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The Geneva Bible

By CARL S. MEYER

ON April 10, 1560, the last page of an English Bible was taken off the press in Geneva. To say that it "rolled off the presses" would be an anachronism. The task of printing this Bible had been begun in January 1558. Twenty-seven months therefore were required for its printing—"God knoweth with what fear and trembling we have been for the space of two years and more, day and night, occupied herein," its translator-pressmen testify.¹ This was the famed Geneva Bible, now 400 years old, which only slowly gave way to the King James Version (1611) during the 17th century.²

Why was it published in Geneva? Geneva was the home of English refugees who had left England at the onset of Mary Tudor's reign (1553). They were fearful of the religious changes that would be brought about—and well they might be. Of Puritanical bent, they had little love for

the "Old Religion," which Mary espoused. They could not foresee the extent of the persecutions under Mary; they believed they were imminent and, with those who settled in Frankfort and elsewhere, they fled betimes.³ After the death of Mary (Nov. 18, 1558) the refugees quickly returned to England.

In the meanwhile, however, as noted, the printing of the complete Bible was well under way. The activity could not be transferred to London, since no printer had as yet been licensed to print Bibles and New Testaments.⁴ Eager as they might be to return to England, the translator-printers had to remain in Geneva to complete their task.

William Whittingham, Anthony Gilby, and Thomas Sampson were the chief, perhaps the only, men responsible for the new translation. Their names are not given in the preface, but there is general agreement among investigators in ascribing the new

¹ Quoted by Christopher Anderson, *The Annals of the English Bible* (London: William Pickering, 1845), II, 319.

² Charles C. Butterworth, *The Literary Lineage of the King James Bible, 1340—1611* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1941), p. 163, calls it "the household Bible of the English people" for 50 years.

Between 1560 and 1644 there were at least 140 editions of the Geneva Bible or the Geneva New Testament. Fifty-seven years ago the British and Foreign Bible Society had collected 120 of these editions. T. H. Darlow and H. F. Moule, *Historical Catalogue of the Printed Editions of the Holy Scripture in the Library of the British and Foreign Bible Society* (London: The Bible House, 1903), I (English), 61, 62, no. 77. Copy 364 of this work, printed in 500 copies, now in the Concordia Seminary library, was used in preparing this article.

³ C. H. Garrett, *The Marian Exiles* (Cambridge, 1938); H. J. Cowell, "The Sixteenth Century English Speaking Refugee Churches at Geneva and Frankfurt," *Huguenot Society Proceedings*, XVI (1939), 209—230; W. M. Southgate, "The Marian Exiles and the Influence of John Calvin," *History*, XXVII (1942), 148 to 152.

⁴ On Jan. 8, 1561, Elizabeth granted a license to John Bodley to print the Geneva Bible. See "Privilege and Licence to John Bodley for Printing the Geneva Bible for Seven Years" printed from the original Patent Roll, 3 Elizabeth, Part 13 (34), 1. A. F. Pollard, *Records of the English Bible: The Documents relating to the Translation and Publication of the Bible in English, 1525—1611* (London: Oxford University Press, 1911), pp. 284 f, no. XLVIII.

version to these three men.⁵ They had collaborators, even as they used previous English versions of the Scriptures. Among these advisers were Goodman and Cox, Coverdale and Knox, Calvin and Beza.

Oxford-educated William Whittingham (1525?—79), minister of the English congregation in Geneva, brother-in-law of John Calvin—he married Calvin's wife's sister—had issued an English version of the New Testament in 1557. It was a period of new versions, and Geneva was a center of Bible publication. Here in the previous year Theodore Beza had brought out a new Latin translation of the Greek New Testament.⁶ Not in Geneva, but in London, Richard Jugge had printed a revision of Tyndale's New Testament in 1552 and 1553, which Whittington used for his 1557 version.⁷ Beza, Jugge, Tyn-

⁵ Butterworth, p. 145; Anderson, II, 320 to 322; Brooke F. Westcott, *A General View of the History of the English Bible*, third edition, revised by Wm. A. Wright (London: Macmillan & Co., Ltd., 1905), pp. 90—92.

Pope lists Whittingham, Christopher Goodman, Thomas Sampson, and Richard Cox (whom he calls a Lutheran) as the translators. Hugh Pope, *English Versions of the Bible*, revised and amplified by Sebastian Bullough (St. Louis and London: B. Herder Book Co., 1952), pp. 216—219.

Darlow and Moule, p. 61, say rather cautiously that it was translated by Whittingham, Sampson, and Gilby, "and perhaps others."

⁶ A copy of the 1565 edition, autographed by Beza as a gift for Henry Bullinger in Zurich, is in the Concordia Seminary library. This 1565 edition contained the Greek text (it is the first edition of Beza's Greek text) and Beza's Latin version. Edgar Krentz, "Autograph Beza New Testament," *CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY*, XXX (January 1959), 64, 65.

⁷ Butterworth, p. 150. Darlow and Moule, pp. 56—59, list the 1552 (4") edition (no. 69), a second edition (16") in 1552 (no. 70), the 1553 (4") edition of the whole Bible (no. 71), a folio edition of the Great Bible in 1553

dale, Coverdale, and perhaps others contributed, each in his way, to this New Testament of 1557, which was revised for the Geneva Bible of 1560. Nevertheless Butterworth's tribute is in order:

No one can handle this small, compact, careful, and courageous edition without a feeling of respect for the work and for its chief producer, Whittingham. . . .⁸

The full title of this edition is *The / Nevve Testa- / ment of our Lord Ie- / sus Christ. / Conferred diligently with the Greke, and best ap- / proved translations. / VVith the arguments, as wel before the chapters, as for euery Boke / & Epistle, also diuersities of readings, and moste profitable / annotations of all harde places: wherunto is added a copi- / ous Table. / At Geneva / Printed by Conrral Badius. / M. D. LVII.* Truth and time are depicted on the title page with an inscription: "God by Tyme restoreth Trvth / and maketh her victorivous" — the hope of the English exiles.

Calvin added an "Epistle" as an introduction to the version; the translator addressed a preface to the reader. Whittingham also added annotations to his New Testament of 1557, with "arguments" placed before each of these books, original in scope, and not dependent primarily on Jerome or Erasmus. Critical notes and explanations, almost a commentary, were

(no. 72), a quarto edition of the same (no. 73), Jugge's revision, a second quarto edition, in 1553 (no. 74), and a 1553 octavo edition of the New Testament in 1553 (no. 75).

⁸ Butterworth, pp. 162 f.

Darlow and Moule, p. 60, no. 76, say: "The text is based upon Tindale's, compared with the Great Bible, and largely influenced by Beza's Latin translation."

added. It was the first English New Testament printed in Roman type, with the words not in the Greek original marked in italics and with the division of the chapters into verses. These features were retained in the 1560 Geneva Bible and subsequent editions, contributing to the popularity of the work.

In his preface Whittingham distinguished among malicious despisers of the Word, the indifferent, and the "simple lambs," to whom he is addressing his words. They are of Christ's flock and know their Father's will, he said; they "are affectioned to the truth." To them he gave an account of his method of translation and revision, the method which, it may be inferred, he and his collaborators followed also in drawing up the 1560 Geneva Bible. He acknowledged that his translation is a revision [he does not add, however, of Tyndale's translation], which was made on the basis of the Greek text and a "conference of translations in other tonges as the learned may easely iudge."⁹

There were changes in the 1560 edition, but the Whittingham revision of Tyndale remained the basis of the Geneva Bible; ". . . the changes introduced in 1560 were not in any way startling, yet they were considerable."¹⁰

The year before the entire Bible was published a separate translation of the

Psalter was printed. This version presumably is the same as that which appeared in the Geneva Bible of 1560. The Psalter as well as all the remainder of the Old Testament in the 1560 edition is a revision of the Great Bible (1539). The translations of Pagninus, Leo Juda, and Sebastian Münster, and the revision of Pierre Olive-tan's French version, made in Geneva in 1555 under the direct supervision and with the help of John Calvin in Geneva, were utilized.¹¹ The Apocrypha, incidentally, were included in the Geneva Bible.

The printer under whose supervision and auspices the Geneva Bible appeared was Rowland Hall. The cost of publishing the work seems to have been borne chiefly by John Bodley—the same individual to whom Queen Elizabeth issued the sole license to print the Bible for seven years on Jan. 8, 1561, although other English Puritans in Geneva also contributed.

The title page of the Geneva Bible reads: *The Bible / and Holy Scriptures / conteyned in / the Olde and Newe Testament. / Translated accord- / ding to the Ebrue and Greke, and conferred With / the best translations in diuers languages. / With moste profitable annota- / tions vpon al the hard places, and other things of great / importance as may appeare in the Epistle to the Reader. / At Geneva. / Printed by Rouland Hall. / M. D. LX.*

The first edition of this Bible, dedicated to Queen Elizabeth I, was illustrated with 26 "figures" in the text, to elucidate, as the Preface states, "certeyne places in the bookes of Moses, of the Kings and Ezekiel." These "seemed so darke that by no descrip-

¹¹ Butterworth, pp. 165, 166; Pope, p. 230; Westcott, pp. 212, 213.

⁹ "Preface to the Geneva New Testament," Pollard, p. 276, no. XLVI.

¹⁰ Butterworth, p. 169; see p. 170 for an illustration from 1 Cor. 13:9-12. Appendix I, pp. 245—253 has 10 passages ("Selected Literary Passages Arranged for Comparative Study") which are reproduced in nine readings from Wycliffe to King James.

Westcott, pp. 223—225.

tion thei colde be made easie to the simple reader." The translation added figures and notes as explanations to visualize the text, so that "by the perspecutiue, and as it were by the eye [the reader] may sufficiently knowe the true meaning of all suche places." Five maps are in this Bible, or as the preface calls them, "mappes of Cosmographie which necessarily serue for the perfect vnderstanding and memorie of diuers places and countreys, partely described, and partely by the occasion touched, bothe in the olde and new Testament."¹² The maps illustrate the wanderings of the Israelites, the division of Canaan, Jerusalem and the second temple, Palestine in the time of Christ, and the journeys of the apostles. On the title page is a small woodcut of the passage through the Red Sea by the Israelites. Around the woodcut are the texts: "Feare ye not, stand stil, and beholde the saluation of the Lord

which he wil shewe to you this day. The Lord shall fight for you: therefore holde you your peace" (Ex. 14:13, 14); and, "Great are the troubles of the righteous: But the Lord deliuereth them out of all" (Psalm 34:19).¹³ Two tables are found in the book, a glossary of Hebrew names and, in effect, a concordance. These two tables, the reader is informed, have been added, "that nothing might lacke which might be noight by labors, for the increase of Gods glorie."¹⁴

To illustrate the style of the Geneva Bible translation two passages are given below. The first line (labeled 1560) is the Geneva Bible translation, the second is Tyndale-Coverdale translation (labeled 1534),¹⁵ the third is the King James Version (labeled 1611), and the fourth is the Revised Standard Version (labeled 1946 or 1952). Ps. 46:1-3:

- 1560 God is our hope and strength, and helpe in troubles, ready to be found.
 1534 God is our hope and strength: a very present help in trouble
 1611 God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble
 1952 God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble
- 1560 Therefore will not we feare, though the earth be moued,
 1534 Therefore we will not fear, though the earth be moved:
 1611 Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed,
 1952 Therefore we will not fear though the earth should change
- 1560 and though the mountaines fall into the midst of the sea.
 1534 and though the hills be carried into the midst of the sea.

¹² "Preface to the Geneva Bible," Pollard, ed., pp. 282, 283, no. XLVII.

¹³ From the copy in the British Museum, London. See Dalow and Moule, p. 61, no. 77.

¹⁴ "Preface to the Geneva Bible," Pollard, ed., p. 283, no. XLVII.

¹⁵ The translation is cited from the 1607 edition, printed in London by Robert Bakker,

of which a copy is in the Concordia Seminary library.

Tyndale's New Testament version is cited from the reprint edited by N. Hardy Wallis, *The New Testament Translated by William Tyndale 1534* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1938); and the Old Testament section from *The Psalms of David, Coverdale's Version*, edited by George Raylands (London: Faber J. Gwyer, 1926).

- 1611 and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea;
 1952 though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea;
 1560 Though the waters thereof rage and be troubled: and the mountains shake
 at the surges of the same.
 1554 Though the waters thereof rage and swell: and the mountains shake at the
 tempest of the same.
 1611 though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake
 with the swelling thereof.
 1952 though the waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble with its
 tumult.

The second example comes from the New Testament (Gal. 2:16).

- 1560 Knowe that a man is not iustified by the workes of the Lawe,
 1534 Knowe that a man is not iustified by the dedes of the lowe:
 1611 Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law,
 1946 who know that a man is not justified by works of the law
 1560 but by the faith of Jesus Christ: euen wee I say, haue
 1534 but by the fayth of Iesus Christ. And therefore we have
 1611 but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have
 1946 but through faith in Jesus Christ, even we have
 1560 beleueed in Jesus Christ, that wee might be iustified
 1534 beleved on Iesus Christ, that we myght be iustified
 1611 believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified
 1946 believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified
 1560 by the faith of Christ, and not by the workes of the Lawe,
 1534 by the fayth of Christ, and not by the dedes of the lawe:
 1611 by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law:
 1946 by faith in Christ, and not by works of the law,
 1560 because that by the workes of the Law, no flesh shall be justified.
 1534 because that by the dedes of the lawe, no flesshe shalbe justified.
 1611 for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.
 1946 because by the works of the law shall no one be justified.

The "argument," as it is called by the translators, prefacing, e.g., the Epistle to the Romans, reflects their Calvinistic theology. It is intended to provide a very succinct summary of the letter.

The great mercie of God is declared toward man in Christ Iesus, whose righteousness is made ours through faith. For when man by reason of his owne corruption could not fulfill the law, yea, continued most abhorm-

inably, both against the law of God, and nature the infinite bountie of God, mindful of his promise made to his seruante Abraham, the father of all beleeuers, ordained that mans saluation should onely stand in the perfit obedience of his Sonne Iesus Christ: so that not only the circumcised Iewes, but also the vncircumcised Gentiles should be saved by faith in him: euen as Abraham before he was circumcised, was counted iust onely through faith, and yet afterward receiued circumcision as a seale or badge of the same righteousness by faith. And to the intent that none should thinke that the couenant which God made to him and his posteritie, was not performed: either because the Iewes receiued not Christ (which was the blessed seed) or else beleeued not he was the true redeemer, because he did not onely, or at least more notably preserue the Iewes: the examples of Ismael and Esau declare that all are not Abraham's posteritie, which come of Abraham according to the flesh: but also the very strangers and Gentiles grafted in by faith, are made heires of the promise. The cause whereof is the only will of God: forasmuch as of his free mercy he electeth some to bee saued, and of his iust iudgement he reiecteth others to be damned, as appeareth by the testimonies of the Scriptures. Yet to the intent that the Iewes should not bee too much beaten downe, nor the Gentiles too much puffed vp, the example of Elias proueth, that God hath yet his elect euen of the naturall posteritie of Abraham, though it appeareth not so to mans eye: and for that preferment that the Gentiles haue, it proceedeth of the liberall mercy of God, which hee at length will stretch toward the Iewes againe, and so gather the whole Israel (which is his Church) of them both. This groundworke of faith & doctrine laied, instructions of Christian maners folow:

teaching euery man to walke in roundnesse of conscience in his vocation, with all patience and humblenesse, reuerencing and obeying the Magistrate, exercising charities, putting off the old man, and putting on Christ, bearing the weake, and louing one another according to Christs example. Finally, Saint Paul after his commendations to the brethren, exhorteth them to vnitie, and to flee false preachers and flatterers, and so concludeth with a prayer.

Various noteworthy features of this introduction must be passed over. The anti-Roman sentiments of Whittingham are present only by inference. In other passages, however, he (and his collaborators with him) demonstrate their strong animosity to the Roman Church. The annotations of the Book of Revelation have frequent references to the Antichrist, by whom the Roman Bishop is meant. By way of illustration one example is cited. On Rev. 9:6 they give the exegesis that "the Popes clergie shall be proud, ambitious, bolde stout, rash, rebellious, stubborn, cruell, lecherous, and authors of warre and destruction of the simple children of God."

The Geneva Bible, because of such annotations, for one thing, would draw the fire of the Romanists. In 1582 Gregory Martin of the English College at Rheims wrote a *Discoverie of the Manifold Corruptions of the Holy Scriptures by the Heretikes of our daies, specially the English Sectaries, and of their foule dealing herein, by partial & false translations to the aduantage of their heresies, in their English Bible used and authorised since the time of Schisme.*

Martin's attack was answered by Wil-

liam Fulke in his *A Defense of the sincere and true Translations of the holie Scriptures into the English tong, against the manifolde cauils, friulous quarels, and impudent slaunders of Gregrie Martin, etc.*¹⁶

In his *Defense* Fulke answered the accusation of Martin that the Geneva Bible mistranslates by denying that the Geneva Bible translates Beza "whom they profess to translate." He maintained that the Geneva Bible follows the Greek and Hebrew texts and not the Latin translation by Beza.¹⁷ Martin nicknamed Beza "the mouse of Geneva," because Beza had suggested emendations to three passages in the New Testament. This, according to Martin, showed that Beza "nibbleth and gnaweth about" the original text.¹⁸

Martin claimed that the Geneva Bible translated many passages falsely in order to support the Protestant teachings. So, for instance, he said that δικαιώματα in Luke 1:16 should be translated "justifications" instead of "ordinances" as the Geneva Bible has it. The annotation of the Geneva Bible at this point reads: "The Greeke word δικαιώματα signifieth iustifications, whereby is meant the outward obseruation of the

ceremonies commanded by God."¹⁹ The translation of τοῦ θανάτου (θάνατος) in Acts 2:24 is a point of controversy. Here the Geneva Bible has "grave," although Wycliffe, Tyndale, and Cranmer (the Great Bible) have "hell."²⁰ But Beza is the target whom Martin would reach. He called him "their [the English Calvinists'] chief translator, and a captain among them, whom they profess to follow in the title of the New Testament, anno 1580, and by the very name of their Geneva Bibles. . . ."

To this Fulke answered:

That we profess to follow Beza by the very name of our Geneva Bibles, it is a very ridiculous argument: for our Bibles are so commonly called, because they were translated and first printed at Geneva, not by Beza (who at that time had scarce finished his translation of the New Testament, and never dealt with translating of the old, so far as we know) but by certain godly and learned Englishmen, which lived there in queen Mary's time, to enjoy the liberty of a good conscience, which they could not have in their own country.²¹

Learned they were, and their translation reflects their scholarship. The translation of Gen. 3:7 with "breeches" ("and the Lord made them breeches," KJV: "aprons") has given the Geneva Bible a nickname which connotes unfortunate renditions. The Geneva Bible, however, as Butterworth and others point out, is a scholarly translation and is important in the lineage of the King James Bible.

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¹⁹ Fulke, pp. 118, 119.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 128.

²¹ Ibid., p. 154.

¹⁶ Martin's work was published by John Fogy of Rheims.

Fulke's work appeared in 1583; it was printed in London by Henry Byneman for George Bishop.

In 1843 the Cambridge University Press printed a modern edition of the text for the Parker Society, edited by Charles Henry Hartshorne. This Parker Society edition is cited below.

¹⁷ Fulke, pp. 117, 118.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 41. These emendations were suggested in Beza's *Annotations on the New Testament* of 1556.