

Sunday, October 9, 2022— Grace Life School of Theology—*From This Generation For Ever*
 Lesson 182 Pre-1611 Evidence for the Text: The General Meeting & The Notes of John Bois, Part 4

Introduction

- In [Lesson 181](#) we looked at the extra Biblical References in Bois' notes. In doing so we observed that John Chrysostom the patriarch of Constantinople (14 mentions) and Theodore Beza (12 mentions) are the two most cited extra Biblical sources in Bois' notes.
- In addition, we considered Irena Backus' monograph *The Reformed Roots of the English New Testament: The Influence of Theodore Beza on the English New Testament* to frame a discussion of the immense influence that Beza exerted upon the King James translators.
- In this Lesson we want to consider what Bois tells us about the discussions that transpired at the General Meeting regarding how the English text should read.

English Idiom, Style, and Register in the Notes of John Bois

- In Lesson 180 we quoted the following statement from Helen Moore and Julian Reid in *Manifold Greatness: The Making of the King James Bible* regarding the notes of John Bois.
 - “As well as recording the translators' intricate scholarly debates, Bois's notes also reveal a degree of attention to the matter of English idiom and some concern with the style and register of the translation.” (Moore & Reid, 108)
- Thus far we have not discussed what Bois' notes reveal about the translators' concern for the sound and style of the English text they were revising/creating.
- The 17th century chronicler John Selden paints a picture of the General Meeting at work in his book *Table Talk*.
 - “The translation in King James's time took an excellent way. That part of the Bible was given to him who was most excellent in such a tongue (as the Apocrypha to Andrew Downes), and then they met together, and one read the translation, the rest holding in their hand some Bible either of the learned tongues, or French, Spanish, Italian, etc. If they found any fault, they spoke up, if not, he read on.” (Selden, 7-8; PDF pages 158-159)
- I take these statements by Selden to be in reference to the General Meeting. They describe the final polish, an audible reading, being placed upon what would become the KJB. After all, the KJB was produced “to be read” in the churches.
- David Teems, author of *Majesty: The King Behind the King James Bible*, describes the aural i.e., linguistic nature of the English Renaissance and how this Elizabethan aesthetic impacted the King James translators.

- “The demise of the Roman Catholic Church in England—outlawed as it was from the days of Henry VIII, confiscated as all its properties were, abbeys, castles, lands—left a hole in culture, a big gaping hole. For centuries it had been a Catholic England. At this dismantling there was a void of large dimensions. As fluid as culture was, as teeming and as eager as early modern England was, there were strong currents that could not be ignored.

The Roman Catholic Mass was, and still is, a grand spectacle. Mysteries were celebrated and with a language (Latin) just as mysterious to most of the faithful. The liturgy engaged all the senses. It was magnificent. And it was suddenly absent.

In 1576, James Burbage built the first theater in London. There had not been a theater in town for more than a thousand years, since the Roman occupation. . . What was lost to the people with the pageantry of the Roman Catholic Church was returned to them with the rise of the theater. This great gaping hole in culture gave them a new champion, indeed, a new kind of church, a new priesthood. And it was so very English.

The pulpit was exchanged for a stage, and the language of plays was reminiscent of the high tone of the Mass. It was after all, a listening culture, a culture of the word, a peculiarly English occupation. Other forms of art—sculpting, painting, music, even architecture—with only a few exceptions were to be found elsewhere, outside the little island, in Italy, Holland, Germany, France. English captures its reflection in words, in the subtleties of the human voice. It is a direct exchange, immediate, intimate. Majestic has no better home.

It should be little wonder that English had become the lingua franca of the civilized world, or that English dominates music, film, literature, the dramatic arts. . .

The English imagination was, and remains, aural. It expressed itself in sound, and the culture was tuned for it. . . Shakespeare and others, would not have written the way they did had the audience not been able to understand.

It was all very much alive. The Elizabethan audience was “eager, alert, and excited by this new form of entertainment.” Touching Englishness to the quick, the play was the very soul of the English Renaissance. It is a key to understanding the age itself. And its queen.

. . . To ignore the development of the theater is to ignore the spirit of the age, the powerful linguistic tide that swept everyone up, that saturated a culture. In the years between 1584 and 1623, hardly more than a single generation, more than fifty million people passed through theater doors.” (Teems, 180-185)

- According to Teems, the King James translators had been reared on this Elizabethan ascetic and had ears tuned to discern aural nature of the English language.
 - “. . . the King James Translators were steeped in this Elizabethan aesthetic, this powerful linguistic vitality, this Hamletized soul of the age that was characterized by a penetrating,

high-velocity wit and melancholy that spun forth the finest lines ever written in any language.” (Teems, 187)

- “What it doesn’t mean is that the Translators attempted to make the Scripture sound Shakespearean. I’m not sure they consciously wanted the Scripture to sound like anything but itself. But what does that mean?”

The King James Translators did not attempt to impose a voice or any sense of style upon the translation. They felt that beauty lay nested in the original Hebrew and Greek texts, and they submitted themselves accordingly. Their task, as they saw it, was to coax it forward, to draw it out. And yet, as any miner or archaeologist understands, to do this kind of precision work, to finesse this kind of detail, you need the right tools. The Translators had the right tools, but more than that, the tools they had were well calibrated. Also, the Rules of Translation included nothing about sonority or style. The Translators were left to their own instincts as to the sound it made.

... The Elizabethan aesthetic is the perfect storm, the collision of powerful and unrepeatable, elements, among them a language coming into its own, a spirit disposed to the word, and one ridiculously fine poet.

An entire culture was swept up in a powerful linguistic current that included not only Shakespeare, but Ben Johnson and John Donne, as well as their predecessors, Edmund Spenser and Christopher Marlowe. We would include Francis Bacon and his brother Anthony in with this lot, and Sir Walter Raleigh. Even Elizabeth herself. And James. All literary. All empowered by the poetic ideal of the age.

What a piece of work is man! How noble in reason!
How infinite in faculty! In form and moving how
Express and admirable! In action how like an angel!
In apprehension how like a god! The beauty of the
World! The paragon of animals! And yet, to me,
What is the quintessence of dust?
William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, II ii, 315-330

What is man, that thou art mindful of him?
And the son of man, that thou visitest him?
For thou hast made him a little lower than the Angels;
And hast crowned him with glory and honor.
Psalm 8:4-5 King James Bible 1611

Does this consideration somehow diminish the King James Bible? No, it does not. On the contrary, the times were alive, effervescent. English was in the throes of discovering itself. The late Elizabethan age was an age of linguistic sizzle. Its echo has been long and powerful. The Translators were all Elizabethans, all passionately literate. This aesthetic could only enhance the beauty and magnificence that was already there in the fold of Scripture. It had the ability to make beautiful even more beautiful . . .

The Elizabethan aesthetic was the filter through which the King James Translators tested every word. . . It was a literary spirit that governed culture, a spirit of the word, a profoundly English spirit that had risen to its zenith in the age of Elizabeth.” (Teems, 188-190)

- Simply stated,
 - “The plays of William Shakespeare were never written to be read, or worse, studied. He did not publish his plays in his own lifetime. The difference is subtle, and thought beyond any science to explain, there is a difference between listening and reading. A poor example, but an immediate one, might be the difference between listening to a song by your favorite singer as opposed to merely reading the lyrics. Certain intimacies are denied in the reading that are alive and resonant in the hearing.

. . . The King James Bible was appointed to be “read in the churches.” . . . One of the last steps of the translation was a hearing, an aural review. The following is an example of what might have been heard at this review. The difference between the two translations of Ecclesiastes 11:1 is conspicuous. More often the differences varied by a rhythmical movement in a line, the placement of a comma, an inflection, or an ambiguity that remained without resolve altogether.”

“Send thy victual over the waters. . .” (Coverdale)

“Lay thy bread upon wet faces . . .” (Bishops)

“Cast thy bread upon the waters. . . (Geneva & King James)
(Teems, 175)

- Bois’ notes give us insight into the nature and contents of the translators’ discussions around English idiom and style. We will consider some of the clearer examples from Bois’ notes of these discussions. We can also compare the discussion reported in Bois’ notes with earlier stages of the project as found in the base text of the 1602 Bishops Bible, MS 98, and the final product of 1611.

Romans 3:9

- Bois’ Note—“After he had said many things concerning the infidelity and iniquity of the Jews, the Jews might be able to ask, *τί οὖν προεχόμεθα* [what then? are we bettered] are we surpassed, are we excelled, plainly by the Greeks. Otherwise in the person of the Jews (for that this must be referred to the Jews is clear from what follows) *What then? Are we safe, and out of danger? Are we preferred? Are we God’s darlings?*” (Allen, 39)
 - 1602 Bishops—What then, are we better *than they*? No, in no wise: we have before assured both, Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin.
 - MS 98— What then, are we better than they? No, in no wise: we have before proved both, Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin.

- AV—What then? are we better than they? No, in no wise: for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin;
 - From this we can see that Bois’ alternative reading (see italics above) was not accepted into the AV.

I Corinthians 10:11

- Bois’ Note—“. . . [that the thought may be complete] read thus, . . . [these things as our examples happened to them]. A.D. sharply and violently . . . [exerted himself beyond measure] for the interpretation of Augustine, that is, that *τύποι* [the examples] were understood as concerning the types and figures of the people of old: but the scope of the passage does not seem to admit this interpretation.” (Allen, 47)
 - 1602 Bishops—~~All~~ these things happened unto them for ensamples, but they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.
 - MS 98—Now these things happened unto them for ensamples, and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.
 - AV—Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.
 - This entry in Bois’ notes is of personal interest to me given what I have said about the words “ensample” and “example.” Bois’ notes indicate that the translators believed that verse 11 completed the “thought.” What thought? In the context would be the thought that started in verse 6 in which the same Greek word (*τύποι*) appears and is rendered “examples.” Bois’ notes reveal that he and the other translators did not understand “ensample” and “example” to be wholly different words of discriminated meaning as they are used interchangeably in the same context in I Corinthians 10.

I Corinthians 13:11

- Bois’ Note—“*I understood, I cared as a child, I had a child’s mind, I imagined as a child, I was affected as a child.*” (Allen, 49)
 - 1602 Bishops—When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I imagined as a child: but assoone as I was a man, I put away childishness.
 - MS 98—When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things.
 - AV—When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things.

Philippians 3:14

- Bois' Note—*"I follow directly to the prize of the high calling, others. I follow toward the mark of the prize."* (Allen, 63)
 - 1602 Bishops—~~And~~ I press toward the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.
 - MS 98—I press toward the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.
 - AV—I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

Colossians 2:2

- Bois' Note—"being knit together in love, [and instructed] in all riches etc. the word συμβιβάζω [knit together, compare] signifies both at once, join together, and instruct, or teach: it is not inconsistent with the truth therefore, that the Apostle took account of both meanings." (Allen, 63)
 - 1602 Bishops—That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and in all riches of certainty of understanding, to know the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ:
 - MS 98—Not available
 - AV—That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ;
 - In this case "the excellent wording" proposed by Bois in his notes was the wording adopted by the AV. (Opfell, 103)

Hebrews 11:1

- Bois' Note—*"is a most sure warrant of things, is a being of things hoped for, a discovery, a demonstration of things that are not seen."* (Allen, 81)
 - 1602 Bishops—Faith is the ground of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.
 - MS 98—blank no recommended changes.
 - AV—Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

Hebrews 13:8

- Bois' Note—"yesterday, and today the same, and for ever A.D. If the words be arranged in this manner, [the statement] will be [more majestic]. A.D." (Allen, 87)
 - 1602 Bishops—Jesus Christ yesterday, and today, and the same for ever.
 - MS 98— Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.
 - AV—Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.

1 Peter 2:24

- Bois' Note—"carried up our sins to the tree D. Harmer, and A.D. [μώλωψ, a bruise, blood clot] i.e., verberibus [by stripes, lashes]. What precedes is understood, in fact, from what follows." (Allen, 91)
 - 1602 Bishops—Which his own self bare our sins in his body on the tree . . .
 - MS 98—Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree
 - AV—Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, . . .

Conclusion

- Read further examples from David Teems on pages 212-215, and 229.
- On page 213 Teems quotes the following from Dr. David Norton's legendary work *A History of the English Bible as Literature*:
 - "We may conclude from Bois's notes that literary considerations were subordinate to accuracy. That is, soundness over sound. According to David Norton, "Whatever one considers the positive literary qualities of the KJB to be, they do not exist through a deliberate attempt on the part of either the KJB translators or their predecessors to write good English." (Teems, 213)
- Put another way, they were primarily concerned with accuracy in translation and created masterful English by accident. In conclusion, please consider the following from the pen of Alister McGrath's *In the Beginning: The Story of the King James Bible and How It Changed a Nation, a Language, and a Culture*:
 - "There was virtually universal agreement in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that the King James Bible had made a massive contribution to the development of the English language in general, and English prose in particular. . . Yet there is no evidence that the translators of the King James Bible had any great interest in matters of literature

or linguistic development. Their concern was primarily to provide an accurate translation of the Bible, on the assumption that accuracy was itself the most aesthetic of qualities to be desired. Paradoxically, the king's translators achieved literary distinction precisely because they were not deliberately pursuing it. Aiming at truth, they achieved what later generations recognized as beauty and elegance . . . elegance was achieved by accident rather than design.'” (McGrath, 254)

Works Cited

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