

BIBLE TRANSLATIONS THAT CONDITIONED MEN'S THINKING

Men's minds have often been bound by strange thinking. Some longstanding erroneous concepts can be traced back to early centuries. The Middle Ages did little to improve the situation. Impressions men start with are often hard to shake off. For these reasons it should not be amiss to look into some interesting points that relate to the impact of Calvinism.

A Carry-Over from the Vulgate

For a thousand years or more the official version of the Bible, and the only one authorized by the Roman Catholic Church, was the Latin Vulgate. Since the Reformation, Protestants generally have deplored misconceptions based upon it, apparently little conscious that they themselves have imbibed erroneous ideas from the same source. These include views relating to predestination, free will and the like that were imbedded in the Vulgate.

Look first at some of the evaluations scholars have made of the Vulgate. Philip Schaff says, "The Vulgate can be charged, indeed, with innumerable faults, inaccuracies, inconsistencies, and arbitrary dealing in particulars." Then this eminent writer speaks of "This high place the Vulgate holds even to this day in the Roman Church, where it is unwarrantably and perniciously placed on an equality with the original" (*History Of The Christian Church*, Vol. II, pp. 975, 976)>

Citations from similar scholars could be multiplied, but let us note what one of the leading Catholic Authorities himself say on the subject. F. E. Gigot's treatise is a recognized source by Catholics and Protestants alike. He declares, "We might also point out a certain number of passages in which the translation assumes a dogmatic or moral bearing which seems to be outside that of the original . . . These are indeed serious defects in our translation of Holy Writ . . ." (*General Introduction To The Study Of The Holy Scriptures*, pp. 324, 325).

Well-known examples of far-reaching errors include the whole system of Catholic "penance," drawn from the Vulgate's "do penance" (and their English translation following that), when the Latin should, of course, have followed the Greek—repent. Likewise the word "sacrament" was a mis-rendering from the Vulgate of the original work for mystery. Even more significant, perhaps, was the rendering of the word presbyter (elder) as "priest."

In the light of this and more, we should not be surprised to find the prestigious *Cambridge History Of The Bible* quoting Samuel Berger, who said of the Vulgate, ". . . it became the most vulgarized and bastardized text imaginable" (Vol. III, p. 414).

How strange, therefore, that men could easily stumble into following peculiar renderings of the Vulgate—and then insist that those renderings are right! Protestants have long been quick to upbraid Roman Catholics for basing so much of their system upon what was drawn from the Vulgate. Yet certain blunders many Protestants have fallen into are traceable to errors springing from that

same Vulgate, which misconceptions members of the "Reformed faith" seem reluctant to acknowledge or turn from.

It might be of less concern if it were not for the far-reaching influence of that unreliable version. The aforementioned Philip Schaff says, ". . . it became the clerical Bible of Western Christendom" (op. Cit., p. 974). Somewhat similarly, Dr. Schaff's son, in an incisive work, says, "For one thousand years the Vulgate was practically the only Bible known and read in Western Europe. All commentaries were based upon the Vulgate text. . . .preachers based their sermons on it" (Schaff, David S., *Our Fathers Faith And Ours*, p. 172).

Then Ira M. Price says of the Vulgate, "It was early carried to England and was the basis of the Christianity that took such deep root in that rich soil" (*The Ancestry Of Our English Bible*, p. 174).

In Smith's *Dictionary Of The Bible* we read, "The vast power which the Vulgate has had in determining the theological terms of Western Christendom can hardly be overrated" (1902 edition, p. 987).

Wide recognition is given to the fact that that influence was often in the wrong direction. A. T. Robertson even reports that a certain scholar, Henslow, "has a striking book on The Vulgate the Source of False Doctrines. It is difficult to estimate the influence of the Vulgate on all modern version. . ." (*An Introduction To The Textual Criticism Of The New Testament*, p. 128).

This leads us to see how some of the ideas in the Western world, now identified as Calvinistic, came to us via this highly questionable Vulgate version. In his *General Biblical Introduction*, H. S. Miller points out, "England is indebted to the Latin Bible for her Christianity, and this Christianity spread to America and other countries. . . . Many of our modern doctrinal and theological terms came from the Vulgate, such as . . . predestination. . ." (pp. 246, 247).

Apparently many authorities of years ago who dealt with the Bible text uncritically followed the current Latin, transposing certain terms into English usage. As an example, one source commenting on Acts 13:48, says, "Vulgate has *praeordinati*, unfairly; Augustine *destinati*, a much too strong word" (Page, T. E., *The Acts Of The Apostles, Greek Text With Explanatory Notes*, p. 169). It will be noted that the italicized words are *preordain* and *destine*, respectively.

The latter part of that test in Acts reads in the Authorized Version, "as many as were ordained to eternal life believed." Offhand, that phrase has frequently been seized upon to "prove" election. It should be noted at the outset that the word "ordained" here is not from the

original word that is usually translated that way. The common rendering of this text is an illustration of what certain careful students handle more judiciously.

Dean Henry Alford, one of the most widely recognized students of the original Greek, renders it, “as many as were disposed to eternal life,” and then adds, “by whom so disposed is not here declared” (*New Testament For English Readers*, Acts, p. 745).

Then Dean Alford, evidently not agreeing with the Latin Vulgate, writes, “The Vulgate translates the word ‘pre-ordained;’ and Augustine, ‘destined’ . . . Dr. Wordsworth well observes that it would be interesting to inquire what influence such rendering as this of ‘pre-ordained’ in the Vulgate version had on the minds of men like St. Augustine and his followers in the Western Church” (Loc. Cit.).

This points to our whole “Western Church” (the church outside of the eastern Greek Orthodox church) apparently having been influenced to an incalculable extent by unwarranted renderings coming down to us from the Latin Vulgate. That version was followed by St. Augustine, and “Augustinian theology” deeply affected by it. It would, indeed, be interesting to ponder how different theology through the centuries might have been, had not “such renderings” referred to by Alford (following Wordsworth) been in vogue and left their stamp upon us.

And how could our great church leaders have been so inconsistent as to have rejected the Vulgate’s blunders in areas affecting controversy with Rome and yet not have seen such evident errors as that called to attention by Dean Alford and Bishop Wordsworth?

Wordsworth, himself a gifted linguist, authority on the Vulgate, and commentator on the text of the new Testament, early saw this. Since Dean Alford calls attention to what Wordsworth “well observes” upon the matter, it may be appropriate to quote directly from Wordsworth’s *New Testament In The Original Greek, With Introductions And Notes*. We find: “It would be interesting to inquire, what influence these renderings in the Vulgate version had on the minds of some, like St. Augustine and his followers in the Western Church, in treating the great questions of Freewill, Election, Reprobation and Final Perseverance?”

“What, also, was the result of that influence on the minds of some writers of the Reformed Churches who rejected the authority of Rome, which almost canonized that Version, and yet in these two important texts (Acts 2:47; 13:48) were swayed away by it from the sense of the original?”

“The tendency of the Eastern (Greek) Fathers who read the original Greek was in a different direction from that of the Western school; and Calvinism can receive no support from these two texts as they stand in the original words of inspiration, and as they were expounded by the primitive church” (*The Acts Of The Apostles*, p. 108).

Dr. Wordsworth goes on to refer to how “God willeth all men to be saved, and that He willeth man’s will to be free to choose life or death,” etc. (ibid).

The writer on Acts in *Cooks’ Commentary* likewise recognizes errors of the Latin version and what has come down to us from it. On Acts 2:47 he says, “A. V. [Authorized Version] was unhappy in following Vulgate here.” And on “were ordained” in Acts 13:48 we read, “A. V. has followed the Vulgate. Rather, were set in order for, i.e. disposed for eternal life, as in Syriac; or, the passive of this verb being used as equivalent to the middle, e.g. XX:13, and repeatedly by Josephus, as many as had marshaled themselves, placed themselves in the ranks of those who welcomed the offer of eternal life” (Loc. Cit.).

Such consideration should make us more cautious and ready to reappraise some of our thinking along these lines.

INFLUENCES Emanating from Geneva

But not alone did the blunders of the Latin Vulgate and the bias of men like Augustine mold the thinking of the religious world. Another instrument came into being having a profound effect upon the religious outlook. This was an early English Bible that turned out to be the most popular for any for many years. How it came about and how its view-point was slanted Calvinistically is an interesting story. And becoming so widely used, even after others appeared, accounts for the influence it exerted.

We refer to what has been known as the “Geneva Bible.” The circumstances under which it was translated readily account for the prejudicial shadows cast by it.

For the background and some of the relevant facts we may turn first to H. S. Miller’s *General Biblical Introduction*. We read, “The Geneva Bible was one of the results of the persecution under “Bloody Mary,” Several of the reformers had fled to Geneva, Switzerland, the home of Beza, the Biblical scholar, and of Calvin, the theologian. Geneva was dominated by Calvinism, the ‘cradle of the Reformed Faith’ . . . John Knox [then in Geneva], and others desired a translation. . . . The New Testament appeared in 1557, and was probably the product of one man, William Whittingham, an Englishman of great learning, and related to Calvin by marriage [married Calvin’s sister]. It was a revision of Tyndale’s, with an Introduction by Calvin. . . . The version of the entire Bible appeared in 1560, the work of English exiled reformers, assisted by Beza, Calvin, and possibly others” (Ninth edition, pp. 352, 353).

Several writers on the history of the English Bible are even more marked in what they say. J.R. Dore says, “Geneva was so permeated with Calvin’s influence, it was almost impossible for the translators of this version to have resided there without being drawn away from the doctrine and practices of the church of their baptism, consequently we find that almost every chapter has voluminous notes full of Calvinistic doctrine” (*Old Bibles: An Account Of The Early Versions Of The English Bible*, 2nd edition, pp. 205, 206).

Andrew Edgar reports, “At the time the Geneva Bible was first published, Calvin was the ruling spirit in

Geneva. All the features of his theological, ecclesiastical, political, and social system are accordingly reflected in the marginal annotations of the English Bible that issued from the city of his residence. The doctrine of predestination is proclaimed to be the head cornerstone of the gospel” (*The Bibles Of England*, p. 185).

In Thomas H. Horne’s *An Introduction To The Critical Study And Knowledge Of The Holy Scriptures*, we read, “In 1560, the whole Bible was printed at Geneva. . .some of the refugees from England continuing in that city for this purpose. The translators were. . .all zealous Calvinists both in doctrine and discipline” (4th American Edition, Vol. II. P. 244).

Equally authoritative are the words of Philip Schaff, who says, “King James’s Version” had a powerful rival in the Geneva Bible, which was never authorized, but had taken strong hold on the affections of the people because it was made by the English exiles in times of fierce persecution, and under the eyes of the great Reformers, Calvin and Beza, and was accompanied with convenient explanatory notes. It continued to be reprinted. . .and many copies were brought to America by the early immigrants. It passed, in all, through about one hundred and sixty editions, and then it finally disappeared, the people, according to Fuller, complained that ‘they could not see into the sense of the Scripture for lack of the spectacles of those Geneva annotators.’” Then in a footnote Schaff points out, “In 1649 the Authorized Version was printed in quarto, with the Genevan notes, as if to promote the circulation” (*A Companion To The Greek Testament And The English Version*, Fourth edition revised, pp. 328, 329).

In a work with a similar title, *Companion To The Revised Version Of The English New Testament*, in a section by “A member of the American Committee, “ we read, “The University of Cambridge, in thanking Beza. . .acknowledges its preference for him and John Calvin above any man that ever lived. . . . A number of errors, as well as excellencies, can be traced to Beza, and some have found an injurious effect of his strong predestinarianism in the rendering of a few passages” (p. 158).

And H. W. Hoare says, “Launched into publicity upon a flood-tide of Protestant elation, it at once arrested attention and secured respect by the prestige of its parent city, by the renown of its sponsors, Calvin, Beza, and Knox. . . . Considered as a literary whole it has about it the character of a Calvinist manifesto. . . .The contrast of ‘elect’ and ‘reprobate,’ which is met with throughout. . . .show that this publication is a book with a special purpose, a book undertaken at the insistence of a Calvinist congregation, by Calvinist scholars, for Calvinist readers” (*The Evolution Of The English Bible*, pp. 222, 223).

All this and more is set forth pointedly in a British work published for a Baptist Historical Society. It is titled “*Calvinism And Evangelism In England, Especially Among Baptist*,” and is by W. T. Whitley. What is set forth is so interesting that we quote at length: “The Genevan Bible. Meantime the influence of Calvin

had come to the layman by quite another route. Other exiles from Queen Mary had gathered at Geneva, and in 1560 they put out a family Bible with many doctrinal and practical notes. It becomes so popular that 140 editions appeared before 1644, and it was the Authorized Version of Scotland. Successive editors doubtless varied details, but substantially the teaching was Genevan, and this was thus indoctrinated in every religious household. The index had the following entries: --“God’s purpose is by election. Election of grace. . . . The elect are few in number. Elected before the foundation of the world. . . . Predestination. As the only will and purpose of God is the chief cause of election and reprobation, so his free mercy in Christ is an inferior cause of salvation, and the hardening of the heart is an inferior cause of damnation. . . . None can believe, but they whom God doth appoint before all beginnings to be saved.’ Many other comments of this type were made; but no comment was made on ‘Go therefore, teach all nations. Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. Whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have eternal life, for God so loved the world, &c.’ In extenuation of this one-sidedness, it may be recalled that the Genevan mission to Brazil undertaken in 1556 was extinct within three years, so that actual preaching to the world was not really present to Genevan minds; and that English settlement overseas did not begin till 1599. Under these circumstances the actual doctrines of Calvin were steadily presented throughout England and Scotland; and in a short time they came to be regarded as perfectly standard. They were intensified by Beza, and the Genevan Version was revised accordingly. They were taught at the universities, they were preached in every pulpit, they were read in every home” (pp. 3, 4, 5).

The last sentence may help us understand why the Calvinistic slant got such a hold on the English speaking world and became entrenched all the way from universities down to the homes. Once implanted and inscribed in works extending from commentaries to textbooks, it seems that no one thought to question the point from which it started.

Some widely recognized authorities acknowledge this far-flung influence. F. F. Bruce says, “The notes of the Geneva Bible. . .are , to be sure, unashamedly Calvinistic in doctrine, and therefore offensive to readers who find Calvinism offensive; but for half a century the people of England and Scotland, who read the Geneva bible in preference to any other version, learned much of their biblical exegesis from these notes. One may surmise that the Geneva Bible, translation and notes together, played no little part in making British Puritanism the strongly vertebrate movement that it was. . . . The Geneva Bible immediately won, and retained, widespread popularity. It became the household Bible of English-speaking Protestants” (*The English Bible, A History Of Translations*, pp. 90, 91). Notice that Bruce includes “translation” as well as notes. Others do similarly.

H. S. Miller says on some of this, “The Geneva

Version, being so much better than the Great bible, and backed by the names of the great reformers, Knox, Calvin, Beza, and others, became very popular in England.... It was issued as late as 1644, and ran through more than 160 editions. . . . The Bishop's Bible [coming later, and authorized by the Church] could not displace the Geneva Bible" (op. Cit., pp. 353, 354).

Questionable Concepts Carried Over in the King James Version

It will be noted by the dates given that the influence of the Geneva Bible continued for a considerable time even after publication of the King James Version in 1611. And even that noble version could not divest itself of concepts drawn from the Geneva Bible. One writer says, "In the lineage of the King James Bible this volume is by all means the most important single volume. . . . The Geneva Bible. . . had a very great influence in the shaping of the King James Bible" (C. C. Butterworth, *The Literary Lineage Of The King James Bible*, pp. 163, 165).

And W. F. Moulton is on record saying, "Though the Bishops' Bible nominally furnished the basis for the new translation, it is clear that the Geneva exercised a much more powerful influence" (*The History Of The English Bible*, p. 201).

H. Wheeler Robinson goes even further. Speaking of the Geneva Bible, he says, "A large part of its innovations are included in the Authorized Version." And again, of the King James Bible, "Sometimes the Geneva text and the Geneva margin are taken over intact, sometimes the text becomes the margin and the margin the text. Sometimes the margin becomes the text and no alternative is offered. Very often the Genevan margin becomes the Authorized Version text with or without verbal change" (*The Bible In Its Ancient And English Version*, pp. 186, 206, 207). All this shows the impact which the Geneva Bible had upon the King James translation.

Some, commenting on this, couple with it the Rheims New Testament (produced by Roman Catholics for their English followers, and based upon the Latin Vulgate, which we saw is unreliable), this also having an influence upon the King James Version.

The *Cambridge History Of The Bible* says, "If...they [the King James translators] rarely went back to pre-Elizabethan translations, they did make extensive use of Geneva and Rheims" (Vol. III, p. 167)

Sir Frederic Kenyon points out, "The earlier versions of which the revisers of 1611 made most use were those of Rheims and Geneva. . . . Many improvements in interpretation were taken from the Geneva Bible, and not a few phrases and single words from that of Rheims" (*Our Bible And The Ancient Manuscripts*, p. 233). And Bishop Westcott is on record saying, "It is most worthy of notice that the Genevan and Rhemish versions. . . contributed most largely of all to the changes which the revisers produced" (Quoted in Pope, Hugh, *English Versions Of The Bible*, p. 316).

Not all would state the case as strongly as Alexander

Geddes, quoted by Hugh Pope, "The truth is that James' translators did little more than copy the Genevan version" (Pope, *ibid.*, p. 316).

At any rate, as already indicated, in leaning upon the Geneva version, the newer translation reflected a large measure of the strong Calvinistic tone of its predecessor. The long standard Smith's *Bible Dictionary* reports of the 1611 effort, "Dogmatic interests were in some cases allowed to bias the translation, and the Calvinism of one party, the prelatric views of another, were both represented at the expense of accuracy" (Vol. IV, p. 3436).

Thus the influence of this Calvinistic Geneva Bible was far-reaching. A writer of today acknowledges this. J. McKee Adams, in *Our Bible*, says, "The Geneva Bible quickly won its way into the hearts of the people of England and Scotland. It was closely associated with the Puritan movement in England and thus widened its influence" (p. 92). And the commentator Arthur s. Peake says of the Geneva version, "The Puritans naturally preferred a bible with so Calvinistic a flavour" (*The Bible, Its Origin, Its Significance And Its Abiding Worth*, p. 54).

Starting then with the Vulgate and its questionable influence, and in later times given great impetus by the dubious Geneva version of the English Bible, it is easy to see how certain one-sided concepts have been so broadly accepted.

Be it noted that it is merely in the area of the subject before us that we take exception to the elements indicated in the long useful King James Version. While not entirely perfect in every other respect, this version is yet, by and large, a most valuable translation. We appreciate its good qualities, use it constantly, and still grant it priority, for example, in congregational use. But this must not blind our eyes to slanted effects coming down from it. In our next chapter we consider one of the most glaring examples of this.

Since the following chapter presents extensive evidence regarding the true (but long misconstrued) meaning of election, one may wonder how it occurred that some far-reaching distortions of it were so widespread and so long entrenched. The ground just covered largely answers that question, showing how men's minds were sidetracked. We should now be ready to allow for a freeing of minds from these misconceptions.

Note on Acts 13:48

Alford's and Wordsworth's misgivings in respect to Acts 13:48 have been objected to on the basis of Luke's use of the original Greek word here (tasso), pointing out that he uses it 3 other times in Acts, twice as "appoint" (or appointed) and once as "determined" (Acts 15:2; 22:10; 28:23). Note, however, that in Acts 15:2 ("determined") and Acts 28:23 ("appointed") it is used of man's doings, not God's. The last reference relates to the Jews in Rome in respect to Paul, "they had appointed him a day." In his Greek lexicon Thayer renders this "to appoint mutually, i.e. agree upon." Furthermore, Thayer's lexicon also points out that Luke himself uses the word in Luke 7:8 "to

put one under another's control," said of the centurian under human authority(A.V. "set under"). Paul also uses the word in this way. First Corinthians 16:15, ". . .the house of Stephanus. . .they have addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints," "Addicted" is another rendering of this word (tasso). The New Scofield Bible substitutes "devoted." But observe that it is "addicted themselves." They did it; it was man's doing , not God's. If "ordain" were the meaning, they would be ordaining themselves!

On this text in Acts 13, the well-known author, Dr. F. N. Peloubet, presents the following: "ORDAINED, tetagmenoi, arranged, assigned a place, either by God, but even then not necessarily by an arbitrary act, but expressing the Divine side of our life plan; or by ourselves. They placed, or disposed themselves." Then Dr. Peloubet quotes from Cook's Commentary the analysis we quoted earlier with which he evidently is in accord (*Suggestive Illustrations On The Acts Of The Apostles*, p. 291).

Rather interestingly, the writer on Acts in Ellicott's Commentary presents very much the same as these we have cited. We read on Acts 13:48, "The words seem to the English reader to support the Calvinistic dogma of divine decrees as determining the belief or unbelief of men, and it is not improbable, looking to the general drift of the theology of the English Church in the early part of the seventeenth century, that the word 'ordained' was chosen as expressing that dogma. . . . The Greek word, however, does not imply more than that they fell in with the divine order which the Jews rejected" (loc. cit.).

Samual Fisk, (from his book "Calvinistic Paths Retraced"
Pages 67-76