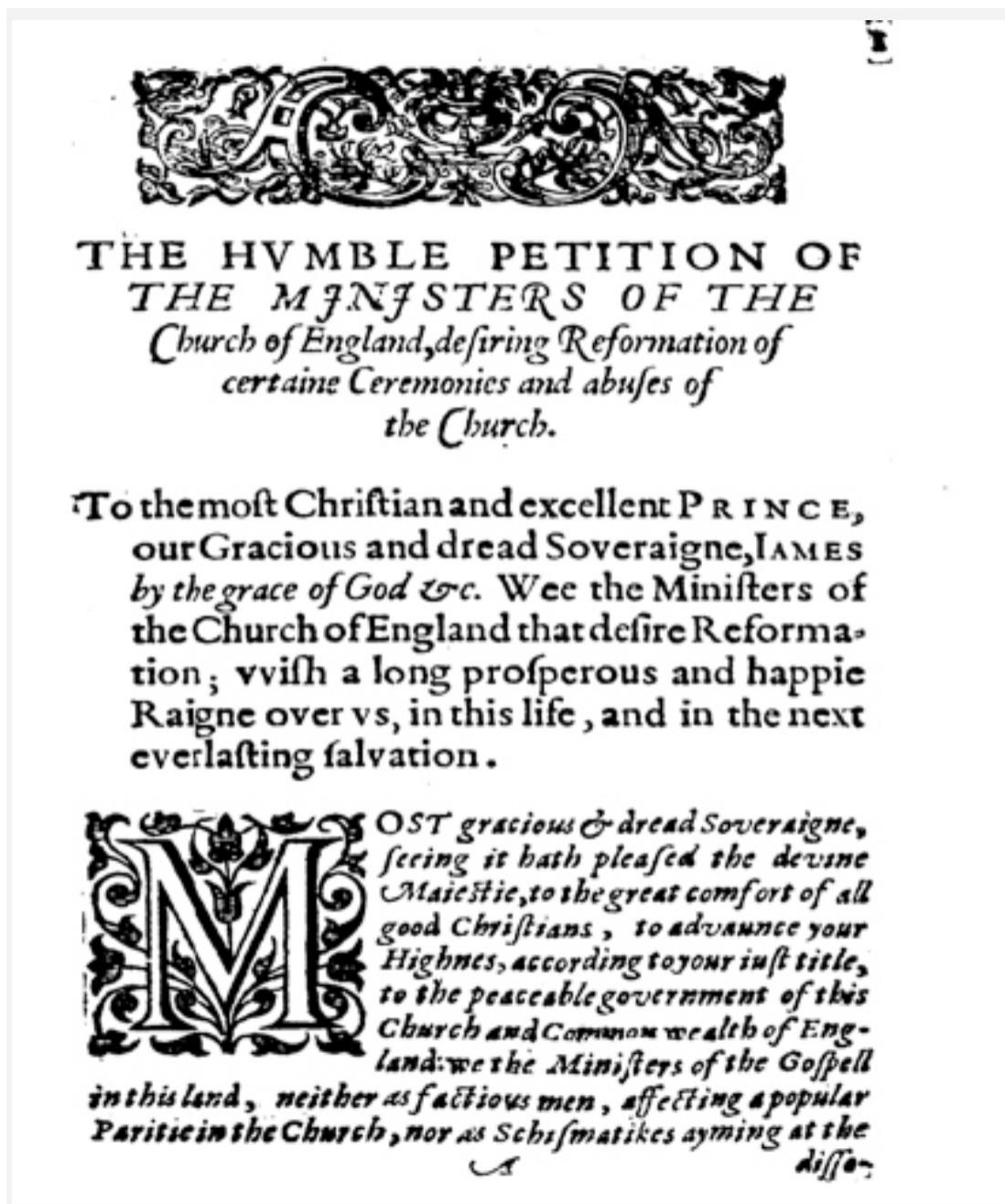
Introduction

- Two weeks ago, in [Lesson 152](#) we looked at some biographical information about King James. Our goal in doing so was to try to understand his personal history and psyche in order to ascertain why he might have agreed to sanction a new translation of the Bible in 1604. I believe this background regarding his personal life and ruling philosophy will help us understand what was motivating James' decision-making process as we move into future lessons.
- Today, in Lesson 153, we want to look at the contents and impact of the Millenary Petition in calling the meeting at Hampton Court at which the decision to translate the King James Bible was made.

The Millenary Petition

- Queen Elizabeth I died on the morning of March 24, 1603. Later that same day, James VI of Scotland was declared King James I of England (Sir Robert Cecil, Elizabeth's chief minister had been negotiating this move behind closed doors since 1601.).
- On April 5, 1603, James left Edinburgh for London, promising to return every three years (a promise he did not keep), and progressed slowly southwards. As James migrated southward, he was met on the way by a delegation of Puritans carrying a document called the Millenary Petition, the full and proper name of which is *The Humble Petition of Ministers of the Church of England, Desiring Reformation of Certain Ceremonies and Abuses of the Church*. The *Petition* outlined Puritan grievances against the Anglican Church as well as their desire to reform some of its practices.
- The Millenary Petition is claimed, but not proven, to have had 1,000 signatures of Puritan ministers. This carefully worded document expressed Puritan distaste regarding the state of the Anglican Church, and took into consideration James' religious views as well as his liking for a debate, as written in [Basilikon Doron](#) (1599).
- *Basilikon Doron* is separated into three books serving as general guidelines to follow to be an efficient monarch. The first describes a king's duty towards God as a Christian, the second focuses on the roles and responsibilities in office and the third concerns proper behavior in the daily lifestyle. The work repeats James' argument for the divine right of kings, as set out in *The True Law of Free Monarchies* (1598), which was also written by James. It too warns against "Papists" and derides Puritans. It advocates removing the Apocrypha from the Bible. **The King's criticism of both Catholics and Puritans is in keeping with the king's philosophy of following a "middle path," a notion that would later manifest itself in James' decision to authorize a new translation into English.**

- Timothy Berg, author of the blog [King James Bible History](#) does an excellent job tracing down access to the original text of the Petition in his post titled “[The Text of the Millenary Petition.](#)” In addition to providing links to the full text of the Petition in academic books from the 19th and 20th centuries, Berg provides an original image of the first page of the Petition as it originally appeared in 1603.



- Interested parties can access the full text of the Petition at one of the following links.
 - [*The Stuart Constitution, 1603-1688: Documents and Commentary*](#) edited by J.P. Kenyon.
 - [*The Church History of Britain*](#) by Thomas Fuller 1845.
- Through the Millenary Petition, the Puritans sought to use their knowledge of James' writings to petition the King for further reforms to the Anglican Church of which James was now the head. Puritan objections set forth in the Millenary Petition include: 1) The signing of the cross during baptism, 2) Confirmation, 3) the administration of baptism by lay people, 4) the use of the rings in marriage ceremonies, 5) bowing at the name of Jesus, 6) requirement of the surplice and cap, and 7) the awarding of multiple ecclesiastical positions, and receiving pay for each. In addition, the Puritans disliked the terms Priest and Absolution (terms they perceived as Roman Catholic), wanted a stricter observance of the Sabbath (which was originally supported by James up until the 1617 publication of *The Book of Sports*), and claimed that ministers should be both "able and sufficient men."
- Timothy Berg maintains that the Millenary Petition was probably "one of about a half dozen other petitions reportedly made to James while he was on his way to London from Edinburgh for his coronation between 4 April and 7 May 1603." The Petition was likely drafted by [Arthur Hildersham](#) at the behest of [Stephen Edgerton](#) though little else is known about the circumstances under which it was originally presented to King James. (Berg, 6/1/20)
- Conspicuously missing from the Millenary Petition is any language regarding a desire for a new translation of the Bible into English. Traditionally, the Petition is viewed as the impetus for the Hampton Court Conference in January 1604 (the meeting was originally set for November 1603 but had to be moved on account of an outbreak of Plague). It was at this meeting that James made the decision to authorize a new translation of the Bible into English.
- Regarding the connection between the Petition and the Hampton Court Conference Timothy Berg states the following:
 - "The various requests made in the Petition provide a window into the past; a snapshot, frozen in time, of the tensions and uncertainties, hopes and fears, that were present when James I took the throne in 1603. They thus form essential background to the Hampton Court Conference where these hopes would rise to their highest point, before being largely dashed. That Conference in turn provides essential background to the King James Bible and its birth." (Berg, 5/18/20)
- In a separate blog entry from June 1, 2020, titled "[The Creation And Impact of the Millenary Petition](#)", author Timothy Berg presents some recent research questioning the commonly accepted view that the Millenary Petition was the immediate impetus or cause for the Hampton Court Conference. In 2008 William Lenard Craig wrote an essay titled "Hampton Court Again: The Millenary Petition and the Calling of the Conference" that advances this argument. Citing

Berg, “He [Craig] suggests that James actually called the Conference of his own accord, that it was not a response to the Millenary Petition, and that it was not so much an attempt to hear Puritan complaints as it was an attempt to ensure that Puritans would stay under his thumb.” (Berg, 6/1/20)

- On page 48 of his essay Craig states the following:
 - It is all very well to say that “It is well known” that “the Hampton Court conference resulted from King James’s favorable response” to the Millenary Petition’s request for a conference, but if this knowledge has no contemporary evidence to support it, then historians must read the evidence again.... Although we cannot know it beyond doubt, it seems likely that the conference was the king’s own idea.” (Craig, 48)
- Berg does an excellent job summarizing Craig’s main arguments in support of his theory that James called the meeting independently of the Millenary Petition. The following summary of Craig’s argumentation is quoted from Berg’s blog entry.
 - “First, the king already had a well-established track record in Scotland of calling such conferences when he saw issues that needed handling with a royal touch. This was his regular M.O., and he needed no outside impetus to prompt such an action. Indeed, he called three of them in 1604 alone.

Second, the language of the Petition that has been cited as requesting the Conference (“...if it shall please your Highness further to hear us, or more at large by writing to be informed, or by conference among the learned to be resolved...”) is exceptionally vague. “Conference” is only one of three different proposals, and in any case, “In the early seventeenth century, ‘conference’ could mean anything from a simple conversation to a formal meeting between representatives of the two Houses of Parliament” (pg. 55).

Third, the surviving invitation of participants to the Conference makes no mention of being a response to any Petition. It seems to assert rather that the Conference was at the king’s own wish. “It does not refer to the Millenary Petition but says that the king wished ‘to confer and advise with some of the bishops and others of the clergy of this realm, of some matters of importance concerning ecclesiastical causes’” (pg. 63).

Fourth, and perhaps more important, as Craig demonstrates, no contemporary accounts link the Petition and the Conference, a connection only made by later historians. No mention is made of the Petition in the official archives, nor even in contemporary histories as related to the Conference. No mention is made of it in the official account of the accession, despite its narrating some five petitions made during the journey of James to London. In fact, even in later accounts, the given date and location of the presentation of the Petition is amazingly inconsistent and unsettled; not what one would expect from a Petition so impactful as to have moved to the king to call a major royal Conference to resolve it.

Fifth, the Conference itself doesn't appear at all by its format to have been intended as a means to hear Puritan complaints. Almost twenty some odd "avant-grade conformists" (to use another historian's term) were present while only four Puritan delegates were present, and these four were only allowed at one day of the Conference, the king hearing from the bishops and making decisions entirely without them the rest of the Conference. As has been noted before, "The conference...made it perfectly clear that James was on the side of the Establishment and expected all others to conform, crying out that if they failed to do so 'I will harry them out of the land, or else do worse.'"

Craig concludes that, "The simplest reading of the evidence is that James called the conference at Hampton Court because that was his usual method of dealing with difficult questions in church and state, and not because he was asked to do it" (pg. 69-70). He may be slightly over-pressing his point in his attempt to re-evaluate the Hampton Court Conference itself, but he at the very least raises concerns about connecting the Conference and the Petition too strongly, and gives clear reason to question the role of the Petition as the solitary cause of the Conference." (Berg, 6/1/20)

- Craig's thesis, as attractive as I find it given our background study of King James, has had difficulty dislodging the commonly held assumption that the Petition was the immediate impetus for the Hampton Court Conference. One reason for this might be that William Barlow, the author of *Sum and Substance* the semi-official record of the proceedings at Hampton Court, mentions the Petition in several places. Timothy Berg provides the following analysis:
 - "He describes the four Puritan representatives (Reynolds, Sparkes, Knewstubs, and Chadderton) for example as, "Agents for the Millene Plaintiffs" (Barlow, pg. 2). He also describes how, while Reynolds was making his case to the king, Richard Bancroft, Bishop of London and the arch Anti-Puritan (and shortly thereafter, Archbishop of Canterbury and the major architect of the King James Bible), rudely interrupted him, and knelt down before the king dramatically, begging that no more should be heard from these schismatics. He presented three reasons why. His second reason was;

...that if any of these parties were in the number of the 1,000 Ministers, who had once subscribed to the [Book of Common Prayer], and yet had lately exhibited a Petition to his Majesty against it, they might be removed and not heard, according to the Decree of a very ancient Council, providing, "that no man should be admitted to speak against that, whereunto he had formerly subscribed."—Barlow, pg. 26." (Berg, 6/1/20)
- Regarding what this might mean for the veracity of Craig's thesis, Berg states the following:
 - "This argues that the impact of the Petition was clearly felt at the Conference. Yet it also further supports Craig's claims. If the Conference had been called to hear the complaints of the Petition, it would hardly make sense to ban anyone from speaking who had signed it! As Craig notes, "These references, which seem to refer to the Humble Petition, show

that Barlow and Bancroft considered it the centerpiece of puritan agitation, but not that they thought the conference had been called as a response to it” (Craig, pg. 51). Craig’s argument does not so much sever the connection between the Petition and the Conference as weaken it. Or more specifically, remove its casual elements, urging us to speak in more nuanced ways of the connections. The Petition was still, “the centerpiece of puritan agitation,” which was put on dramatic display at the Conference.” (Berg, 6/1/20)

- For our purposes it is important to remember that the Petition makes no mention of a Puritan desire for a new Bible translation. Evidence that we will consider in future Lessons suggests that in 1603, as he made his way from Scotland the England, it was only James himself who thought there needed to be a new translation of the Bible into English.
 - “It remains an important window into the exploding controversy between non-conformists and avant-grade conformists that was first publicly showcased at the Conference which conceived the King James Bible, partly as an ultimately failed attempt at bringing uniformity to that controversy. Though it is important to remember that the Petition itself makes no mention of a new translation, which was probably at that point only desired by the King himself, being little more than a gleam in the Puritan eye.” (Berg, 6/1/20)
- In the next Lesson we will begin our consideration of the Hampton Court Conference.

Works Cited

Berg, Timothy. “[The Coming of King James And The Millenary Petition](#)” on *King James Bible History*. May 11, 2020.

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