

Sunday, May 7, 2023—Grace Life School of Theology—*From This Generation For Ever*
 Lesson 203 The AV 1611: Producing A Proper Perspective on the Preface (Diversity of Senses in The Margin)

Introduction

- In [Lesson 202](#) we concluded our study of subsection thirteen of Myles Smith’s famous Preface titled “The Purpose of the Translators with Their Number, Furniture, and Care, Etc.” In doing so we considered the following points:
 - Their Number
 - Their Furniture
 - Their Care
- In this Lesson we want to consider subsection fourteen of the Preface which is devoted to a defense of the use of marginal notes in the AV to set forth a “diversity of senses.”

Reasons Moving Us To Set Diversity of Senses In the Margin, Where There Is Great Probability For Each

Modern Spelling Transcription	Modern Form Edited by Rhodes & Lupas
¶16) Some peradventure would have no variety of senses to be set in the margin, lest the authority of the Scriptures for deciding of controversies by that show of uncertainty, should somewhat be shaken. But we hold their judgment not to be sound in this point. For though, " <i>whatsoever things are necessary are manifest,</i> " as S. Chrysostom saith, and as S. Augustine, " <i>In those things that are plainly set down in the Scriptures, all such matters are found that concern Faith, Hope, and Charity.</i> " Yet for all that it cannot be dissembled, that partly to exercise and whet our wits, partly to wean the curious from the loathing of them for their everywhere plainness, partly also to stir up our devotion to crave the assistance of God's spirit by prayer, and lastly, that we might be forward to seek aid of our brethren by conference, and never scorn those that be not in all respects so complete as they should be, being to seek in many things ourselves, it hath pleased God in his divine providence, here and there to scatter words and sentences of that difficulty and doubtfulness, not in doctrinal points that concern salvation, (for in such it hath been vouched that the Scriptures are plain) but in matters of less moment, that fearfulness would better beseem us than	¶16) “Some persons perhaps would want to have no alternative readings or renderings placed in the margin, for fear that any appearance of uncertainty might undermine the authority of the Scriptures as definitive. But we do not consider their judgment to be prudent on this point. It is true that “everything that is necessary is obvious.” as St. Chrysostom says, and as St. Augustine says, “the things that are stated clearly in the Scriptures include everything having to do with faith, hope, and love.” And yet the fact cannot be disguised that partly in order to keep us alert and make us use our intelligence, partly to keep sophisticated people from looking down on the Scriptures as too simple for them, partly also to encourage us to pray for the assistance of God’s Spirit, and finally, to make us look actively to our brethren for help through discussion (not looking down on people who are not as educated as they might be, since we too are ignorant in many areas), God has been pleased in his divine Providence to scatter here and there words and sentences that are difficult and ambiguous. These do not touch on doctrinal points that have to do with salvation (because we know that in these the Scriptures are clear), but on matters of less importance. Therefore we should

confidence, and if we will resolve upon modesty with S. *Augustine*, (though not in this same case altogether, yet upon the same ground) *Melius est debitare de occultis, quam litigare de incertis*, "it is better to make doubt of those things which are secret, than to strive about those things that are uncertain." There be many words in the Scriptures, which be never found there but once, (having neither brother or neighbor, as the *Hebrews* speak) so that we cannot be holpen by conference of places. Again, there be many rare names of certain birds, beasts and precious stones, etc. concerning the *Hebrews* themselves are so divided among themselves for judgment, that they may seem to have defined this or that, rather because they would say something, than because they were sure of that which they said, as S. *Jerome* somewhere saith of the *Septuagint*. Now in such a case, doth not a margin do well to admonish the Reader to seek further, and not to conclude or dogmatize upon this or that peremptorily? For as it is a fault of incredulity, to doubt of those things that are evident: so to determine of such things as the Spirit of God hath left (even in the judgment of the judicious) questionable, can be no less than presumption. Therefore as S. *Augustine* saith, that variety of Translations is profitable for the finding out of the sense of the Scriptures: so diversity of signification and sense in the margin, where the text is no so clear, must needs do good, yea, is necessary, as we are persuaded. We know that *Sixtus Quintus* expressly forbiddeth, that any variety of readings of their vulgar edition, should be put in the margin, (which though it be not altogether the same thing to that we have in hand, yet it looketh that way) but we think he hath not all of his own side his favorers, for this conceit. They that are wise, had rather have their judgments at liberty in differences of readings, than to be captivated to one, when it may be the other. If they were sure that their high Priest had all laws shut up in his breast, as *Paul* the Second bragged, and that he were as free from error by special privilege, as the Dictators of *Rome* were made by law inviolable, it were another matter; then his word were an Oracle, his opinion a decision. But the eyes of the world are now open, God be thanked, and have been a great while, they find that he is subject to the same affections and infirmities that others be, that his skin is

be diffident rather than confident, and if we must make a choice, to choose modesty as did St. *Augustine*, who said about a situation that was similar though not identical, "It is better to be reserved about things which are not revealed, than to fight about things that are uncertain." There are many words in the Scriptures which are found there only once (with neither brother nor neighbor, as the *Hebrews* say) so that help cannot be gained by comparing passages. Again, there are many rare names for birds, animals, and gems, etc which the *Hebrews* themselves are so uncertain about that they seem to have defined them one way or another, more because they wanted to say something, than because they were sure of what they said, as St. *Jerome* says somewhere about the *Septuagint*. In such cases a marginal note is useful to advise the Reader to seek further and not to draw inferences or dogmatize rashly about this or that. For if it is the fault of incredulity to doubt what is evident, it can be no less than presumption to be definite about things that the Spirit of God has left (even in the judgment of the judicious) questionable. Therefore as St. *Augustine* says that alternative translations are profitable for finding out the meaning of the Scriptures, so also we believe that alternative readings in a marginal note, where the text is not clear must not only be good but even necessary. We know that *Sixtus V* specifically forbids any alternative readings to be put in the margin of their *Vulgate* edition (and although this is not precisely what we are discussing here, it is close), yet not all of his colleagues are in agreement with him in this. The wise would prefer a freedom of choice where there are differences of readings, rather than be restricted to one when there is an alternative. It would be different if they were sure that their high priest had all laws in hand, as *Paul II* bragged, and that he was by special privilege free from error just as the dictators of *Rome* were made legally inviolate. Then his word would be an oracle, and his opinion a decision. But the eyes of the world are open now, God be thanked, and they have been a great while They find that he is subject to the same feelings and weaknesses that others are, that he is human. Therefore they will recognize and accept only what he proves, and not everything that he claims. (Rhodes & Lupas, 82-83)

penetrable, and therefore so much as he proveth, not as much as he claimeth, they grant and embrace.	
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- As the title suggests, subsection fourteen of the Preface touches upon the marginal notes found in the 1611 edition of the AV. Before unpacking what Smith says about the nature of these notes it is important to remember what we have already learned about marginal notes in the story of the King James Bible.
- First, recall that one of the reasons why King James strongly objected to the Geneva Bible was on account of its marginal notes. Once again, we turn our attention to William Barlow’s account of the Hampton Court Conference as set forth in the *Sum and Substance* in which King James is reported to have stated the following:
 - “Whereupon his Highness wished, that some especial pains should be taken in that behalf for one uniform translation (**professing that he could never, yet, see a Bible well translated in English, but the worst of all his Majesty thought the Geneva to be**) and this to be done by the best learned in both the Universities, after them to be reviewed by the Bishops, and the chief learned of the Church; from them to be presented to the Privy Council; and lastly, to be ratified by his Royal authority; and so this whole Church to be bound unto it and none other: Mary, withal, he gave this caveat (**upon a word cast out by my Lord of London that no marginal notes should be added, having found in them which are annexed to the Geneva translation (which he saw in a Bible given him by an English Lady) some notes very partial, untrue, seditious, and favouring too much of dangerous, and traitorous conceits**) as, for example, Exod. 1:19, where the marginal notes alloweth disobedience to Kings. And 2 Chron. 15:16, the note taxeth Asa for deposing his mother, only, and not killing her.” (Barlow, 47)
- It turns out that James also believed that there needed to be “one uniform translation” but he would never sanction or recognize the Geneva Bible on account of its marginal notes that he viewed as seditious and undermining the Divine Right of Kings.
- Given the King’s misgivings regarding the Geneva Bible’s marginal notes, it is not surprising to find Archbishop Richard Bancroft’s Rules addressing the issue of such notes. Bancroft set forth the following “Rules” to govern the use of marginal notes in the AV.
 - 6—No marginal notes at all to be affixed, but only for the explanation of the Hebrew or Greek words, which cannot without some circumlocution so briefly and fitly be expressed in the text.
 - 7—Such quotations of places to be marginally set down as shall serve for the fit reference of one scripture to another.
- Gordon Campbell, author of *Bible: The Story of the King James Version 1611-2011* offers the following explanation of “Rules” 6 and 7.

- “[Rule 6] The interdiction against expository marginal notes may have originated in King James’s dislike of anti-monarchical notes in the Geneva Bible, but also reflected unease about the prospect that marginal notes might reflect a particular theological perspective.

[Rule 7] ‘Places’ are verses; this rule gave the authority for the revisers to produce a system of cross-references.” (Campbell, 37)

- So according to Bancroft’s Rules there were two allowable reasons for the use of marginal notes in the AV. First was to explain Hebrew and/or Greek words that could not “briefly” or “fitly be expressed in the text.” Second was to produce a system of Biblical cross-references to “serve for the fit reference of one scripture to another.”
- With this background information in mind regarding the stated purpose/function of marginal notes we will now turn our attention to what Myles Smith said about the marginal notes in subsection fourteen of the Preface to the 1611. Smith begins with the following statement:
 - “Some peradventure would have no variety of senses to be set in the margin, lest the authority of the Scriptures for deciding of controversies by that show of uncertainty, should somewhat be shaken.”
- In this statement Smith is acknowledging that some people thought that there should be “no variety of senses to be set in the margin” because “the authority of the Scriptures” in deciding “controversies” in the church would be “shaken” and made “uncertain.” Put another way, if the Biblical text could plausibly read differently than how the church has certainty in how the text does read. While on the surface I can understand this concern, our purpose is to understand the thinking of the translators as set forth by Myles Smith on the matter. In the next sentence Smith begins to address why the translators do not argue with this concern.
 - “But we hold their judgment not to be sound in this point.”
- In support of this statement Smith offers the opinions of Chrysostom and Augustine.
 - “For though, *“whatsoever things are necessary are manifest,”* as *S. Chrysostom* saith, and as *S. Augustine*, *“In those things that are plainly set down in the Scriptures, all such matters are found that concern Faith, Hope, and Charity.”* Yet for all that it cannot be dissembled, that partly to exercise and whet our wits, partly to wean the curious from the loathing of them for their everywhere plainness, partly also to stir up our devotion to crave the assistance of God's spirit by prayer, and lastly, that we might be forward to seek aid of our brethren by conference, and never scorn those that be not in all respects so complete as they should be, being to seek in many things ourselves, **it hath pleased God in his divine providence, here and there to scatter words and sentences of that difficulty and doubtfulness, not in doctrinal points that concern salvation, (for in such it hath been vouched that the Scriptures are plain) but in matters of less moment, that fearfulness would better beseeem us than confidence, and if we will resolve upon modesty** with *S. Augustine*, (though not in this same case altogether, yet

upon the same ground) *Melius est debitare de occultis, quam litigare de incertis*, “**it is better to make doubt of those things which are secret, than to strive about those things that are uncertain.**”

- Essentially, Smith is arguing that while the vast majority of the word of God is plain and easy to understand, particularly in matters concerning salvation, there are scattered “words and sentences” where there is an element of “difficulty and doubtfulness” that require a bit of “modesty” rather than “confidence.” Put another way, there are places where God chose to inspire his word with an element of difficulty. In these places it is better for translators to err on the side of “modesty” by placing an explanatory marginal note rather than to engage in translational dogmatism, according to Smith.
- In the next section Smith provides some examples of where “difficulty and doubtfulness” reside in endeavoring to translate the Scriptures.
 - “There be many words in the Scriptures, which be never found there but once, (having neither brother or neighbor, as the *Hebrews* speak) so that we cannot be holpen by conference of places. Again, there be many rare names of certain birds, beasts and precious stones, etc. concerning the *Hebrews* themselves are so divided among themselves for judgment, that they may seem to have defined this or that, rather because they would say something, than because they were sure of that which they said, as S. *Jerome* somewhere saith of the *Septuagint*.”
- The first example provided by Smith of when a marginal note might be appropriate is in cases where a given Hebrew or Greek word is found but “once” in the text and the translator cannot “be holpen [helped] by conference of places,” i.e., by comparing cross references.
- Secondly is in the case of “rare names of certain birds, beasts and precious stones, etc. concerning the *Hebrews* themselves are so divided among themselves for judgment.” In these two situations Smith views the “margin” as the appropriate place to convey a “variety of senses,” as the next portion of subsection fourteen makes plain.
 - Now in such a case, doth not a margin do well to admonish the Reader to seek further, and not to conclude or dogmatize upon this or that peremptorily? For as it is a fault of incredulity, to doubt of those things that are evident: so to determine of such things as the Spirit of God hath left (even in the judgment of the judicious) questionable, can be no less than presumption. Therefore as S. *Augustine* saith, that variety of Translations is profitable for the finding out of the sense of the Scriptures: so diversity of signification and sense in the margin, where the text is not so clear, must needs do good, yea, is necessary, as we are persuaded.”
- Smith’s primary concern is that readers of the Biblical text not “dogmatize” upon things “peremptorily” i.e., “with strong or positive belief or assurance; confidently; emphatically; dogmatically,” according to OED definition 3 (*Obsolete*). He goes on to say that just as it is “incredulity” to doubt “those things that are evident” it is “presumption” to “determine of such things as the Spirit of God hath left (even in the judgment of the judicious) questionable.” As a

result, Smith purports that the translators were “persuaded” that “diversity of signification and sense in the margin, where the text is not so clear, must needs do good, yea, is necessary.”

- In the next portion of subsection fourteen, Myles Smith contrasts the Protestant approach to textual ambiguities with those of Sixtus Quintus and the Roman Catholic Church.
 - “We know that *Sixtus Quintus* expressly forbiddeth, that any variety of readings of their vulgar edition, should be put in the margin, (which though it be not altogether the same thing to that we have in hand, yet it looketh that way) but we think he hath not all of his own side his favorers, for this conceit. They that are wise, had rather have their judgments at liberty in differences of readings, than to be captivated to one, when it may be the other. If they were sure that their high Priest had all laws shut up in his breast, as *Paul* the Second bragged, and that he were as free from error by special privilege, as the Dictators of *Rome* were made by law inviolable, it were another matter; then his word were an Oracle, his opinion a decision. But the eyes of the world are now open, God be thanked, and have been a great while, they find that he is subject to the same affections and infirmities that others be, that his skin is penetrable, and therefore so much as he proveth, not as much as he claimeth, they grant and embrace.”
- Sixtus Quintus is a reference to Pope Sixtus V (1585-1590) who forbade “any variety of readings of their vulgar [Vulgate] edition.” This is not the first time that Myles Smith mentioned Sixtus in the Preface. In subsection twelve titled “An Answer to the Imputations of Our Adversaries” he cited the Sixtus edition of the Vulgate as an example of Roman Catholic revision of the Latin Vulgate. Now in subsection fourteen, Smith is noting that Sixtus forbade that “any variety of readings . . . should be put in the margin” of his edition of the Vulgate. Smith goes on to note that not all of his fellow Roman Catholics agreed with this decision on the part of Sixtus, “they that are wise, had rather have their judgments at liberty in differences of readings, than to be captivated to one, when it may be the other.”
- Lastly, “the eyes of the world are now open” to the fact that Popes are not “free from error by special privilege,” for which Smith thanks God. Therefore, Popes such as Sixtus, are “subject to the same affections and infirmities that others be, that his skin is penetrable.” As a result, of the Pope’s lack of infallibility only what can be proved not merely claimed should be granted and embraced.
- Smith’s heavy focus on the Papacy/Rome in the second half of paragraph sixteen in a subsection devoted to discussing the use of the margin to place a “diversity of senses” in the margins of the AV is a major clue that it was primarily Catholics who objected to the practice. Herein we see the apologetic nature of Smith’s Preface. Much of what he says throughout the Preface is designed to answer the objections of the critics of the project from both the Roman Catholic as well as Protestant sides of the fence.
- While Smith’s Preface sets forth a rationale for why the translations included marginal notes in the AV of 1611, it does not comment further upon the nature of the notes or their number. According to the Preface the reasons for marginal notes are as follows:

- Difficult Words & Sentences—“. . . it hath pleased God in his divine providence, here and there to scatter words and sentences of that difficulty and doubtfulness, not in doctrinal points that concern salvation, (for in such it hath been vouched that the Scriptures are plain) but in matters of less moment, that fearfulness would better beseem us than confidence, and if we will resolve upon modesty with S. *Augustine* . . . “it is better to make doubt of those things which are secret, than to strive about those things that are uncertain.”
- Singular Word Occurrences & Rare Animals Etc.—“There be many words in the Scriptures, which be never found there but once, (having neither brother or neighbor, as the *Hebrews* speak) so that we cannot be holpen by conference of places. Again, there be many rare names of certain birds, beasts and precious stones, etc.”
- According to F.H.A. Scrivener’s 1884 publication *The Authorized Edition of the English Bible* there are 8,422 total marginal notes in the AV of 1611. This total breaks down as follows:
 - Old Testament—6,637
 - Apocrypha—1,018
 - New Testament—767 (Scrivener, 56)
- Timothy Berg author of the article “[Five Types of Marginal Notes In The King James Bible](#)” on the *King James Bible History* blog offers some slightly different numbers via a computer calculation of the number of marginal notes. Please note that Berg’s statistics do not include the Apocrypha.
 - Old Testament—6,565
 - New Testament—777
 - Total—7,342 (Berg)
- There is a webpage on the *Literature Bautista* website titled “[An exhaustive listing of the marginal notes of the 1611 edition of the King James Bible](#)” that catalogues every marginal note from the 1611 in canonical order.
- The question of whether the thousands of marginal notes exclusively fit the framework laid out by Myles Smith in the Preface is beyond the scope of this Lesson. Put another way, were the marginal notes limited to the following two categories that Smith enunciated in the Preface: 1) Difficult Words & Sentences, and 2) Singular Word Occurrences & Rare Animals Etc.; or did they extend beyond these two general categories. This will be the focus of a future Lesson.
- Smith’s purpose in the Preface was not to expound upon or defend every individual marginal note. Rather, his focus was to address the general practice and principles for the translators’ use of marginal notes in the face of those who opposed the practice.

- The translators' use of marginal notes to set forth "a diversity of senses" as well as their stated principle in subsection fifteen to not "stand curiously upon an identity of phrasing" indicates that they did not believe in *verbatim identicality of wording* as the standard for translation. We will look at the translators' statements regarding not tying themselves "to an uniformity of phrasing, or to an identity of words" in the next Lesson when we study subsection fifteen.

Works Cited

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