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ARTICLE

# Debating Biblical Translation in Late Elizabethan England

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## Abstract

This article explores how Protestants defended the co-existence of multiple translations of the Bible into English in Elizabethan England. The matter of biblical plurality is considered through the prism of the debates surrounding bible translation which occurred throughout the 1580s between the Catholic translator of the Bible into English, Gregory Martin (c. 1542–1582), and the English Protestant polemicist William Fulke (1537/8–1589). It is contended that this debate, which has tended to be cast as a storm in a teacup, reveals how Protestants responded, innovatively, to the publication of the Catholic English New Testament. Attention is paid to how Martin attacked the existence of the many different Protestant English bible translations in circulation and, reciprocally, how Fulke defended them. This study of the Martin and Fulke debate thereby unsettles some long-standing assumptions about the combative relationship between different versions of the English Bible and it points, instead, to ways in which contemporaries might have seen the plurality of translations as spiritually and polemically advantageous. Fulke's arguments help us to comprehend how, prior to early seventeenth-century attempts to restrict the existence of multiple English bibles, some Elizabethans responded to, and even defended, the plurality of English bible translations which had come to exist.

A single uniform translation of the Bible in English appears to have been a perpetual concern of the post-Reformation English church. Writing in 1564, Bishop Richard Cox of Ely lamented to Sir William Cecil that the 'diversitie of translations make a fowle gerre in churches at this day. Many good men are greved at it. And our Satans laugh at it.'[1] Cox perceived that biblical plurality created quarrels ('a fowle gerre') while exposing the English church to Catholic attack ('Satans laugh'). His solution was simple: that 'one uniforme translation' should

[1] Richard Cox to William Cecil, 1564, The National Archives, Kew (TNA), SP 12/34, fo. 3. I owe this reference to Arnold Hunt.

be enforced. An Elizabethan draft act of parliament had similarly called for the 'reducinge of diversitie of Bibles now extant in the Englishe tongue' and demanded a new translation to swell 'the multiplicitie of errors' which circulated.[2] At the 1604 Hampton Court conference, James VI/I also decreed that there would be 'one uniforme translation' and the 'whole Church to be bound unto it, and none other'.[3] This declaration prompted the most famous translation of the Bible into English – the King James Bible of 1611 – but James still struggled to bind his whole church 'unto it and none other'. 'One uniform translation' seems to have been an ever-present ambition of the English church but one which remained just out of reach.

That the English Bible was central to English Protestant identity has long been recognized; as Christopher Hill observed, 'the vernacular Bible became an institution in Tudor England'.[4] Just as for Protestants across Europe, the notion that the Bible was the sole authority which should guide the church – a belief in *sola scriptura* – had rooted itself firmly in Reformed thought. However, the distinctive ways in which English monarchs had utilized the Bible as a political tool, branding royal images upon its title page and using prefaces and prologues to assert their authority, also meant that the vernacular Bible became a symbol of English religious identity very early in the Reformation.[5] This association was buttressed by claims that the English had a historic and unique relationship with vernacular scripture, claims which were often recited within bible prefaces, and also with the increased celebration of the English language as an expression of national identity.[6] Yet the translation of the Bible into English had always been a vexed matter and so the English Bible existed as both a harmonizing symbol of Protestant identity and a contentious source of division. This was a fact that English Protestants variously exploited or ignored. As the Protestant minister William Chillingworth declared, 'The BIBLE, I say, The BIBLE only is the Religion of Protestants!'[7] Despite Chillingworth's use of the singular, there was not *an* English bible but multiple English bibles.

Over the last few years a succession of important works have advanced our understanding of English bibles.[8] By situating their production within a

[2] 'Draft for an act of parliament for a version of the Bible', reprinted in A. W. Pollard, ed., *Records of the English Bible: the documents relating to the translation and publication of the Bible in English, 1525–1611* (London, 1911), pp. 329–31, at p. 329.

[3] William Barlow, *The summe and substance of the conference...* (London, 1605; STC 1457), p. 46.

[4] Christopher Hill, *The English Bible and the seventeenth-century revolution* (London, 1993), p. 4.

[5] See Kevin Sharpe, *Selling the Tudor monarchy: authority and image in sixteenth-century England* (New Haven, CT, 2009); John N. King, *Tudor royal iconography* (Princeton, NJ, 1989), esp. ch. 2.

[6] For an excellent summary of the connection, see Patrick Collinson, 'Biblical rhetoric: the English nation and national sentiment in the prophetic mode', in Claire McEachern and Debora Shuger, eds., *Religion and culture in Renaissance England* (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 15–45. On these arguments appearing in bible prefaces, see Harry Spillane, '"A matter newly seene": the Bishops' Bible, Matthew Parker, and Elizabethan antiquarianism', *Reformation*, 27 (2022), pp. 107–24.

[7] William Chillingworth, *The religion of Protestants...* (London, 1638; STC 5138), p. 375.

[8] Many of these recent developments are summarized in the wide-ranging contributions to Kevin Killeen, Helen Smith, and Rachel Willie, eds., *The Oxford handbook of the Bible in early modern England, c.1530–1700* (Oxford, 2015).

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dynamic international landscape, the 'Englishness' of the English Bible has been questioned and its relationship to developments in translation habits across Europe uncovered.[9] Scholars, particularly literary scholars, have paid greater attention to the material and paratextual features of bibles printed in the early modern period in order to show how bibles functioned as political and polemical tools, as well as devotional aids.[10] This has enabled a series of works to explore how Protestants embraced the materiality of bibles while still expressing concerns about the problematic veneration of the Bible as an object and the sin of idolatry.[11] Studies investigating how readers engaged with their bibles have further developed our understanding of who was reading English bibles and why.[12] One thread which ties these historiographical strands together is the recognition that the English Bible was not a monolithic and static entity but constantly subject to textual and material change. Drawing on this, the ensuing exploration uncovers how Protestants and Catholics responded to this instability, or what I term 'biblical plurality'. This term reflects the fact that there were not only multiple translations of the Bible circulating, but many different editions of each of these translations.

Into the vast terrain of translations which existed by the 1580s, the Catholic translator of the Bible into English, Gregory Martin, set forth an attack on the English church and its uses of vernacular scripture. He declared that, 'if the Puritans & grosser Calvinists disagree about the translations, one part preferring the Geneva English Bible, the other the Bible read in their Church … What doth it argue, but that the translations differ according to their diverse opinions.'[13] This was a blistering shot across the bow of the English church because it questioned both the veracity of its translations and the manner in

[9] See Alison Knight, *The dark bible: cultures of interpretation in early modern England* (Oxford, 2022); Kirsten Macfarlane, *Biblical scholarship in an age of controversy: the polemical world of Hugh Broughton (1549–1612)* (Oxford, 2021); Scott Mandelbrote, 'Philology and scepticism: early modern scholars at work on the text of the Bible', in Gian Mario Cao, Anthony Grafton, and Jill Kraye, eds., *The marriage of philology and scepticism: uncertainty and conjecture in early modern scholarship and thought* (London, 2019), pp. 123–42; Nicholas Hardy, *Criticism and confession: the Bible in the seventeenth century republic of letters* (Oxford, 2017).

[10] See Ezra Horbury, *Reading the margins of the early modern Bible* (Oxford, 2024); Debora Shuger, *Paratexts of the English Bible, 1525–1611* (Oxford, 2022); Eyal Poleg, *A material history of the Bible, England, 1200–1553* (Oxford, 2020); Kirsten Macfarlane, 'The biblical genealogies of the King James Bible (1611): their purpose, sources and significance', *The Library*, 19 (2018), pp. 131–58.

[11] See Brian Cummings, *Bibliophobia: the end and beginning of the book* (Oxford, 2022); Ethan Shagan, 'Stealing bibles in early modern London', in William J. Bulman and Freddy C. Domínguez, eds., *Political and religious practice in the early modern British world* (Manchester, 2022), pp. 37–54; Avner Shamir, *English bibles on trial: bible burning and the desecration of bibles, 1640–1800* (London, 2016).

[12] See Erminia Ardissino and Élise Boilet, eds., *Lay readings of the Bible in early modern Europe* (Leiden, 2019); Femke Molekamp, *Women and the Bible in early modern England: religious reading and writing* (Oxford, 2013); Naomi Tadmor, *The social universe of the English Bible: scripture, society, and culture in early modern England* (Cambridge, 2010).

[13] Gregory Martin quoted in William Fulke, *A defense of the sincere and true translation of the Holy Scriptvres into the English tongve…* (London, 1583; STC 11430.5), p. 22. Martin's attack was originally made in his *A discoverie of the manifold corruptions of the Holy Scriptures by the heretikes of our daies…* (Rheims, 1582; STC 17503).

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which they co-existed. It was an attack that William Fulke, master of Pembroke College, Cambridge, sought to counter.

The year 1582 is more frequently noted as the year in which the Rheims New Testament, also Gregory Martin's project, was published.[14] This Catholic English New Testament represented an implicit attack on Protestant English bibles. Less noted is the fact that Martin's attack was two-pronged for, alongside his New Testament translation, there came his *A discoverie of the manifold corruptions of the Holy Scriptures by the heretikes of our daies*. And, within the Rheims New Testament notes, readers were directed to read such in 'a booke lately made purposely of that matter'.[15] Martin was simultaneously attacking specific Protestant translations of the Bible into English, questioning why multiple translations co-existed, and providing the first authorized Catholic vernacular translation of the New Testament in English.

Approaching these debates through the lens of 'biblical plurality' allows for the critical responses to the proliferation of translations to be balanced with a recognition that polemical and sincere attempts to justify the situation also existed. Early modern England was a society which, despite periodic calls for uniformity, had largely come to accept the co-existence of different bibles, often for pragmatic reasons. Nonetheless, it had avoided proactively defending the situation that had developed. Martin sought to show that this co-existence was, in fact, a clash. Fulke responded with a brief *Defense* of English bibles in 1583, before spending the period between 1583 and 1588 producing a full edition of the Catholic New Testament to which he added polemical notes and arguments (hereafter referred to as his *Confutation*).[16] This was a text which printed the English translation of the Bible, according to the Bishops' Bible, in parallel columns with the unabridged text of the Catholic New Testament.

This article takes these texts as its subject. Attention is paid to how the debate forced Fulke to readdress older arguments surrounding the existence and purpose of vernacular bibles but also to expand upon the comments of bible translators like William Tyndale and Miles Coverdale, who had each proposed that no English translation could perfectly capture the words of the original text but that each new translation constituted part of a greater work in progress. Drawing upon this belief, Fulke went further still and actively defended biblical plurality as both a practical and a spiritually advantageous phenomenon. The debate between Fulke and Martin thus opens up important questions about what constituted a good bible translation, what the perceived differences were between minor faults and heretical insertions, and what contemporaries believed should be done to old bible translations when new ones were published. The publication of the Rheims New Testament, building on the earlier commitment to produce a 'Catholic' translation of the Bible into English made under Mary I, marked an important transition in the attitudes of English

[14] Gregory Martin, *The Nevv Testament of Iesvs Christ, translated faithfvlly into English...* (Rheims, 1582; STC 2884).

[15] Martin, *New Testament of Iesvs Christ*, sig. B1v.

[16] William Fulke, *The text of the New Testament of Iesus Christ...* (London: 1589; STC 2888) (hereafter *Confutation*).

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Catholics towards vernacular scripture.[17] It also forced Protestants to adjust their long-standing polemical stance.

## I

The subject of this article is dominated to such a great extent by two figures that a brief introduction to each of them is essential. William Fulke has not yet received the serious attention he deserves as a preacher, theologian, and polemicist, though Richard Bauckham has fruitfully explored his interests in science and the natural world.[18] Yet Fulke was to be dubbed 'the hammer of hereticks' by the seventeenth-century bishop of Norwich Joseph Hall, who appreciated that Fulke had produced an important series of defences of the English church's doctrines.[19]

Fulke (1537/8–1589) took his MA from St John's College, Cambridge, and was subsequently awarded a fellowship. A popular preacher, he was instrumental in starting a campaign to abandon the wearing of surplices within St John's chapel. St John's, then under the mastership of Richard Longworth, rapidly became a hotbed of puritanical preaching, and Fulke was made its principal lecturer.[20] In the 1570s, he entered the service of the earl of Leicester, and he was elected to the mastership of Pembroke College in 1578. Surprisingly, as Bauckham has noted, the college did not become a hotbed of puritanism and cannot be compared to the likes of St John's or Christ's College, nor to that later nurturer of Reformed preaching, Emmanuel. What remains so intriguing about Fulke was his movement from vocal critic of the Elizabethan Settlement, even briefly of episcopacy itself, to defender of it. From the later 1570s, he seems to have positioned himself as defender of a church which had a breadth to it. Moreover, his fixation on tackling the external threat which Rome posed seems to have lessened his insistence upon purging every last remnant of it from within the English church. In this sense, he personifies Anthony Milton's arguments about the unifying capacity of anti-Catholic rhetoric within the Church of England.[21]

Gregory Martin (c. 1542–1582), meanwhile, had been one of the first scholars at St John's College, Oxford, and it was there he met his lifelong friend

[17] Cardinal Reginald Pole had used the Lambeth Synod of 1555–6 to commission a 'Catholic' translation of the New Testament but by 1558, and the death of Mary I and Pole, the project had stalled. On this, see Lucy Wooding, *Rethinking Catholicism in Reformation England* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 119, 136; Eamon Duffy, *The stripping of the altars: traditional religion in England, c.1400–c.1580* (New Haven, CT, and London, 2005), p. 530; and, for the details of the synod, see David Wilkins, *Concilia Magnae Britanniae et Hiberniae* (4 vols., London, 1737), IV, p. 132.

[18] Richard Bauckham's important doctoral thesis focused primarily on Fulke's scientific interests and explored Fulke's meticulous scholarly approaches: 'The career and thought of Dr William Fulke (1537–1589)' (Ph.D. thesis, Cambridge, 1973). See also Richard Bauckham, 'Science and religion in the writings of Dr William Fulke', *British Journal for the History of Science*, 8 (1975), pp. 17–31.

[19] Joseph Hall, *The works of Joseph Hall* (London, 1634; STC 12639.3), p. 262.

[20] Richard Bauckham, 'Fulke, William (1536/7–1589)', *ODNB*.

[21] Anthony Milton, *Catholic and Reformed: the Roman and Protestant churches in English Protestant thought, 1600–1640* (Cambridge, 1995).

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Edmund Campion, who went on to become a Jesuit. Campion also engaged with Fulke in a series of polemical exchanges throughout the remainder of his life.[22] Martin did not leave England upon the accession of Elizabeth but remained until 1569. Following increasingly severe measures put in place to bring Oxford colleges into conformity with the 1559 Church Settlement, however, he resigned his fellowship in 1568 and moved into the service of the earl of Arundel, whose Catholic household provided him greater religious freedom.[23] That Martin spent a decade living under a Protestant regime might be seen as evidence of his own ability, like his future adversary Fulke, to accommodate some religious practices he disagreed with. After the arrest of the earl in 1569, following the Northern Rebellion of that year, Martin fled England and moved to the newly established English College at Douai, founded by Cardinal William Allen. First as a student, and from 1576 as a lecturer, Martin's academic reputation grew and he was duly dubbed 'the Venerabile' by his peers. Having written on the issue of church papistry, he turned his attention, around 1578, to the creation of a New Testament in English.[24] He completed the project at the behest of Cardinal Allen, who had appointed him to the post of professor of Hebrew at his seminary. It is, therefore, no surprise that Martin frequently employed detailed discussions of Hebrew in his works. We are denied his responses to Fulke because he succumbed to tuberculosis in October 1582. Nevertheless, the Rheims New Testament left a deep impression on English Catholic identity, and the debates it sparked left an equally great impression on the English church.

## II

Given their length and significance, Fulke's and Martin's works have attracted relatively little historical attention. William McKane's consideration of Hebrew scholars offered the first extended scholarly commentary of them, with Ellie Gebarowski-Shafer providing a recent and thorough exploration of Martin's arguments as part of a broader consideration of Catholic attacks on Protestant bible translations from the sixteenth century to the nineteenth.[25] The paratextual features of these printed works – namely the marginal annotations and commentaries – have been dissected by Ezra Horbury and Debora Shuger.[26] Alison Knight has helpfully incorporated Fulke's works into her

[22] The story that William Fulke and Edmund Campion had sparred while youths in London and that Campion had won (leading Fulke to swear revenge against him) is, as Bauckham observes, surely apocryphal. See Bauckham, 'Fulke, William'.

[23] See Thomas McCoog, 'Martin, Gregory (1542?–1582)', *ODNB*.

[24] Gregory Martin, *A treatise of schisme...* (London, 1578; STC 17508).

[25] William McKane, *Selected Christian Hebraists* (Cambridge, 1989), ch. 3; Ellie Gebarowski-Shafer, 'Heretical corruptions and false translations: Catholic criticisms of the Protestant English Bible, 1582–1860' (D.Phil. thesis, Oxford, 2007). A brief survey of these debates appeared as part of Peter Milward, *Religious controversies of the Elizabethan age: a survey of printed sources* (London, 1977), pp. 46–50.

[26] Horbury, *Reading the margins*, pp. 51–4, 133–4, 149–57; Shuger, *Paratexts of the English Bible*, pp. 71–9. See also the brief discussion of the concordances that Fulke created for his *Confutation*

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magisterial exploration of how early modern writers and translators engaged with 'dark' – that is, difficult and contentious – aspects of scripture.[27] These works have all built in original ways upon Alexandra Walsham's central argument that 'the issue at stake [following the publication of the Rheims New Testament] was no longer whether it was permissible to translate the Scriptures but which version most accurately captured the true meaning and purpose of the Holy Spirit'.[28]

By further dissecting the attacks Martin made, and Fulke's response in his *Confutation* and *Defense*, it is possible to see that something more complex than a disregard for the Catholic New Testament's translation was at play. For Fulke, the Catholic New Testament was not just an issue because of the support it would offer Catholics in England, as dangerous as that might be. Indeed, in printing the full Rheims New Testament within his responses, he created a vehicle through which a Catholic could legally possess a copy of the text.[29] Lori Anne Ferrell has even suggested that 'Fulke's treatment did more than any Jesuit missionary to spread the gospel according to Rheims'.[30]

What Fulke saw as a greater issue was Martin's insistence that the entirety of Protestant scriptural translation, particularly the ways in which English Protestants hopped and leaped from translation to translation, was tantamount to heresy. In his overview of all English bible translations, David Norton summarized the attacks that Martin and Fulke threw at each other with regard to the renderings of particularly significant words.[31] This was a prominent feature of the debate, but Norton's suggestion that beyond this the debate was 'mostly concerned with theological detail' overlooks the fact that Fulke was forced to defend the plurality of English bibles circulating in

in Amy Tan, 'Printed English-language Bible concordances to c. 1640 and intentions for lay Bible use', in Bulman and Domínguez, eds., *Political and religious practice*, pp. 55–76, at pp. 65–6.

[27] Knight, *Dark bible*, pp. 115–18, 123–4, 127–9.

[28] Alexandra Walsham, 'Unclasping the book? Post-Reformation English Catholicism and the vernacular bible', *Journal of British Studies*, 42 (2003), pp. 141–66, at p. 143.

[29] Writing in 1603, John Dove suggested that English Catholics were 'contented to give more mon[e]y for the Rhemish Testament alone, then for the same booke with Doctor Fulkes answer joyned with it'. See John Dove, *A persvvasion to the English recusants* (London, 1603; STC 7085), p. 7. On the problems of printing an opponent's text for the purposes of refutation, see Alexandra Walsham, 'The spider and the bee: the perils of printing for refutation in Tudor England', in John King, ed., *Tudor books and readers: materiality and the construction of meaning* (Cambridge, 2010), pp. 163–90.

[30] Lori Anne Ferrell, 'The Bible in early modern England', in Anthony Milton, ed., *The Oxford history of Anglicanism, volume 1: Reformation and identity c.1520–1662* (Oxford, 2016), pp. 412–29, at p. 423. One example of this is Stephen Vallenger, a Catholic printer condemned to prison in the late 1580s, who had a copy of Fulke's *Confutation* confiscated because of the spiritual use to which a Catholic could put it. See Anthony Petti, 'Stephen Vallenger (1541–1591)', *Recusant History*, 6 (1962), pp. 248–64, at p. 258. On the uses of individual copies, see Daniel Cheely, 'Opening the Book of Marwood: English Catholics and their bibles in early modern Europe' (Ph.D. thesis, Pennsylvania, 2015); Thomas Fulton and Jeremy Specland, 'The Elizabethan Catholic New Testament and its readers', *Journal of Early Modern Christianity*, 6 (2019), pp. 251–75.

[31] David Norton, *A history of the English Bible as literature* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 49–52.

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Protestant England while accepting the limits of each version. This, quite remarkably, he managed to spin as a positive thing.[32]

The publication of the Rheims New Testament gave Catholics greater control over the nature and shape of polemical exchanges in the early 1580s and so it ensured that the debate moved away from whether vernacular bibles were acceptable and towards a more thoroughgoing series of debates about which translation was correct. This, as Fulke found, was a shift in polemical debate which English Protestants were not wholly prepared for.

Martin used his lengthy preface to the reader to establish his motives for translating the New Testament and how he envisaged it being properly used. The title page encapsulates these arguments. Firstly, the full title of the Rheims New Testament concludes with the phrase 'specially for the discoverie of the CORRUPTIONS of divers late translations, and for cleering the CONTROVERSIES in religion, of these daies'.[33] So Martin did not believe that 'the holy Scriptures should alwaies be in our mother tonge' but had put them into English 'upon special consideration of the present, time, state, and condition of our countrie'.[34] This was because the Rheims New Testament was designed to act as a remedy (be 'medicinable') to Protestant falsehoods.[35] The use of an epigraph from St Augustine on the title page further detailed 'how things [from scripture] specially must be commended to memorie, which make most against Heretikes'.[36] These citations corroborate Walsham's argument that 'the Elizabethan Catholic leaders were responding to a situation in which an English Bible had become a vital weapon in the struggle to resist the annihilation of the Roman faith'.[37] Martin did not believe that an English Bible was entirely desirable, but he did see that it was entirely necessary. Crucially, this was only until 'the peace of the Church' was restored, at which point the Rheims New Testament would become 'neither much requisite, nor perchance wholy tolerable'.[38]

An additional reason for Martin translating the New Testament was, as his preface explained, so that Catholics could 'lay away ... [the] impure versions as

[32] Ibid., p. 52.

[33] Martin, *Nevv Testament*, sig. A1r. Note the use of capitals on the keywords 'corruptions' and 'controversies'.

[34] Ibid., sig. A2r.

[35] Ibid., sig. A2v. References to poison and remedies were also employed in Thomas Sanders and Nicholas Harding's request to translate the New Testament into English, as they suggested an approved translation would help those 'now seething with heresy, so that those who are everywhere compelled to drink poison, may be compelled to put away the drug, until a doctor comes'. This letter, from the Vatican archives, appears as an appendix in Arnold O. Meyer, *England and the Catholic church under Queen Elizabeth*, trans. J. R. McKee (London, 1967), appendix 12, pp. 475–8.

[36] Martin, *Nevv Testament*, sig. A1r. The quotation is taken from Augustine's second homily on the first epistle of John.

[37] Walsham, 'Unclasping the book?', p. 166. Debora Shuger also recently observed that the Rheims New Testament's paratextual features were designed to 'fortify Catholics against the arguments of their Protestant neighbours, clergy and classmates' (Shuger, *Paratexts of the English Bible*, p. 176).

[38] Martin, *Nevv Testament*, sig. A2r.

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hitherto you have be[e]n forced to occupie'.[39] Who then constituted the intended audience of the Rheims New Testament? Where the Reformer William Tyndale, whose 1526 New Testament was the first to be printed in English, had declared that he did so in the hope that every ploughboy would know it, Martin made clear that he wished the very opposite, and had not produced his New Testament for 'every husbandman, artificer, prentice, boies, girles, mistresse, maide, [or] man'.[40] The Rheims New Testament was not designed for popular devotional reading but to act, as Walsham has contended, as 'a crib book for Catholic clergy seeking to regain the evangelical advantage'.[41] Martin, concerned about his New Testament being used by non-clerical readers, forcefully cautioned readers who approached the scriptures with 'curious or contentious wittes' and the 'arrogancie and presumption' that they could understand the 'hard and high mysteries' contained within.[42] Where Protestants lauded those who gathered their families together to read and discuss the scriptures, like the puritan John Bruen, Martin condemned those who would use his translation for 'table talke'.[43] For Martin, the 'better times' were when bibles were 'in Libraries, Monasteries, Colleges, Churches' and read 'with feare and reverence'.[44] Ultimately, he stated his approval for the restrictions that the Council of Trent placed upon translations of the Bible into vernacular languages, and the reading of them by the laity, concluding that these rules were what 'many a wise man wished for'.[45]

In attacking Protestant translations of the Bible, and with them a central tenet of Protestantism (that the Bible was to be freely read and constituted a singular and ultimate authority), Martin could better make clear to his Catholic readers how they should approach his New Testament and for what purposes. Consequently, Fulke had the dual task of condemning the Catholic version while defending both the veracity of English Bible translations and the co-existence of different versions. As Fulke noted in his *Confutation*'s prefatory address to Queen Elizabeth, 'not content to quarrel at the sinceritie and truth of our translations' they have put out 'a farre worse' translation and 'indevored to corrupt the sense of the new testament'.[46] Paying attention to Fulke's reference to Catholic attacks against 'our translations', in the plural, one can see how the defence of bible plurality was at the heart of his approach from the outset.[47]

[39] Ibid., sig. B2r.

[40] See John Foxe's comments on Tyndale in his *Actes and Monumentes...* (London, 1563; STC 11222), p. 514; Martin, *Nevv Testament*, sig. A3r.

[41] Walsham, 'Unclasping the book?', p. 155.

[42] Martin, *Nevv Testament*, sigs. A1v, A3r.

[43] William Hinde, *A faithfull remonstrance of the holy life and happy death of Iohn Bruen...* (London, 1641), esp. pp. 71–2, 223–34; Martin, *Nevv Testament*, sig. A3r.

[44] Martin, *Nevv Testament*, sig. A3r.

[45] Ibid., sig. A3r. On those restrictions, see Robert E. McNally, 'The Council of Trent and vernacular bibles', *Theological Studies*, 27 (1966), pp. 204–27.

[46] Fulke, *Confutation*, sig.*2r.

[47] As was the very title of Fulke's *Defense*, which referenced 'translations'. Likewise, the full title of the Rheims New Testament references 'the corruptions of divers late translations': Martin, *Nevv Testament*, sig. A1r.

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What becomes evident in the disputes between Fulke and Martin is just how many English bibles Martin had access to. This can be seen in the copious and precise references made to given versions. In such exchanges, grand arguments about the validity of vernacular scripture quickly gave way to a bitter series of points which took as their focus not only a given translation, but the form of its printing in a specific edition. Martin made reference to no fewer than seven different translations of the Bible into English, most frequently the 1562 printing of the Great Bible, the 1577 Bishops' Bible, the 1579 printing of the Geneva Bible by Christopher Barker, and a 1580 New Testament in English.[48] It was his intermingled references to so many bibles throughout his attacks on English translations which made them so difficult for Fulke to respond to.[49] Fulke even had to lodge with his publisher in London, alongside two colleagues, simply because he otherwise had not the 'bookes to performe'.[50] With these resources, however, he was able to respond by employing the full gamut of translations at his disposal. Fulke thus decided that it was often sufficient to show that what Martin considered to be the 'correct' translation existed in at least one of the English church's translations. So when Martin made a specific attack on one translation's inadequacies – for instance, in querying why the 1577 English Bible translated Matthew 16:18 as 'upon this rocke I will build my congregation' rather than 'my Church' – Fulke could respond, 'to put you out of all feare, the Geneva translation hath the worde Church, that you make so great account of'.[51] Fulke's arguments built on the assumption that it was sufficient for one of the many existing translations to have the 'correct' rendering of the term and to co-exist alongside those lacking it. He thereby turned the potentially problematic aspects of biblical plurality into a mode of defence.

One example serves especially well in illustrating how Martin's approach pushed Fulke further towards defending biblical plurality: the rendering of the words 'temple' and 'altar'. This was a controversy which sprang out of the Protestant use of communion tables, rather than altars, and the belief that an altar required a sacrifice and that the sacrament of the eucharist, as Protestants conceived of it, did not re-enact the sacrifice of Christ but constituted a memorial of it. Martin concluded that Protestants had substituted 'altar' for 'temple' throughout the Old Testament, or vice versa, to justify the use of communion tables and thereby create precedents with which to question the Catholic use of altars and the mass itself. As such, Martin claimed that Protestants 'alter and change, adde & put out' words and phrases in different versions and did so in order to justify their contemporary policies.[52] He wrote:

[48] *The bible in Englishe...* (London, 1562; STC 2096); *The holy Byble...* (London, 1577; STC 2121); *The Bible...* (London, 1579; STC 2127); *The Newe Testament...* (London, 1580; STC 2881).

[49] Work on Martin often overlooks the fact that he had been in England at the time of the Bishops' Bible's publication in 1568. See McCoog, 'Martin, Gregory'.

[50] TNA, SP 14/109, fos. 106–7.

[51] Fulke, *Defense*, pp. 144, 147–8.

[52] Ibid., p. 66.

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> all the English corruptions here noted, and refuted, are either in all or some of their English Bibles printed in these yeares, 1562.1577.1579. And if the corruption be in one Bible, not in an other, commonly the sayd Bible or Bibles are noted in the margent: if not, yet sure it is, that it is in one of them, and so the Reader shall find it if he find it not alwaies in his owne Bible. And in this case the Reader must be very wise and circumspect, that he thinke not by and by we charge them falsly, because they can shew him some later edition that hath it not so as we say. For it is their common and knowen fashion, not onely in their translations of the Bible, but in their other bookes and writings, to alter and change, adde & put out, in their later editions, according as either them selves are ashamed of the former, or their scholers that print them againe, dissent and disagree from their Maisters.[53]

Martin noted here that Catholics had to take such a precise approach in refuting Protestants – stating which translation, as well as which edition and the year of its printing – because Protestants employed the term 'altar' only in cases where it was being criticized (for instance, in rendering the Temple of Bel as 'bels altar') because such is 'in favour of their communion table'. Elsewhere, he argued, positive references to God's altar were rendered as 'God's temple'.[54]

Martin's attack on the use of 'temple' and 'altar' in English bibles raised complicated questions around Greek and Hebrew philology.[55] Yet Fulke's overall response was disarmingly simple: 'I thinke it was the fault of the Printer'.[56] Nevertheless, he still worked through the various translations that Martin had cited and sought to clarify which editions Martin was referring to.

> First this is untrue, for some you have noted in the new Testament, printed 1580. Secondly, it is uncertaine, for two of these translations might be printed in one yeare, and so I thinke they were. Therefore I know not well which you meane, but I guesse that the Bible 1562. is that which was of Doctor Coverdales translation, most used in the Church service in King Edwards time. The Bible 1577. I take to be that, which being revised by diverse Bishops, was first printed in the large volume, and authorised for the Churches, about tenne or twelve yeares agoe. That of 1579. I knowe not what translation it be, except it be the same that was first printed at Geneva, in the beginning of the Queenes Majesties Raigne. And this conjecture as the fittest I can make.[57]

Evidently on the defence here, Fulke tried to label each of the different translations in ways that made clear the different forms of authority they possessed.

[53] Ibid., pp. 65–6.
[54] Ibid, p. 16.
[55] Fulke and Martin were both competent linguists and Fulke had also translated works in his youth. See Bauckham, 'Science and religion', pp. 18–19 and n. 8.
[56] Fulke, *Defense*, p. 16.
[57] Ibid., p. 66.

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He thus noted the 'authorized' nature of the Bishops' Bible compared to the historic place of 'Coverdales translation' and the foreign printing of the Geneva Bible.

Martin focused in on the 1562 edition of the Great Bible to show that changes to the text had been made by Protestants to defend contemporary policy. He asserted that 'the English Bible printed the yeare 1562, you reade thus: Howe agreeth the Temple of God with images? [2.cor.6]'.[58] His decision to reference the Great Bible as being printed in 1562, a decision likely necessitated by the fact that he was not able to view an earlier iteration printed in that period of iconoclasm under Edward VI (r. 1549–53), left him exposed to Fulke's cunning response. For Fulke observed that, by 1562, there were no images and altars in England left to 'pull down' and so it was quite absurd to suggest that this translation was a matter of convenience. Martin had also left marginal notes such as 'Bib. in king Edw. time printed againe 1562'.[59] Such a note was correct in observing that the Great Bible had been printed from 1539 to 1562 but incorrect in establishing the origin of this translation as having been under Edward VI rather than Henry VIII. Fulke was quick to leap on this detail and he retorted that this text was

> so translated, & printed nere 30 yeres before 1562 in King Henrie the eightes time, when images were not in plucking downe. And when it was printed againe 1562. which was the fifth yere of her Majesties reigne ... there was no neede to plucke downe images out of churches, which were pluckt downe in the first and second yeres of her reigne.[60]

Fulke was content to leave the controversial matter of the changing rendering of words as significant as 'altar' down to the whims of printers and the fact that the same version of the Bible had been employed from 1539 to 1568. In so doing, he suggested that bible texts were stable and constant, in theory, but in practice, owing to the errors of printers, instability was inherent. He also noted that the extent of biblical plurality in England was such that he would rather call bibles by a name like 'Geneva Bible' than 'by the yeares in whiche they were once printed' because many different translations might have been printed 'perhaps all in some one yeare'.[61] While Martin sought to portray the entire corpus of Protestant English bibles as a hodgepodge which was erratically cited and used, regardless of origin or veracity, Fulke presented a different picture. He was clear that the Bishops' Bible was merely a revision of the Great Bible, not a new translation; that Coverdale's Bible and Matthew's Bible were early versions that fed into later translations; and that the Geneva Bible and Beza's Latin New Testament were rightly used but not authorized within the English church. Biblical

[58] Ibid., p. 90.
[59] Ibid., p. 16.
[60] Ibid., p. 91.
[61] Ibid., pp. 70–1.

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plurality for Fulke was not a messy web of competing translations but a tapestry of interlocking bibles with different origins and purposes.

Matters became more complex in areas where Martin was able to show that the Great Bible, Bishops' Bible, and Geneva Bible presented contradictory translations. In such instances printers could not be blamed and Fulke's attempts to suggest that different translations had different purposes still left open the question of which translation was correct. Martin, although somewhat confused about the status of the 1562 Great Bible, nevertheless showed that the 'one Bible which for the present is redde in their churches' differed from the previous. Yet the 'people read not all indifferently without prohibition' and so 'may bee abused by every one of them'.[62] Martin took pleasure in presenting Protestant translations of the Bible as transitory, labouring the point that the version he cited (the revised Bishops' Bible translation of 1572 as printed in 1577) was, 'wee thinke', the translation now authorized but that it is 'hard to know, it changeth so oft'.[63]

Fulke was thus forced to explain how erroneous versions of the Bible were allowed to continue existing, despite recognition that they needed replacing being evident in the fact that a new version or entirely new translation had been published. Moreover, translations such as the Great Bible's had been the foundation of arguments made by earlier generations of Protestants. To entirely dismiss these older translations as erroneous was to risk dismissing parts of their arguments – arguments which were foundational to the Church of England and its religious settlement. Fulke would also have been aware that attacks against the Bishops' Bible in the late 1560s had led to revisions being issued in 1572. However, editions of the 1568 Bishops' folio and 1569 Bishops' quarto were still being used across England, as, in many churches, were copies of the Great Bible.[64] Fulke's response was again simple: older bibles were not erroneous, just less plainly translated, and so their continued use and existence was no threat to true religion.

Milton has noted that 'any discussion of what the Church of England's position was on a particular doctrine or practice also had to tackle the thorny question of the state of the statutes, proposals and writings of the earlier Reformations under Henry and Edward'.[65] This was true of the Great Bible because Martin's attack placed Fulke in a position in which he needed to defend it, despite the fact that changes to it had been made, in the form of the Bishops' Bible. This, in turn, forced Fulke to take up a much stronger defence of biblical plurality than had previously been seen. Consistently, he declared that he did 'defend both as true'. He concluded that: 'We tel you that wee may not justifie any fault committed in our translations, but we have reformed them (if any were espied) in the later. Neverthelesse those faults are not so greate, that

[62] Ibid., p. 99.

[63] Ibid., p. 100.

[64] See Harry Spillane, 'The Bishops' Bible and the Church of England' (Ph.D. thesis, Cambridge, 2022), ch. 4.

[65] Anthony Milton, *England's second reformation: the battle for the Church of England, 1625–1662* (Cambridge, 2021), p. 19.

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we neede call in al[l] the Bibles in which is any fault.'[66] Put another way, Fulke was suggesting that all English bibles possessed a sense of truth and that subsequent editions and translations were attempts at perfecting it.

This argument resonates with those employed by Protestant theologians across Europe who were seeking to erode the status of the Latin Vulgate and defend the circulation of multiple Hebrew and Greek versions of the scriptures. These debates were reignited by the Council of Trent's ruling that the Vulgate be treated as 'authentic' and that 'no one dare or presume to reject it on any pretext'.[67] Protestants, at pains to show the authenticity of other Greek and Hebrew sources, nevertheless had to navigate the fact that multiple Greek and Hebrew translations were in existence. As Richard Muller has shown, the 'problem of the "authentic edition of the scriptures" enters Reformed theology ... by way of the polemic with Rome'.[68] And so, just as Martin's arguments pushed Fulke to deal with the matter of biblical plurality directly, we can see how wider Catholic attacks on the production of vernacular bibles forced Protestants across Europe to confront the problems which biblical plurality in all its forms posed to the notion of *sola scriptura*.

By contrast, Martin proclaimed in his New Testament preface that he had relied purely on the Latin Vulgate for his translation and so he explained that words for which there was no perfect English translation from the Latin would remain, in a sense, untranslated.[69] Fulke ridiculed such an approach and, in suggesting that it was better to attempt to translate than not to translate at all, defended the plethora of English translations that had been completed. This exchange illustrates Martin's fundamental view that there was one inerrant translation of the Bible, in contrast to Fulke's contention that translation was an ongoing project. Indeed, throughout Fulke's works, one senses his movement from a reactive defence of biblical plurality to a positive assertion of its benefits. He stated that to 'translate out of one tongue into an other, is a matter of greater difficultie than is commonly taken' and that it was difficult to 'yeeld as much and no more, than the originall containeth'.[70] Here, Fulke was again claiming that successive versions of the English Bible were part of a process of perfecting that balance of yielding enough but not too much. Such a view illustrates Alison Knight's observation that Protestants had to find ways of dealing with the fact that the Bible was 'mired with frustrating difficulty and problems even as it was transcendent, illuminating, and perfect'.[71]

Fulke took this argument even further with his suggestion that the Great Bible had knowingly been put into print containing errors. At pains to show the involvement of that great conservative stalwart of the Henrician court, Bishop Stephen Gardiner, Fulke recorded that, following the presentation of

[66] Fulke, *Defense*, pp. 320–1.

[67] As cited in Richard Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed dogmatics: the rise and development of Reformed orthodoxy, ca. 1520 to ca. 1725* (4 vols., Grand Rapids, MI, 2003), IV, p. 402.

[68] Ibid.

[69] On Martin's decisions to leave some words essentially untranslated, see Brett Foster, 'Gregory Martin's "Holy Latinate Jerusalem"', *Prose Studies*, 28 (2006), pp. 130–49.

[70] Fulke, *Defense*, p. 3.

[71] Knight, *Dark bible*, p. 2.

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Coverdale's translation to Henry VIII, it had been scrutinized by bishops like Gardiner. It was their belief that 'there were many faultes therein'. Tellingly, when the king inquired as to whether any heresies might be introduced by such faults, it was their opinion that 'there was no heresies that they could finde'.[72] Fulke rewrote the history of the printed English Bible as a history which originated with a version containing unheretical imperfections – imperfections that future revisers were tasked with clearing up. The English Bible therefore began, in Fulke's chronology, as an inherently transitory entity which it had always been anticipated would be supplemented.

Writing in the 1520s, at the end of his New Testament in English, William Tyndale had suggested something similar when he declared that his work should be seen 'as a thynge not havynge his full shape, but as it were borne afore hys time, even as a thing begunne rather then fynnesshed. In tyme to come ... we will geve it his full shape.'[73] In terms similar to Martin's later attack on Fulke, Sir Thomas More responded to Tyndale that it was better 'to weve a new webbe of cloth, as to sowe uppe every hole in a net'. More contended, as Martin would later, that it was better to have no bread at all than to have poisoned bread: better to have no vernacular translation than an imperfect one. He noted that the response to his contention that Tyndale's work constituted poisoned bread had been answered by evangelicals to the contrary, relating that 'these wordes of myne were rehersed in a sermon, and answered in this wyse, yet though there were brede that were poysoned in dede, yet were poysened brede better then no brede at all'.[74] Tyndale's belief – indeed, that early English evangelical belief – that the benefits of setting forth a translation known to be imperfect but also known to be translated with 'a pure entent' echoes throughout Fulke's work.[75]

Fulke's responses discussed thus far might be seen to have answered the question of why the English church had allowed for a series of different translations to be produced, but he also needed to answer Martin's query as to why older translations were not suppressed. It has been shown that Fulke declared that faults noted by Martin were 'not so great, that we neede call in al[l] the Bibles in which is any fault'.[76] However, rather than merely suggesting that this co-existence caused no harm, he also contended that it created benefits. Indeed, Fulke argued that, by allowing translations to co-exist, the light of one might better illuminate another. 'Why should not one translation help an other', Fulke asked Martin.[77] His conclusion was that:

> If of three translations, we preferre that which is the best, what signe of corruption is this? If any fault have either of ignorance, or negligence escaped in one, which is corrected in an other, and we preferre that which corrected, before that which is faultie, what corruption ca[n] be

[72] Fulke, *Defense*, p. 4.
[73] William Tyndale, *The New Testament* (Worms, 1526; STC 2824), sig. Tt2v.
[74] Thomas More, *The apologye of Syr Thomas More knyght* (London, 1533; STC 18078), fos. 17v–18r.
[75] Tyndale, *New Testament*, sig. Tt2r.
[76] Fulke, *Defense*, p. 320.
[77] Ibid., p. 17.

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> judged in either? Not every fault is a wilful corruption, & much lesse an heretical corruption.[78]

Harking back to Tyndale's belief that if a translation was completed with 'pure entent' it had credit, Fulke drew a clear distinction between 'fault' and 'wilful corruption'.[79] This developed Tyndale's claim about the Bible having an ability to illuminate itself when he stated that 'one scripture will helpe to declare a nother … And the open and manyfest scriptures will ever improve the false and wrong exposition of the darker sentences.'[80]

The translator of the first printed English Bible, Coverdale, told his readers that, 'where as some men thynke now that many translacions make division in the fayth and in the people of God, it is not so'.[81] Foreshadowing Fulke's suggestion that translations worked together to better each other, Coverdale explained that different translations worked like a group of friends out shooting together who all aim for the same target. If a shooter does not hit the target perfectly they should be 'commended, and to be helped forwarde, that he maye exercyse himselfe the more therin'.[82] With this process of translation in mind, Fulke was emboldened to answer criticism of the Great Bible's rendering of Romans 9:16 (Martin's '1562' version) by stating that 'the translation you reprehend, I graunt is not proper for the words, and therefore it is reformed in the later translations'.[83] The target might not have been hit first time but, Fulke suggested, it had nevertheless been hit.

A belief that diversity of translation allowed for the greater amendment of error was not entirely new to Elizabethan religious debate. Matthew Parker, as archbishop of Canterbury, had made such a point at the beginning of Elizabeth's reign when granting a patent to John Bodley for the printing of the Geneva Bible in England. Corresponding with Edmund Grindal, then bishop of London, Parker observed: 'for thoughe one other speciall bible for the churches be meant by us to be set forthe as convenient tyme and leysor hereafter will permytte: yet shall it nothing hindre but rather do moche good to have diversitie of translacions and readinges'.[84]

Parker was claiming that biblical plurality could 'do moche good', and seemingly overturned the notion that a national church would privilege one translation as the national bible. This argument stands in stark opposition to the Elizabethan draft act of parliament 'for reducyinge diversitie', which claimed that it did not engender the revelation of biblical truth through a process of enlightenment but rather 'the most daungerous increase of papistrie and atheisme'.[85] When

[78] Ibid., pp. 18–19.
[79] Tyndale, *New Testament*, sig. Tt2r.
[80] William Tyndale, *The obedie[n]ce of a Christen man…* (Antwerp, 1528; STC 24446), fo. Lxxxviir.
[81] Miles Coverdale, *Biblia the Byble…* (London, 1537; STC 2063.3), sig. *4v.
[82] Ibid., sig. *5r.
[83] Fulke, *Defense*, p. 313.
[84] Pollard, *Records of the English Bible*, pp. 285–6. The whole patent is detailed at pp. 283–6.
[85] Ibid., p. 329. The fact that Geneva bibles were not printed in England until 1575, in the period just after Parker's death, might imply that Parker was actually much less confident in the benefits of biblical plurality than his public statement suggests.

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attempts were made to prevent the printing of Geneva bibles in England, puritan critics responded in kind that the 'restraint of translations and annotations of the Bible, is harmful to learning' and that 'the use of many translations has not disturbed the unity of the Church'.[86] The benefits of biblical plurality were consistently contested in post-Reformation England but articulations of its potential benefits can nevertheless be found from the very beginning. Fulke took these briefer comments and developed them into a wide-ranging defence of the existence and simultaneous circulation of different translations: of biblical plurality. For all these reasons, his defence was more than an academic quibble; it was a monumentally important work.

## III

When requests for a new translation were put to James VI/I in 1604, Archbishop Whitgift and his successor, George Abbot, were reluctant to commission one. They were concerned that it would expose the Church of England to a new swathe of Catholic attacks on its bible and changing translations of it. Whitgift was also worried that a new translation would bring the then official translation of the church, the Bishops' Bible, into 'disrepute'.[87] That Fulke produced his response to the Rheims New Testament using the Bishops' Bible, and that he had done so under the watch of Whitgift, exposes the political motivations behind Fulke's response to Martin and the role of Fulke's patrons in shaping his arguments.

Having produced a defence of bible translations in the plural, Fulke's *Confutation* nevertheless made clear that the Bishops' Bible represented 'The Translation of the Church of England'.[88] This bible had first been published in 1568 at the behest of Archbishop Parker. It was commissioned as a revision of the Great Bible (1539) and was an opportunity to counter the growing popularity of the Geneva Bible (1560), whose politically charged marginal notes Parker perceived to be a threat to the English church.[89] Using the Geneva Bible as the text to counter the Rheims New Testament might well have been preferable, as it made many of the points Fulke wished to put across in its notes; Geneva was also the translation Martin had pitted most attacks against. Fulke's use of the Bishops' Bible's translation in the late 1580s, at a point when the Geneva Bible was then being printed in England (and by the Queen's Printer at that), was thus a statement that the Bishops' Bible had a privileged status even if it was not the most widely read version.[90]

[86] *The seconde parte of a register: being a calendar of manuscripts under that title intended for publication...* ed. Albert Peel and C. H. Firth (2 vols., Cambridge, 1915), II, p. 186.

[87] George Harrison, *A Jacobean journal: being a record of those things most talked of during the years 1603–1606* (London, 1941), p. 108.

[88] Fulke, *Confutation*, fo. 1r.

[89] For Parker's comments on the 'bitter' notes of the Geneva Bible, see Pollard, *Records of the English Bible*, pp. 295–8.

[90] Christopher Barker, printer to the queen, began printing Geneva bibles in 1575 alongside the Bishops' Bible. On the ways in which these two translations were periodically printed in similar forms, see Ian Green, '"Puritan prayer books" and "Geneva bibles": an episode in Elizabethan

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The decision to utilize the Bishops' Bible was not Fulke's alone. He was commissioned to refute Martin only after Archbishop Whitgift had taken the project out of the hands of Thomas Cartwright.[91] Cartwright had commented on everything up to Revelation and so Whitgift's decision to halt the project so near to its completion indicates that serious concerns must have emerged. Cartwright had already been ejected from his Cambridge professorship, having preached in favour of Presbyterianism, but his continued criticisms of the church fed fears that his refutation of the Rheims New Testament would, in a sense, be a criticism of the English church too.[92] He had spent the years 1570–2 in Geneva with Theodore Beza, whose Latin and Greek New Testament translations were used by the translators of the Geneva Bible, and this might have led Whitgift to presume that Cartwright would use his refutation to defend making the Geneva Bible the authorized translation of the English church.[93] At the very least, it seemed unlikely that the Bishops' Bible would receive anything more than a lukewarm defence. Whitgift needed a polemicist who would defend the English church regardless of their personal preoccupations. Fulke fitted the bill.

William Fulke has not hitherto been given satisfactory attention by historians and this may stem from the difficulty of placing him on any kind of religious spectrum. He was a youthful renegade but an aged defender of the Church of England's authority; he was afforded patronage by both the moderate William Cecil and the reform-minded earl of Leicester; he corresponded with both the more radically puritan Thomas Cartwright and the great puritan theologian William Whitaker but was also a collegiate peer of the traditionalist Lancelot Andrews. Fulke's religious identity thus evades neat categorization, but Whitgift nevertheless decided he was the man to refute Martin's arguments. The willingness with which Fulke attempted to construct a consensus around the multiplicity of translations, while providing the Bishops' Bible a privileged role, seems to explain why. His approach allowed Whitgift to have his cake and eat it. For, in 1583, one of Whitgift's first acts as archbishop of Canterbury had been to issue an injunction demanding that parishes use the Bishops' Bible.[94] This demand, that 'only one translation of the Bible – that approved by the Bishops – be allowed in public worship', still recognized that other translations would be used outside worship but illustrates the

publishing', *Transactions of the Cambridge Bibliographical Society*, 11 (1998), pp. 313–49; Harry Spillane, 'Two bibles, one printer: the Bishops' and Geneva bibles in Elizabethan and early Jacobean England', Cambridge University Library, Gordon Duff Prize Essay (2021), essay 32.

[91] Complaints about the suppression of Cartwright's work were then included in the Martin Marprelate tracts: *Oh read ouer D. Iohn Bridges...* (Molesey, 1588; STC 17453), pp. 28–9. On this, see Andrew Pearson, *Thomas Cartwright and Elizabethan puritanism* (Cambridge, 1925), p. 203.

[92] Cartwright's text was not published fully until 1618; even then it was printed abroad, in Leiden. It gives the Bishops' Bible a far less central role and it does not print that translation alongside the Rheims.

[93] See Patrick Collinson, 'Cartwright, Thomas (1534/5–1603)', *ODNB*.

[94] 'Archbishop Whitgift's articles, 1583', in Gerald Bray, ed., *The Anglican canons, 1529–1947* (Woodbridge, 1998), pp. 770–2, at p. 771.

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importance he placed on preserving the Bishops' Bible's position as the authorized translation.[95]

Despite the pressure on Fulke to produce a refutation which appropriately respected the place and authority of the Bishops' Bible, some implicit criticism was included. Yet, when he was confronted with instances in which the Geneva Bible's text was more accurate than the Bishops', he defended 'both as true'.[96] This illustrates how biblical plurality was not only a way of allowing the light of one version to illuminate flaws in another but an essential concept within the English religious landscape. It allowed polemicists within the English church to navigate a world in which the 'translation of the Church of England' often provided a less accurate rendering than another. As Bauckham has observed, Fulke was no politician, but he was certainly astute enough to recognize that his refutation could not rely too heavily on the Geneva translation or present the Bishops' Bible in a damaging light.[97] Although he consistently laboured the point that 'truth is deerer to us, than credit', and so Protestants thought it better 'to reforme a fault, than being admonished, willfully to continue it, or defend it', when the Bishops' Bible was called into question using the Geneva Bible, he chose to resolutely defend the Bishops' Bible.[98] Beginning afresh in the wake of Cartwright's removal from the project, Fulke only went as far as observing that, in producing his *Confutation*, he was 'not meaning thereby, to prejudice the more learned labours, and longer studied commentaries, of them that had taken the matter in hand before me, if they purpose at length to bring them to light'.[99] This, as Lake noted, 'was as close as the now eminently respectable Dr Fulke could come to publicly lamenting the official bar on the publication of Cartwright's book'.[100]

The broader European context of these disputes is essential to understanding Fulke's approach. While he was responding to Martin, the Catholic Reformation (or Counter-Reformation) was making further strides, and missionary priests were arriving on English shores. Fulke understood that the Rheims New Testament was part of this project and he saw it as a Trojan horse designed to carry rebellious and regicidal polemic into England.[101] He accused Martin, for instance, of using the Rheims New Testament notes to justify Catholic attempts to assassinate the queen.[102] That Martin's cavils about biblical plurality aimed to create and exploit fissures and divides within the English church was deemed particularly dangerous by Fulke. The unifying capacity of anti-Catholic rhetoric could only go so far, and so it was essential that Fulke defended the way in which Protestants engaged with the Bible and that he made clear that none of their translations were 'false'.[103] His attempt to

[95] Ibid.
[96] Fulke, *Defense*, p. 104.
[97] Bauckham, 'Career and thought of Dr William Fulke', p. 145.
[98] Fulke, *Defense*, pp. 104–5.
[99] Fulke, *Confutation*, sig. *2r.
[100] Peter Lake, *Moderate puritans and the Elizabethan church* (Cambridge, 1982), p. 74.
[101] Fulke, *Confutation*, fos. 18v, 46r.
[102] Ibid., sig. *2v and fo. 46r.
[103] On the limits of anti-Catholicism, see Milton, *Catholic and Reformed*.

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validate the Elizabethan regime is also evident in his dislike for Martin's use of terms such as 'Protestant', 'Calvinist', and, perhaps most of all, 'Puritane'.[104] Peter Lake has described how 'moderate Puritan divines', including Fulke, attempted to 'construct a general Protestant position' in late Elizabethan England.[105] Martin's divisive terminology chipped away at such a construct and so Fulke had to ensure that his defence of biblical plurality did not present the Church of England as divided between those who preferred one version over another.

Lake's contention that, by constructing a general Protestant position, moderate puritans were 'freed from any need to stick closely to the particularist claims of the English Church' is similarly supported by Fulke's approach.[106] Questions about the peculiarities of the Prayer Book communion service for the sick and dying, especially the use of absolutions, which bothered many puritans, were notably left undefended by Fulke in these debates.[107] With this in mind, his career need not be seen as that of another tiring radical who had abandoned youthful zeal for aged conservatism. Rather, we may see his movement as a response to the changing political and religious circumstances of the late Elizabethan period, in which moderate puritans, among whom Fulke might be numbered, regarded Rome as the biggest threat to true religion, not remnants of popery within the English church.[108]

Fulke's responses must therefore be seen as a product of the 1580s; of that period of increased hostility with Spain; of the decade in which Jesuits began to arrive in England. His *Confutation*, published as the English rebuffed the Armada, was a response not just to Gregory Martin's work but to an increasingly divided religious landscape. His fervent defence of Protestant unity was not only pitched in the English context, however. Significantly, as well as many different editions of English bibles, Martin had integrated refutations of Protestant writers from across Europe into his attacks, most consistently and fervently against Theodore Beza. Just as Martin tried to separate out English Protestants into factions, so too did he present European Protestantism as divided over the question of the Bible's translation. He contended that Protestant works revealed 'one Heretike not onely correcting his fellow every day, but one e[a]gerly refuting and refelling an other'.[109] He observed that bible translations divided Protestants such as 'Bucer, and the Osiandrians and Sacramentaries against Luther for false translations: Luther against Munster, Beza against Castaleo, Castaleo against Beza, Calvin against Servetus, Illyricus both against Calvin and Beza'.[110]

Relating this to the case of the English Bible and Beza's New Testament, Martin said that English Protestants were even 'afraide sometime and ashamed

[104] Fulke, *Defense*, pp. 21, 57, 203–4; Fulke, *Confutation*, fo. 178v.

[105] Peter Lake, 'The significance of the Elizabethan identification of the Pope as Antichrist', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 31 (1980), pp. 161–78, at pp. 161–2.

[106] Ibid., p. 162.

[107] Fulke, *Confutation*, fos. 47v, 176r–v.

[108] Marshall Knappen, *Tudor puritanism* (Chicago, IL, 1930), p. 290.

[109] Fulke, *Defense*, p. 56.

[110] Ibid.

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to expresse in English his [Beza's] false translations in the Latin'.[111] Fulke responded by showing how the history of English bibles proved that the English were not at odds with other Protestants in Europe, nor 'ashamed' of Beza, and so he paraphrased Augustine's comment that 'the multitude and diversite of translations is for the benefite of them that be igoraunt in the tongues, yea & of them also, that be learned in them oftentimes, that of diverse mens translations, they may judge which is the aptest'.[112] Fulke's contention that the light of one translation may illuminate another was not confined to the English bible. He thus made clear that, where other translators across Europe had erred and 'somewhat trodden awrye', there could be no fault in avoiding their missteps in subsequent translations.[113]

As with the succession of English bibles, Fulke concluded that these 'former oversightes' did not constitute heresy and so these translations remained valid.[114] The Fulke–Martin debate should not therefore be seen as a storm in a teacup but a further window into the interconnectedness of English Bible culture, of English Protestantism, with the works and debates of European writers. Reciprocally, it casts further light on ways in which English Catholics engaged with these texts as part of their refutations of Protestant doctrine. Presenting a unified Protestant front was essential to refuting Roman attacks, and defending – even commending – biblical plurality allowed Fulke to turn a potentially divisive seam within Protestantism into a mode of defence. Biblical plurality was a means of building consensus and of preserving the symbolic role of the Bible as a unifying force within English Protestantism and European Protestantism more generally.

## IV

The monumental project of completing the Rheims New Testament was followed by Martin's death. Fulke likewise died shortly after the completion of his refutations, and this helped cement his work as an authoritative statement on English bible translation.[115] Editions of his works were reprinted to coincide with the publication of the Catholic Douay–Rheims Bible, and went through numerous reprintings in the seventeenth century.[116] As his memorial in the

[111] Ibid, p. 57.

[112] Ibid, p. 58. Fulke is paraphrasing Augustine's comments in his *De doctrina christiana*, book II, ch. 5 ('Scripture translated into various languages').

[113] Ibid, p. 58.

[114] Ibid.

[115] McKane, *Selected Christian Hebraists*, p. 78, noted that Martin's death lent Fulke an advantage in that, although his 1588 *Confutation* was produced after Martin's death, it still created the 'illusion of a running debate between himself and Martin'.

[116] When editions of the Rheims New Testament were printed in 1600 and 1633, editions of Fulke's works were printed in 1601 and 1633 in response. See STC nos. 2898 and 2946 (Rheims New Testaments) and STC nos. 2900 and 2947 (Fulke's *Confutation*) and 11423 (*Defense*). Fulke's *Defense* was also deemed to be a significant text by the Parker Society and was reprinted as one of its fifty-six volumes of 'works of the Fathers and Early Writers of the Reformed English Church'. See William Fulke, *A defense of the sincere and true translations of the Holie Scriptures*, ed. Charles H. Hartshorne (Cambridge, 1843).

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parish of Dennington, Suffolk, records, 'His Works will shew him free from all Error, Rome's Foe, Truth's Champion, and Rhemishes Terror'.[117] A telling indication of the enduring impact of Fulke's works is a comment made by George Wither in response to Catholic attacks on English bibles: 'their accusations of our translations, have alreadie been so well answered by Master Doctor Fulke to Martinus'.[118] The pluralization of 'translations' is illustrative of Wither's awareness that Fulke defended all English translations rather than one.[119] Fulke had been resoundingly clear that there was a co-existence of translations in Elizabethan England, not a clash, even if successive generations came to think differently.

The seventeenth century did indeed witness a renewed call for 'one uniform translation' of the Bible to be adopted, and the commissioning of a new translation to bring this about.[120] The publication of the King James Bible in 1611 has come to stand as a watershed moment in bible history, and in the history of English religion and literary culture more widely. Historians have, however, long been sceptical of the almost mythical qualities imbued into the King James Bible, and recent work has helped to advance our understanding of the surprisingly slow and patchy take-up of this version in the first decades after its publication.[121] Nonetheless, by the early seventeenth century there seemed to be a general agreement that biblical plurality was not, as Fulke had tried to argue, engendering practical or spiritual advantages, or enough of them, but rather that it was exacerbating fractious tendencies within the church. Even so, and despite periodic attempts to limit the printing of Geneva bibles in England, the King James Bible did not prove to be a remedy for biblical plurality. The prefatory matter to that version is symbolic of the continued place for other translations within the English church, even after 1611. For, in the preface to a translation which was to draw all to itself 'and none other', scriptural references were printed using the Geneva Bible's translation.[122] The experience of biblical plurality as it had developed in Elizabethan England was not something that could be easily cast off. Though Fulke's justifications for bible plurality in England were relatively short-lived, they cast a long shadow.

The innovation that was the Catholic English New Testament profoundly unsettled the European polemical landscape and forced Catholics and Protestants to adopt new ways of defending and utilizing vernacular translations. As Ethan Shagan contended, 'Protestants and Catholics defined both their identities and their political positions in response to their ideological

[117] Fulke, *Defense*, ed. Hartshorne, p. iv.

[118] George Wither, *A view of the marginal notes of the popish Testament...* (London, 1588; STC 25889), sig. A2v.

[119] See ibid., pp. 174, 199, 259 (misprinted as 295), 260.

[120] See, for instance, Barlow, *Summe and substance*, p. 46.

[121] Kenneth Fincham, 'The King James Bible: crown, church and people', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 71 (2020), pp. 77–97.

[122] 'The translators to the reader', *The Holy Bible...* (London, 1611; STC 2116), sigs. A3v–A8v. James Carleton, *The part of Rheims in the making of the English Bible* (Oxford, 1902), explored the role that the Rheims New Testament played in the making of the King James Bible.

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opponents.'[123] Although English Protestants had been experiencing biblical plurality well before the publication of the Rheims New Testament, that translation forced English Protestants, in particular, to think critically about the culture of biblical plurality which had developed. Moreover, Fulke's responses to Martin cast new light on attempts to build religious consensus in Elizabethan England, and thereby develop Lake's argument about the role of moderate puritanism in holding the Church of England together in the later decades of the sixteenth century.[124] In the face of Catholic attacks, as well as internal disputes between English Protestants (the kind encapsulated in the Martin Marprelate tracts circulating as the *Confutation* was completed), Fulke's work can be seen as part of an attempt to hold together a broad and ever broadening church. Rather than rejecting one translation in favour of another, and thereby cementing divisions in English Protestantism, Fulke used biblical plurality to stitch together a new way of looking at the problem: one which presented that problem as an advantage. That Fulke did so, and that he did not perceive his approach to be a threat to the central Protestant belief in *sola scriptura*, necessitates a reconsideration of long-standing assumptions that different bibles were simply in conflict with each other in post-Reformation England. There was no 'one uniform translation' in England then, but Fulke suggested that that did not matter; it mattered only that there were Protestant English bibles at all.

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[123] Ethan Shagan, 'Introduction: English Catholic history in context', in Ethan Shagan, ed., *Catholics and the 'Protestant nation': religious politics and identity in early modern England* (Manchester, 2005), pp. 1–21, at p. 2.

[124] Lake, *Moderate puritans*.

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