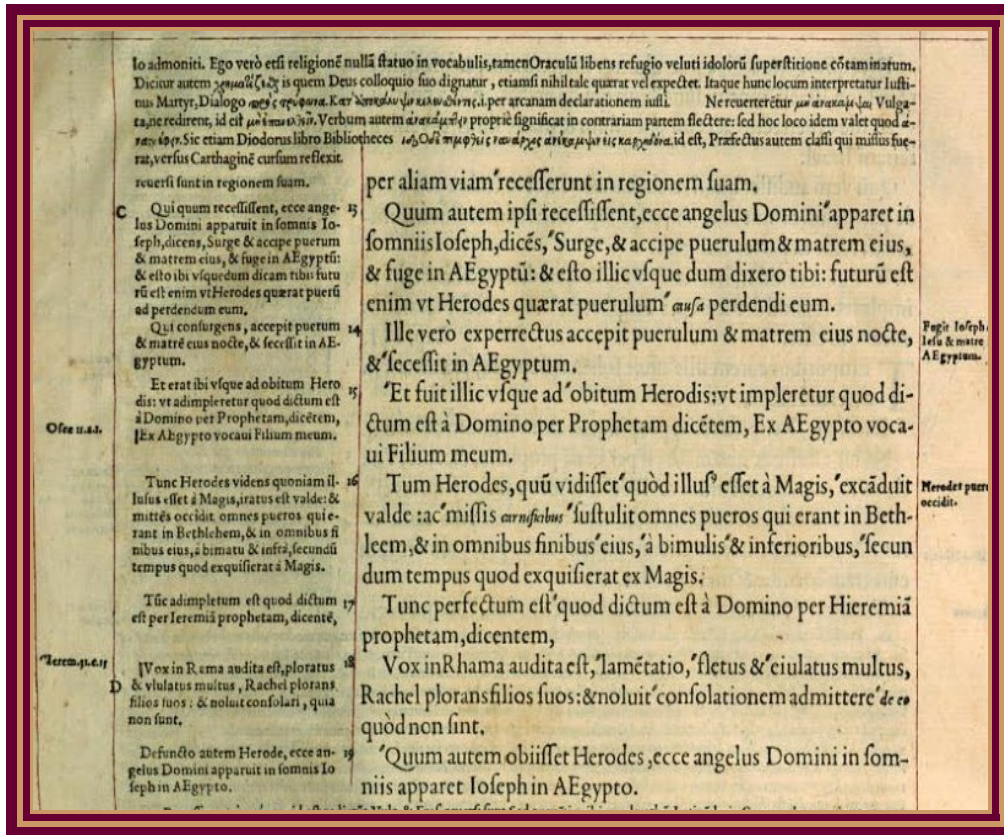


*Noli altum sapere, sed time.*¹

The Latin Bible at the Reformation (1517-1648)²

2 The New Testament



As we noted last week, it was at the Reformation that the great movement for translating the Bible into the language of the common people began. At this time Latin was still used it as a regular means of communication, enabling scholars to exchange ideas all over Europe. Immanuel Tremellius made a translation of the Old Testament which was very popular among protestant scholars but what about the New Testament?

The French Reformer John Calvin (1509-1564), scholar, preacher and writer, is a well known figure. Less well known is his younger co-worker in Geneva, Theodore Beza (1519-1605). Beza was a scholar and linguist of exceptional skill and his new translation of the New Testament from Greek into Latin was published in 1556. Perhaps his greatest work, however, was his *Annotations of the New Testament*. This consisted of the Greek text of the New Testament and two translations into Latin, one of which was the Vulgate and the other the new translation by Beza himself. The two Latin texts were set out in parallel for easy comparison and there were very full and detailed notes to aid the reader, rather like a modern Study Bible. This book was very influential because the Puritan refugees who had fled to Geneva during the persecution of Queen Mary I's reign made great use of it in the English translation (also with notes and comments) of the whole Bible that they made. This was the Geneva Bible of 1560 which was very widely used by Puritans back home in England, especially when the refugees began to return on the death of Mary. When King James gathered a team of translators together to make the Authorized Version translation they in turn made use of Beza's original work as well as William Tyndale's 1526 English translation of the New

¹ "Be not high-minded but fear," (Romans 11:20) Motto of Robert Estienne (1503-1559) who first printed Beza's *Annotations of the New Testament*.

² These dates are arbitrary and are decided upon because 1517 was the year in which Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses to the door of the castle church in Wittenberg and 1648 was the year of the Treaty of Westphalia.

Testament. The translation team were familiar with the Geneva Bible and also consulted it. The results of their work was published in 1611 and the Authorized Version gradually became the standard Bible for English Christians for the next three hundred years and beyond.

Beza's Latin translation is superior to that of the Vulgate in being more word for word and accurate. Sadly for Latin learners, however, it is not easy to get hold of a copy. There is no modern reprint and second hand copies of older reprints are rare and expensive. Although it can be seen here https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=e5dUAAAACAAJ&redir_esc=y there is no accurately digitised and searchable version yet on line, as far as I know. The Vulgate, on the other hand, is easily accessible here: <https://www.biblegateway.com> and in other places in full digitised and searchable formats because it is still the official Bible of Roman Catholicism.

Exercise: (Don't forget to write your answers by hand on paper!)

Which three versions of the New Testament were included in Beza's *Annotations of the New Testament*?

What did it contain in addition to the actual texts?

Which English language edition had this same feature?

What made English puritans flee to Geneva?

What is the technical term for word for word for word translation?

Answers on the next page.

Answers:

Beza's *Annotations of the New Testament* included the Greek New Testament, The vulgate and Beza's own new Latin translation.

in addition to the actual texts it contained very full notes and helps for the reader.

The Geneva Bible had this same feature.

Persecution by Queen Mary I made English puritans flee to Geneva.

Formal equivalence is the technical term for word for word for word translation.