



Abstract from Article

THE NATURE AND INTELLECTUAL MILIEU OF THE POLITICAL PRINCIPLES IN THE GENEVA BIBLE MARGINALIA

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Published: *Journal of Church and State*, (1980), 233-249.

Abstract

By the time the King James Bible was published in 1611, more than one hundred and twenty editions of the Geneva Bible had been issued. Although Archbishop William Laud subsequently attempted to ban its publication in England, the number of editions climbed to nearly two hundred by the outbreak of the Civil War. More people, therefore, came into contact with this book than any other until well into the seventeenth century. Like every other English Bible of the sixteenth century, it contained marginal notes "upon all the hard places, aswel for the understanding of suche wordes as are obscure, and for the declaratio of the text, as for the application of the same as may moste apperteine to Gods glorie and the edification of his Churche." The Geneva annotations are more extensive than those of other versions. The marginalia of the Coverdale Bible (1535) and the Great Bible (1539,1540) are almost exclusively scriptural cross references. The Matthew Bible (1537) follows the precedent of the Tyndale New Testament and Pentateuch in providing more substantive remarks, but these are less extensive than their Geneva counterpart. The Bishops' Bible (1568) and the Rheims New Testament (1582,1600) reflect the emphasis given to the marginalia in the Geneva Bible, though failing to equal it. The authorship of the Geneva annotations is uncertain, but they were likely by William Whittingham and Anthony Gilby, possibly with assistance from Miles Coverdale, Christopher Goodman, Thomas Sampson, William Cole, William Kethe, John Baron, and John Pullain. The potential significance of the annotations may perhaps be better appreciated when one recalls the extent to which Tudor Englishmen and women were expected to read Scripture in order to ascertain the proper course of action as well as belief. The contents of the Geneva marginalia appear to have caused concern in some official circles. In 1565, Matthew Parker, archbishop of Canterbury, and Edmund Grindal, bishop of London, wrote favorably of the Geneva Bible and expressed support for a diversity of translations and readings. Three years later, however, Parker complained to Elizabeth about "diverse preuidicall notis" in what must have been the Geneva Bible. The translators of the Bishops' Bible (1568) were instructed "to make no bitter notis vppon any text, or yet to set downe any determinacion in places of controver-sie." Its marginal notes are consequently briefer and less apt to provoke disagreement, though still fuller than those in most other Tudor Bibles. As archbishops of Canterbury, neither Grindal nor John Whitgift was concerned about the Geneva annotations, but James I was. His criticism that certain notes were "very partiall, untrue, seditious, and sauouring too much of daungerous and trayt-erous conceites" is relatively well known. The Geneva marginalia contain numerous remarks relative to the political sphere. In number they easily exceed politically oriented annotations in the Tyndale New Testament and Pentateuch, the Matthew Bible, the Bishops' Bible, and even the Rheims New Testament. A partial outline of the Geneva statements on politics was presented nearly four decades ago by Hardin Craig, Jr., although no full account has ever been rendered. The notes run to some three hundred thousand words, but it is essential to remember that, taken in toto, they are not the equivalent of a systematic treatise. In fact,

the scattered range of the notes on any given subject must have been conducive to self-serving selectivity on the part of some readers. Nevertheless, despite these limitations, the general thrust of the notes could hardly have been lost on readers in England, Scotland, and the American colonies. Certainly more people in these lands were exposed to the political views in the marginalia of the Geneva Bible than in any other source until well into the seventeenth century, and these views had the added advantage of being presented in a volume to which its readers attached special authority.

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