

## ***Richard Bancroft and the Decision to Translate (one)***

1. It is very difficult for us to get our heads around it but it was understood by ALL that God (two) decided who the king would be, who the ruling classes would be, and who was born in what place in society. To question this or, even worse, to go against what your betters told you, was a threat to the very fabric of society and faith. Puritanism was one of those threats.
2. Puritans (three) were those who wanted a thorough housecleaning of the newly formed Church of England. They were not satisfied with replacing Rome with English rulers, prelates, bishops, and priests. They wanted more: they wanted a return to the pure, Christian faith. The established church and the government and nobles were all threatened by this.
3. One of the fiercest opponents of the Puritans was a bishop named Richard Bancroft. (four) He preached at St. Paul's Cathedral in London and made that his platform from which to declare the Puritans as false teachers who threatened to destroy the fabric of church and nation. He taught that God ordained the king and bishops to rule the church and that was the end of the matter. He led secular authorities in the hunt for Puritans, placing many of them in prison (John Bunyan would spend 12yrs in prison for non-conformism 60 years later).
4. When Bancroft learned that James VI of Scotland would succeed Elizabeth as monarch of Britain, he was alarmed. (five) James was king over a country where Presbyterianism was the norm and bishops were not so powerful. However, he also knew that James had a very high view of kingship which he had revealed in a book written to instruct his son on what it meant to be king. That book had been published in England within days of the death of Queen Elizabeth and Bancroft decided to use it as his way into the inner circle of James' advisors and, thus, to protect the Episcopal Church.
5. Bancroft was going to try to persuade King James that the monarchy could only be maintained with the help of the bishops. The bishops were the only thing standing between the king and the complete breakdown of the social order, the rise of republicanism, and riots. He wrote extensively to James, flattering him as a ruler just like Constantine, the first Christian Roman

Emperor. The king's real enemies, he said, were Papists and Puritans, each having a vested interest in destroying his power and authority.

6. He led bishops in preaching sermons that should make our heads spin. One preached from Numbers 10:2-3 (**six**) "Make thee two trumpets of silver...and thou shalt have them to assemble the congregation." He said the clear meaning of this passage was that the church and state were the two trumpets and only the king could have authority over them. Another preached from Song of Solomon 8:11 – (**seven**) "Solomon had a vineyard in Ball-Hamon. He gave the vineyard unto keepers." The clear meaning of this, the bishop said, was that the vineyard was the church and the ones to whom it was entrusted were the bishops and king.
7. Bancroft went to work on James to get him to back off of his early agreement with the Puritans to end "inappropriate tithes: and he did. Still, James wanted a conference where the bishops and the puritans could come together and work out their differences. This would be known as the Hampton Court Conference (**eight**) and it would have a lot to do with the decision to create a new, national translation of the scriptures. But it was also a terrible tactical decision...
8. It caused the bishops to be alarmed that he was treating the puritans as equals with them, the established order, ordained by God. And it raised the hopes of the Puritans, making them think they were finally going to get somewhere. Frustrating both sides led to long lasting divisions and, eventually, the English Civil War...but that comes after our story here.
9. By the time the conference took place – January 12, 1604 – it had been weighted heavily in favor of the bishops. Nineteen representatives of the government were there and only 4 puritans were allowed to attend...and those four had been hand picked by the bishops and king, not by the Puritans themselves.
10. King James began the conference with an hour long speech in which he asserted his right – and his alone – to make policy in matters of religion. However, he also admitted that any organization could become corrupt

over time and that all policies should be examined. Still, the divine right of the king over all matters secular and religious was not to be questioned.

- 11.** I will not go into the discussions at the conference for they won't be of interest to most of us and they deal more with wording in the Book of Common Prayer than most other issues. But they also demanded the use of the Geneva Bible in the churches and that caused James to kneejerk against them. The Geneva Bible, published by Calvinist Protestants in Geneva (primarily English scholars who'd been driven out of England by Queen Mary's persecution), was a mainstay of Scottish Presbyterians and they had been hard on James. He rejected the Geneva Bible as the "worst of all" English translations.
- 12.** It looked like the conference would end with no wins for the Puritans at all and that would cause James a problem with civil unrest. Wanting to give them something, he agreed to one of the Puritan's request for a new Bible translation – one that would be authorized, the only one allowed to be used by all churches so that all could agree.
- 13.** Politically, the Geneva Bible (**nine**) had to be rejected. Another version of the Bible had been partially completed, the Douai-Rheims Version, created by Roman Catholic scholars driven from England by the persecution of Catholics undertaken by Queen Elizabeth. Still, it was made by Catholics and only had the NT completed (the OT would be completed two years later) so it was rejected. Besides, the Douai-Rheims Version had been translated from the Latin Vulgate, not the original Greek. That was the only way the Catholic Church would allow it to be published as their official doctrine was that the Vulgate WAS the Bible.
- 14.** James ordered (**ten**) that the best learned from both universities (England only had two at this time – Oxford and Cambridge) be brought together to work on a new translation. "A translation be made of the whole Bible, as consonant as can be to the original Hebrew and Greek; and this to be set out and printed, without marginal notes, and only to be used in all churches of England in time of divine service."

- 15.** The “no marginal notes” clause was to avoid the fights caused by the notes in the Geneva Bible. The bishops were called to work six months later.
- 16.** Remember how volatile matters were at the time. After Mary and Elizabeth, people were ready for war to break out at any time – civil or via invasion from a Catholic country. When James announced the marriage of his heir and son, Charles, to the child of the Spanish king and queen, pulpits exploded in anger. She, as the daughter of Catholics, was called Jezebel. Sermons were preached against the sin of Israelites marrying foreigners. Catholic Englishmen were often hunted down and beaten, fined, or worse. Eight of them, at least, conspired to blow up the House of Lords in the Gunpowder Plot. All eight were caught and executed in January 1606. Another Englishman, a Jesuit, was executed in front of St. Paul’s Cathedral in March on the grounds that he knew of the plot. (hung, drawn, quartered)
- 17.** While all of this was going on, scholars were gathered – for no pay, at least from the government: some got a bit from private sources. Bancroft was in charge of the group and he set out some rules.
  - a.** (eleven) The ordinary Bible read in the Church, commonly called the Bishop’s Bible, to be followed and as little altered as the Truth of the original will permit.
  - b.** The names of the Prophets, and the Holy Writers, with the other Names of the Text, to be retained, as nigh as may be, accordingly as they were vulgarly used.
  - c.** The Old Ecclesiastical Words to be kept, viz. the Word “Church” not to be translated as “congregation” etc.
  - d.** (twelve) When a word hath divers Significations, that to be kept which hath been most commonly used by the most of the Ancient Fathers, being agreeable to the Propriety of the Place, and the Analogy of the Faith.
  - e.** The Division of the Chapters to be altered, either not at all, or as little as may be, if Necessity so require.
  - f.** 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.

- g. (thirteen) Such Quotations of Places to be marginally set down as shall serve for the fit Reference of one Scripture to another.
  - h. Every Particular Man of each Company, to take the same Chapter or Chapters, and having translated or amended them severally by himself, where he thinketh good, all to meet together, confer what they have done, and agree for the Parts what shall stand.
  - i. As any one Company hath dispatched any one Book in this Manner they shall send it to the rest, to be considered of seriously and judiciously, for His Majesty is very careful in this Point.
  - j. (fourteen) If any Company upon the Review of the Book so sent, doubt or differ upon any Place, to send them Word therof; note the Place, and withal send the Reasons, to which if they consent not, the Difference to be compounded at the general Meeting, which is to be of the chief Persons of each Company, at the end of the work.
  - k. When the Place of special Obscurity is doubted of, Letters to be directed by Authority, to send to any Learned Man in the Land, for his Judgement of such a Place.
  - l. Letters to be sent from every Bishop to the rest of his Clergy, admonishing them of this translation in hand; and to move and charge as many as skillful in tongues; and having taken pains in that kind, to send his particular observations to the company, either at Westminster, Cambridge, or Oxford.
- 18.** A few more rules were set up about the order in which translations would be referred to: Geneva, Tyndale, Matthews, Coverdale, Whitchurch, Geneva. And about who would be in charge of the companies.
- 19.** It is crucially important (fifteen) that we understand something here: this new translation was to settle arguments among the people, establish who and what was in charge, and to English the Bible...in other words, it was not translated from the oldest and most ancient manuscripts alone but used English translations and referred to the original languages only when necessary.