AD 405 JEROME COMPLETES TRANSLATION OF THE VULGATE

The First Standard Version of the Whole Bible

In many ways Jerome was the most remarkable of the early Church Fathers. Though he did not have the eloquence of his contemporary Chrysostom (the name means ‘golden mouth’), Bishop of Constantinople, or the winsomeness of Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, he had a more powerful pen than either of them and was one of history’s most outstanding Bible translators. His Latin translation of the Bible, the Vulgate, remained the Church’s source of inspiration for over a thousand years.

During the first centuries there were three ‘sacred’ languages predominantly used in the Church. Of first importance was Hebrew, the language of the Old Testament and of the synagogue liturgy; it may even have been the language spoken by Jesus, rather than Aramaic, though a matter of some dispute.

Following the introduction of Hellenism – Greek culture and language – into the lands of the Middle East during the fourth century BC, Greek became the common language of the Mediterranean world. Not only educated people, but traders and even ordinary citizens acquired a knowledge of the language, and it was in use in Judea at the time of Jesus. During the third and second centuries BC a large Jewish population resided at Alexandria (Egypt), so that it became necessary to provide them with a Greek version of the Old Testament. It was known as the Septuagint (or LXX), from the seventy scholars said to have worked on it.

For the first two centuries the language of the Church was Greek, even in Rome. The Septuagint was read in worship services alongside Christian writings such as Paul’s letters, also in a simple Greek (known as the koine
or 'common' dialect). Greek words such as Christ, eucharist, apostle, evangelist and bishop, were incorporated into the Church's vocabulary. Anyone who knew Greek, therefore, had access to the whole of the Bible.

Latin
It was not until the third century that Latin, the third sacred language, began to take hold in the Church. The theologian, Tertullian, was first to write in Latin, around the year 200 in North Africa. By about 240 it was beginning to be used by Christians in Rome, as witnessed by catacomb inscriptions, where there was continued competition between Greek and Latin. Before the end of the century Latin had ousted Greek and established itself as the standard language of the Western Church.

The increasing use of Latin made it essential to have a Latin version of the Scriptures. The earliest Latin translation was from North Africa, though it did not include all the books we have in the Bible today. Others were made, based on the Septuagint, but the translators did not always have a good command of Greek nor a regard for accuracy. Hence many of these 'Old Latin' translations were generally poor and sometimes unintelligible.

Concerning this situation, Jerome was prompted to write in 382 to Bishop Damasus of Rome, 'If we are to rely on the Latin versions, then let us be told which of these we are to rely on, for there are almost as many distinct versions as there are copies of the Scriptures.' Damasus, who wanted to establish Latin as the language of the Western Church, wanted an accurate Latin Bible. In response to Jerome's letter, he invited the scholar to make an accurate Latin translation according to the 'the true Greek text'.

Commitment
Little is known of Jerome's early years. He was born into a wealthy family who professed Christianity, and lived in Stridon, a small town in Dalmatia, close to the border of Italy. Instructed at first by his father, he was later sent to Rome to complete his education where he studied the two foremost classical disciplines of the day, grammar and rhetoric.

In Rome he seems to have been taken up by the usual worldly pleasures and attractions of the capital, but soon found himself on the 'slippery path' of youth. Fortunately he recognised the folly of his ways and around the age of twenty made a Christian commitment. After he was baptised, Jerome joined other Christian young men on the Lord's Day in visiting the catacombs beneath the city. Their purpose was to discover the tombs of famous martyrs buried there and to note the inscriptions on their crypts.

Jeremy completes translation of the Vulgate
Following what was becoming a popular ascetic practice of the time, Jerome determined to break with the world in order to keep himself 'free for God and Christ'. Leaving Rome, he set out with the aim of pursuing knowledge whereby he could better serve God. His travels took him first to France and Germany where he settled in the town of Trier, on the Moselle, and spent time copying the texts of sacred books.

His desire to follow a more devout life, however, led him next to Aquileia, a city in north-east Italy not far from his native home. Here he joined a community of like-minded young men who were similarly intent on leading an ascetic life. Despite his pleasure in the fellowship, however, his fiery temperament caused trouble and he felt it wiser to withdraw.

MONASTICISM
The rise of Christian monasticism owes much to the practice of asceticism, which taught that the material order – and especially the body – was inherently evil. Hence the ascetic was one who denied himself the natural pleasures of human life in order to subdue the flesh and set the spirit free. Some Christians attached great honour to the ascetic life, renouncing marriage and giving themselves to the simplest form of existence. Among them were Athanasius and Jerome.

In Christianity, asceticism was usually expressed in monasticism. The founder of the movement is generally recognised as Antony (251–356). From a Christian family of Upper Egypt, who towards the end of the third century gave away his wealth and retired to the desert to live a solitary life. His example attracted others to join him, and a colony of over 5,000 ascetics was established. Living in separate cells but meeting for worship.

By the end of the following century monasticism had spread through Palestine, Syria and Asia Minor. It was introduced to the West by Athanasius during his exile to Rome. Jerome spent over two years in Syria as a hermit; he popularised the movement in Rome, and later retired to live in a cell at Bethlehem for the rest of his life.

Still eager to further his studies, in 374 he moved with some of his friends – and his library of books – to Antioch, the capital of Syria, another leading centre of Christianity. Even here his spirit was restless, but it was while in this frame of mind that he reached a turning-point in his Christian life.

One night, ill with a fever, he had a remarkable dream. In it, he saw himself before the judgment throne of God, who accused him of devoting more time to secular than to Christian writings. Asked who and what he was, Jerome replied, 'I am a Christian.' 'You lie', was the response. 'You are a disciple of Cicero and not of Christ. For where your treasure is, there
is your heart also. When ordered to be flogged for his worldliness, he pleaded for mercy and promised never to read secular books again. 'Lord, if I ever again possess worldly books or read them, I have denied you.'

The effect on Jerome was startling, for he began more earnestly to study Christian books. From Antioch, he retired into the deserts of Syria where he joined a colony of hermits living the solitary life in a cave. This period of isolation proved most fruitful, for it was here that he took the opportunity to perfect his mastery of Hebrew and to add a knowledge of Greek.

Rome

The solitude of this kind of living did not appeal to Jerome, and he quit the desert. Following his ordination around the year 379, he moved to Constantinople and thence to Rome. In 382 he was invited by Damasus, Bishop of Rome, to assist him in the work of a Council being held to discuss divisions that had arisen in the church at Antioch. It was at this point that the Bishop asked him to make an accurate translation of the Bible. It was felt necessary to replace the variety of Old Latin versions that were full of mistakes and 'the blundering alterations of confident but ignorant critics, and, further, all that has been inserted or changed by copyists more asleep than awake'.

Jerome was reluctant to attempt the task. He was aware that there would be many who would be greatly incensed by having their favourite texts changed, even in the cause of accuracy. Nevertheless, he began with the Gospels as they had fared worst with numerous false insertions, and only made changes where sense demanded it. He often left passages untouched which he might otherwise have corrected, in order to preserve the familiar form. They were finished early in 384, and the rest of the New Testament – which he only revised slightly – was published in 391.

While in Rome Jerome became spiritual adviser to a group of aristocratic ladies. He formed a special friendship with one, Paula, and her three daughters, whom he encouraged in the practice of ascetic living. When one of the ladies died due to the rigors of fasting, accusations quickly mounted against him. Added to which, his failure to become bishop following the death of Damasus upset him, and in 385 he decided to quit Rome. His journey took him to Antioch and Egypt before finally settling down to a monastic life in Bethlehem.

1. Augustine, Bishop of Hippo (North Africa), was among his critics, who considered it unwise for him to alter the words of Scripture to which people had become accustomed.

Jerome completes translation of the Vulgate

Bethlehem

For the next thirty-five years Jerome remained in the Holy Land, devoting himself to translation work and writing commentaries on the Scriptures. His monastery became a centre for Bible teaching and for receiving pilgrims, while other activities included preaching in the Church of the Nativity and engaging in theological controversy. A number of Roman ladies – including his friend Paula – followed him to Bethlehem, where they built a convent and continued in their celibate life.

The 4th century Church of the Nativity, Bethlehem, where Jerome preached and taught - it was rebuilt in the sixth century.

Jerome had already made a start in Rome on revising the Old Testament, working from the Old Latin versions. Following a request from the church there, he had begun with the Psalter, but his first attempt was neither successful nor complete. When he reached Bethlehem he began another, more thorough revision, this time with the help of the Greek text, while at the same time endeavouring to represent the real rendering of the Hebrew. The translation was successful, and was followed by a revision of other Old Testament books along the same lines.

Even so, Jerome found working from the Greek version a hopeless task; persuaded by some of his friends, he set this work aside in favour of a translation directly from the original Hebrew – to 'give my Latin readers the hidden treasures of Hebrew erudition', he remarked. He even went so far as to consult Jewish rabbis concerning the text.

The first books made available were Samuel and Kings (around 391);
the sixteen prophets were in circulation by 393, followed by Job, Ezra and Nehemiah (394), Chronicles (395), the three books of Solomon (398), plus the Pentateuch, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, and Esther (after 400). The remaining books were completed by around 405.

It should be noted that the Greek Old Testament differed from the Hebrew Bible in that it contained the books of the Apocrypha, books not recognised as canonical by the Jews. Neither did Jerome accept them as God-inspired, but was nevertheless compelled by the Church to include them in the Vulgate. (In his opinion, they were helpful only for edification. Later, Protestants followed his example by similarly rejecting them.)

This great piece of work was accomplished after twenty-three years of labour, while at the same time continuing his many other activities. As expected, his translation received a hostile reception, and those familiar with the Old Latin version did not easily take to the new one. It was not received by the Church as the 'official' version until well into the eighth century, but from then onwards it remained the Bible of the Western Church until the end of the Middle Ages. It was not called the 'Vulgate' (meaning 'common' language) until the 1530s and was only recognised by the Roman Catholic Church at the Council of Trent in 1546.

**Standard Version**

By the end of the fifth century there existed for the first time a standard version of the whole Bible, which brought order into the confusion of the variety of Old Latin texts. The complete Bible of sixty-six books — which Jerome rightly called 'the Divine Library' — involved a tremendous amount of work for copyists. It was rare to have all the books within one cover, partly because they were expensive and only the rich could afford such a luxury. Added to which a handwritten Bible was bulky, hence they were often produced either as individual books or in sections.

The use of Latin by the Western Church continued through the Middle Ages, both in its services and for missionary outreach in northern Europe. It was understood by educated men from one end of the continent to the other, as well as by the clergy, and was a means by which the Church was linked to culture and learning. For a thousand years translators used this version for their work, before finally once again making use of the Greek New Testament. But whereas Jerome had intended to make the Bible a more readable book, over the centuries the practice of using Latin in church services — rather than the vernacular — eventually made it impossible for lay people to understand the words.
seventeenth century. The passing of the Toleration Act in 1689, which gave Nonconformists a measure of religious freedom, meant that it was safe for them to sing hymns without the fear of being detected. At first, hymns were only sung at the end of the communion service, following the pattern of the Last Supper. The practice was only extended after many prejudices had been overcome. Several collections of hymns were available, but it was Isaac Watts' *Hymns and Spiritual Songs* (1707) – which included 'When I survey the wondrous cross' and 'Join all the glorious names' – which led the way for the increasing popularity of hymns in worship services.

The Wesley brothers greatly encouraged the singing of hymns, and in 1780 produced *A Collection of Hymns for the People Called Methodists*, ranked by one scholar alongside the Psalms and the Book of Common Prayer. Hymns-singing among Anglicans did not become established until the nineteenth century, following the publication of *Hymns Ancient and Modern*.

There was steady growth among the Baptists during the seventeenth century. By 1660 there were about 130 Particular Baptist churches, while the General Baptists had 115. Whilst the Particular Baptists were strong in their doctrinal beliefs, the General Baptists were not so soundly based and by the end of the eighteenth century a number of congregations had moved to a Unitarian position.

Though the title 'Baptist' might appear to suggest that this ritual is central to the Church's teaching, this is not the case. Behind the rite of baptism lies a deeper truth – the need for regeneration, to enter into a personal relationship with God through Christ. This is not arrived at by undergoing any particular ritual, but rather by a work of God's Spirit in the life of the individual.

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1611 KING JAMES VERSION OF THE BIBLE PUBLISHED

The High-water Mark of Bible Translation

It was not until towards the end of the fourteenth century that the first English translation of the Bible appeared. For the most part it was the work of John Wyclif (1320–1384), an Oxford philosopher and theologian, who spearheaded an attack on Church abuses. 'If the ordinary man was to understand the Faith for himself,' he argued, 'then he must have access to the Scriptures ... and he should be taught them in whatever language is best known to them.' It was this impetus given by Wyclif that led to a surge in Bible translations and ultimately to the production of the King James Bible.

Over the centuries there had been a long-standing desire in England for a translation of the Bible in the vernacular. A number of Scripture portions in local dialects had been made, but it was not until Wyclif's efforts that there was an attempt to produce a complete Bible in English. Once a breakthrough had been achieved it eventually opened the door to a number of other translations, often made at great personal cost to the translators.

Wyclif's Bible was not entirely his own work, for he was assisted by a small group of followers, known as Lollards. They translated the Latin Bible into a Midland dialect, published in 1382. A revised version was made later, written this time in a more common dialect of the day; it was finished in 1388, four years after Wyclif's death.

Up to this point the clergy had shown no concern at the translation of

1. Following the Norman conquest in 1066, French became the dominant language in England. Latin remained as the language of religion and learning, while the ordinary people spoke dialect English.
the Scriptures into the vernacular. But this latest trend challenged the authority of the Church. To maintain its hold on the Bible and its interpretation, rendering the Scriptures into English was henceforth forbidden (1407), and anyone found reading the Scriptures in the mother tongue would have 'to forfeit lands, cattle and life'. This prohibition forced a number of scholars to move to the Continent in order to continue their endeavours; for the next hundred years or so most translation work was accomplished abroad.

EARLY TRANSLATIONS
The movement in England to translate the Word of God into the language of the people had its origins in the seventh century. At that time there were only a few portions of Scripture translated into Anglo-Saxon, including John's Gospel, translated by the Venerable Bede (673–735). Towards the end of the tenth century there appeared the earliest English translation of the four Gospels (the Wessex version) and an interlinear version of the Lindisfarne Gospels in the Northumbrian dialect.

As very few people outside the monasteries could read, manuscripts were both costly and scarce. Thus the Church retained its prerogative over the Scriptures, and Jerome's Vulgate continued in use throughout the Middle Ages virtually without rival.

No further translations were made during the period from the Norman Conquest of 1066 until the time of Wyclif. This was partly because French culture began to dominate the English scene, but also due to the lack of a uniform English language. (There were many dialects in use throughout the land, making a common translation impossible.) That English survived this struggle was in some measure due to the work of Chaucer (1340–1400), whose poetry laid a foundation for the native tongue.

Renaissance
Tremendous changes, however, were taking place throughout Europe during the fifteenth century which greatly assisted the cause of the translators. The invention of printing made possible the production of Bibles on a scale not previously imagined. Before the end of the century Bibles had been printed in the national languages of the major European countries, except England. Around the same time a revival of ancient learning – the Renaissance – created a renewed interest in the original languages of the Bible. In 1516 the Dutch scholar Erasmus published his corrected Greek New Testament, which provided a more accurate rendering of the Scriptures.

In England, the first man to use the original biblical languages for translation purposes was William Tyndale (1494–1536). He was determined to produce an English Bible that 'even the ploughboy' could read and understand. 'It was impossible to establish the lay people in any truth,' he contended, 'except the Scriptures were plainly laid before their eyes in their mother tongue.' Hostility forced him to leave the country in order to achieve his ambition – first to Germany, the land of the Reformation, then to Belgium. Despite opposition, his New Testament was published in 1525. He next turned his attention to the Old Testament, but was betrayed before his task was completed. Condemned as a heretic, he was publicly strangled and his body burned at the stake. His final prayer was, 'Lord, open the King of England's eyes.'

The tide of opinion in England was meanwhile beginning to change. Thomas Cranmer, appointed Archbishop of Canterbury in 1532, and Thomas Cromwell, Henry VIII’s Vicar-General and a strong advocate of Protestantism, both supported the idea of an authoritative rendering of the Bible into English. Cranmer’s appeal to the king, ‘that the Holy Scriptures shall be translated into the vulgar English tongue’, met with approval. Tyndale’s prayer was answered.

Tyndale’s Work
Over the next decades several versions of the Bible were published, all of them founded on Tyndale’s translation. Matthew’s Bible, printed abroad in 1537, was sanctioned by the Church and licensed by the king; it was sold publicly in England, even though a great part of it was Tyndale’s work. Its controversial marginal notes, however, alarmed Cromwell and a new edition was brought out in 1538.

Edited by Myles Coverdale, the new ‘Byble in Englyshe’ was actually the Matthew’s Bible but without the notes. These had been banned by Royal Proclamation, which decreed that any Bible in the English tongue should have only the plain text. Though warmly commended by Cranmer, it was viewed with disapproval by many conservative churchmen because it was based on the work of the ‘heretic’ Tyndale. Known as the Great Bible because of its size, it was the first Bible to be formally authorised for public use, and Thomas Cromwell issued an order that a copy should be placed in every parish church throughout the realm.

During the reign of the Catholic Queen Mary (1553–1558) a number of Protestant leaders were forced to flee to the Continent, finding a refuge in Geneva, the home of the reformer Calvin. Here, in 1560, a new English translation of the Bible was published that was considered more accessible to the ordinary man: it was smaller in size, the old-fashioned type was
replaced by a clearer, Roman type – making it more legible – and the verses were now divided and numbered. Sometimes referred to as the Breeches Bible (because of its translation of Genesis 3:7), the Geneva Bible immediately gained in popularity, threatening to oust the Great Bible.

The Geneva Bible, showing the reference to Adam and Eve making themselves ‘breeches’ (Gen. 3:7), so that it became known as the Breeches Bible.

When Queen Elizabeth I came to the throne, a revision of the Great Bible was made in the hope that it would replace that from Geneva. Known as the Bishops’ Bible – because it was prepared by a panel of bishops – and published in 1568, it was the only version recognised by Convocation.

**Hampton Court**

Without a doubt, however, the translation that most endeared itself to the nation and gradually won supremacy over all the other versions was the one authorised by King James I (1603–1625) in 1611. Although the idea of a new Bible was a Puritan proposal, credit must be given to James who was the driving force behind the undertaking.

James became King of Scotland on the abdication of his mother, Mary Queen of the Scots. He succeeded to the throne of England on the death of

2. The Hebrew New Testament was divided into verses by a Rabbi Nathan (1448). The first Bible that has the present verse division in both Testaments was Stephanus’ Vulgate of 1555.

**King James Version of the Bible published**

Elizabeth I by virtue of his mother’s descent from Henry VII. The religious parties in England eagerly anticipated his accession – the Catholics on account of his parentage, the Anglicans because of his high ideal of ‘the divine right of kings’ and the Puritans by reason of his Presbyterian education.

On his way to London in April 1603, James was met by a delegation of Puritans who presented him with the so-called Millenary Petition. Led by Dr John Rainolds, President of Corpus Christi College, Oxford, the Puritans were anxious to ‘purify’ the Church of all ‘the rags of popery’ – the Romish practices and abuses that remained after the Reformation. The petition expressed a desire to be rid of bishops, requested changes to the Prayer Book and prayed to be relieved from the ‘common burden of human rites and ceremonies’.

Although brought up Presbyterian, James gladly embraced the principles of the Church of England and especially the king’s title, Defender of the Faith. In an attempt to put down the Puritans, he agreed to meet them in conference along with the bishops. It was held at Hampton Court palace in January 1604, with the king in the chair. James quickly showed where his sympathies lay and made it clear that there would be no changes in the Elizabethan Church Settlement.

Whilst no concessions were made to the Puritans, Rainolds’ idea – that ‘there might be a new translation of the Bible, because those which were allowed in the reigns of Henry VIII and Edward VI were corrupt and not answerable to the truth of the original’ – was readily received. For the king, here was a chance to get rid of the popular Geneva Bible which had Calvinistic leanings, and to produce a more acceptable version.

**Translation**

A panel of fifty-four translators was appointed from both Oxford and Cambridge Universities, without regard to their theological or ecclesiastical bias, divided into six committees. A set of rules was drawn up for their guidance, with the stipulation that the text should not be ‘prejudiced’ by the use of marginal notes, though cross-references and explanations of Hebrew and Greek words were permissible.

Each committee was assigned a portion of the text and three years were given over to preliminary research. They used the Hebrew and Greek Testaments, but also referred to previous Protestant and Catholic

3. Because it was said to have been signed by a thousand clergymen.
translations, including those in French, Spanish and Italian. Working individually and in conference, the work took two years to complete. A committee of twelve required a further nine months to scrutinise the whole text, and it was edited by Dr Miles Smith (who also wrote the Preface) and Bishop Bilson. There is no actual proof that it was formally authorised by King James, though it was ascribed to him.

Behind it all was the inspiration of Tyndale's original version, for such was the excellence of his work that many of the passages in the KJV's New Testament remained as he wrote them. While the actual number of new renderings was small, the engraving of the various sources was done in such a masterly manner as to make it 'a work of art'. For a time the KJV competed in popular use with the Geneva Bible, and did not gain the ascendency until the restoration of the monarchy (1660). In the end it prevailed and, with the exception of the Catholic Church, was acknowledged as the Authorised Version of the English-speaking people.

Discoveries
The outcome of the Hampton Court Conference served only to widen the gap between the Puritans and the Anglican Church, and the king's threat to 'harry them out of the land, or do worse', was a serious one. Unable to wait for reform within the Church of England, many of them - known as Separatists - had already withdrawn and joined the Anabaptists. Some had emigrated to Holland before James had ascended the throne, and others now joined the stream of refugees leaving the country. In 1620 the Pilgrim Fathers, as they later became known, sailed to America, determined to build a 'New England' where they could worship in freedom.

While no other authorised versions were made for nearly three centuries, later developments finally made a revision necessary. One reason relates to the changes that had taken place in English usage. Many forms of expression used in the KJV had become outdated and generally unintelligible to the public. In addition there were words still in use that had changed in meaning. For example, the KJV used the word 'prevent' to mean precede, 'communicate' for to share and 'allege' for prove. Many other examples could be quoted.

Another compelling reason was the discovery of a large number of ancient Greek and Hebrew manuscripts, including a great many fragments. These finds were helpful in two ways. In the first place, they provided a more reliable biblical text from which to work, as scholars were able to determine how the books of the Bible had been transmitted since they were originally composed. Then, the discovery of a large number of Greek
Great Events in the Story of the Church

papyri, which included private letters, official reports, business accounts and other everyday items, shed new light on the meaning of Greek words that helped to give a better rendering of the text.

ANCIENT MANUSCRIPTS
Since the publication of the KJV in 1611 a large number of ancient manuscripts have come to light. The first discovery was the early fifth century manuscript of the Greek Bible, the Codex Alexandrinus, a gift from the Patriarch of Constantinople to the English monarch in 1627. The arrival of a manuscript of such antiquity created a sensation and a search was begun throughout the libraries of Europe. Between 1627 and 1830 over a thousand manuscripts were catalogued. The oldest was the Codex Vaticanus, a fourth century Greek Bible which had been in the Vatican library since at least 1481. There was also the Codex Bezae, a fifth century Graeco-Latin manuscript of the Gospels and Acts, presented in 1581 to the University of Cambridge.

The most amazing find was that made by Count Tischendorf (1815–74) who, after graduating in theology at Leipzig University, set himself the task of searching out and publishing every fragment of uncial manuscripts he could locate. At the St Catherine monastery, Mount Sinai, he one day saw in a basket a number of vellum leaves with fine, early uncial writing on them. He rescued them, for they were about to be destroyed (as had already happened to similar leaves). On succeeding visits he made further finds, until eventually he had the whole of the New Testament and nearly half of the Old Testament. Now known as the Codex Sinaiticus, it was a hundred years older than any extant manuscript, except the Codex Vaticanus. At Tischendorf’s suggestion, the monks presented the fourth century codex to the Tsar of Russia. In 1933 it was sold by the Soviet Government to the British Museum for £100,000.

An English revised version was consequently published, by authority of the Church of England, between 1881–1885. (Some 80 per cent of this version was taken from the work of Tyndale, which included phrases such as ‘salt of the earth’ and ‘the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak’.) An American Standard Version was produced in 1901. Since then a wide variety of Bibles and New Testaments have been made available — some authorised, others a result of the endeavours of private individuals.

The King James Bible, however, represented more than any other the high-water mark of translation, superior in literary merit to all other versions. Its acceptance by English-speaking peoples has commended the teachings of the Bible to ordinary men and women, making its mark upon the character of the nation in a way that no other book can claim.

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1662 THE ACT OF UNIFORMITY

The Emergence of Nonconformity as a Force for Good

The 1662 Act of Uniformity was a deliberate attempt by parliament to oust the Puritans from the Established Church. By insisting that all clergymen should subscribe to the Prayer Book and submit to episcopacy, nearly 2,000 ministers, who preferred to preserve their independence, were forced to surrender their livings. Whilst some of them expected this would only be a temporary move and that a change of circumstances would enable them to return, it ultimately drove them further into dissent. Rather than bringing the rebels to heel, the act highlighted the division that existed in England between the two groups.

The root of the problem can be traced back a hundred years or more, when in 1534 Henry VIII declared himself to be Supreme Head of the Church of England. Henry was still a Catholic at heart and until his death remained an opponent of the Reformation. While many in England were open to the new ideas, it was not until the reign of the young King Edward VI (1547–1553) that the Reformation was finally introduced. The leading architect of the movement was Archbishop Cramner, supported by a number of leading scholars of a Calvinistic leaning, some of whom were later martyred under the Catholic Queen Mary (1553–1558). As it turned out, Mary’s attempt to reintroduce the Catholic religion into England served only to advance the Protestant cause, for many were repulsed by her ruthless methods.

It was left to Elizabeth I (1558–1603) to establish Protestantism in the land, beginning in 1559 with the introduction of two acts of parliament. By the Act of Supremacy Elizabeth proclaimed herself Supreme Governor