

20. THE ACT OF THE SIX ARTICLES, 1539

History

This Act was the first in what would turn out to be a long series of similar Acts designed to enforce uniformity in religion. It was passed by Parliament between 07 and 16 June 1539, and was inspired by the innate conservatism of the King, who was determined to protect traditional practices. Archbishop Cranmer opposed it, but eventually submitted, though Bishop Shaxton of Salisbury and Bishop Latimer of Worcester felt compelled to resign their sees because of it. It was highly unpopular with those of Protestant sympathies, who referred to it unofficially as "the bloody whip with six strings". The Act remained in force until the King's death (1547), but the severity of some of its provisions, notably 19 and 20, was soon relaxed.

Theology

The Six Articles are mainly concerned with ecclesiastical practices, and touch on few doctrinal matters other than predestination, which was now to be upheld on pain of death. The severity of the punishments, which included death for relatively minor offences, reflected the concern felt by many that the "old religion" was being overthrown, but it also demonstrates the essential hollowness of the opposition to reform. By compromising on superficial matters, and by pointing out the injustice suffered by those who went to their deaths for relatively minor offences, the Protestants were eventually able to promote their cause more quickly and more peacefully than might otherwise have been possible.

N.B. For this edition, the matters at issue, and the six articles dealing with them, are printed in bold type.

01. Where the King's most excellent Majesty is, by God's Law, Supreme Head immediately under him of this whole Church and Congregation of England, intending the conservation of this same Church and Congregation in a true, sincere and uniform doctrine of Christ's religion, calling also to his most blessed and gracious remembrance as well the great and quiet assurance,

prosperous increase and other innumerable commodities, which have ever ensued, come and followed, of concord, agreement and unity in opinions, as also the manifold perils, dangers and inconveniences which have heretofore, in many places and regions, grown, sprung and arisen, of the diversities of minds and opinions especially of matters of Christian religion, and therefore desiring that such a unity might and should be charitably established in all things touching and concerning the same, as the same, so being established, might chiefly be to the honour of Almighty God, the very author and fountain of all true unity and sincere concord, and consequently redound to the common wealth of this his Highness's most noble realm, and of all his loving subjects, and other residents or inhabitants of or in the same; hath therefore caused and commanded that this his most High Court of Parliament, for sundry and many urgent causes and considerations, to be at this time summoned, and also a Synod and Convocation of all the archbishops, bishops and other learned men of the clergy of this his realm, to be in like manner assembled.

And for as much as in the said Parliament, Synod and Convocation, there were certain articles, matters and questions proponed and set forth touching Christian religion, that is to say:

First, whether in the most blessed sacrament of the altar remaineth after the consecration the substance of bread and wine or not;

Secondly, whether it be necessary by God's law that all men should be communicated with both kinds or not;

Thirdly, whether priests, (that is to say, men dedicated to God by priesthood), may by the law of God marry after, or not;

Fourthly, whether vows of chastity or widowhood made to God advisedly by man or woman, be by the law of God to be observed or not;

Fifthly, whether private masses stand with the law of God and be to be used and continued in the Church and Congregation of England, as things whereby good Christian people may and do receive both godly consolation and wholesome benefit or not;

Sixthly, whether auricular confession is necessary to be retained, continued, used and frequented in the Church, or not;

The King's most royal Majesty, most prudently pondering and considering, that by occasion of variable and sundry opinions and judgements of the said articles, great discord and variance has arisen, as well amongst the clergy of this his realm, as amongst a great number of vulgar people, his loving subjects of the same, and being in a full hope and trust that a full and perfect resolution of the said articles should make a perfect concord and unity generally amongst all his loving and obedient subjects, of his most excellent goodness, not only commanded that the said articles should deliberately and advisedly, by his said archbishops, bishops and other learned men of his clergy, be debated, argued and reasoned, and their opinions therein to be understood, declared and known, but also most graciously vouchsafed, in his own princely person, to descend and come into his said High Court of Parliament and Council, and there, like a prince of most high prudence and no less learning, opened and declared many

things of high learning and great knowledge, touching the said articles, matters and questions, for a unity to be had in the same; whereupon, after a great and long, deliberate and advised disputation and consultation had and made concerning the said articles, as well by the consent of the King's Highness, as by the assent of the Lords spiritual and temporal, and other learned men of his clergy in their Convocation, and by the consent of the Commons in this present Parliament assembled, it was and is finally resolved, accorded and agreed in manner and form following, that is to say:

First, that in the most blessed sacrament of the altar, by the strength and efficacy of Christ's mighty word (it being spoken by the priest), is present really, under the form of bread and wine, the natural body and blood of our Saviour Jesus Christ, conceived of the Virgin Mary; and that after the consecration there remaineth no substance of bread and wine, nor any other substance, but the substance of Christ, God and man.

Secondly, that communion in both kinds is not necessary *ad salutem*, by the law of God, to all persons; and that it is to be believed, and not doubted of, but that in the flesh, under the form of bread, is the very blood; and with the blood, under the form of wine, is the very flesh; as well apart, as though they were both together;

Thirdly, that priests after the order of priesthood received, as afore, may not marry, by the law of God.

Fourthly, that vows of chastity or widowhood, by man or woman made to God advisedly, ought to be observed by the law of God; and that it exempts them from other liberties of Christian people, which without that they might enjoy.

Fifthly, that it is meet and necessary that private masses be continued and admitted in this the King's English Church and Congregation, as whereby good Christian people, ordering themselves accordingly, do receive both godly and goodly consolations and benefits; and it is agreeable also to God's law.

Sixthly, that auricular confession is expedient and necessary to be retained and continued, used and frequented in the Church of God.

For the which most godly study, travail and pain of his Majesty, and determination and resolution of the premises, his most humble and obedient subjects, the Lords spiritual and temporal and the Commons in this present Parliament assembled, not only render and give unto his Highness their most high and hearty thanks, and think themselves most bounden to pray for the long continuance of his Grace's most royal estate, but also being desirous that his most godly enterprise may be well accomplished, and brought to a full end and perfection, and so established that the same might be to the honour of God, and after to the common quiet, unity and concord to be had in the whole body of this realm for ever, most humbly beseech his royal Majesty, that the resolution and determination above written of the said articles may be established, and perpetually perfected, by authority of this present Parliament:

It is therefore ordained and enacted by the King our Sovereign Lord, the Lords

spiritual and temporal, and the Commons in this present Parliament assembled, and by the authority of the same, that if any person or persons within this realm of England, or any other the King's dominions, after the twelfth of July next coming (12 July 1539), by word, writing, printing, ciphering or in any other wise do publish, preach, teach, say, affirm, declare, dispute, argue or hold any opinion, that in the blessed sacrament of the altar, under form of bread and wine, after the consecration thereof, there is not present really the natural body and blood of our Saviour Jesus Christ, conceived of the Virgin Mary; or that after the said consecration there remaineth any substance of bread and wine, or any other substance but the substance of Christ, God and man; or after the time above said, publish, preach, teach, say, affirm, declare, dispute, argue or hold opinion, that in the flesh under form of bread, is not the very blood of Christ, or that with the blood under form of wine is not the very flesh of Christ, as well apart as though they were both together, or by any of the means abovesaid or otherwise preach, teach, declare or affirm the said sacrament to be of other substance than is abovesaid, or by any means contempt, deprave or despise the said blessed sacrament, that then every such person and persons so offending, their aiders, comforters, counsellors, consenters and abettors therein, being thereof convicted in form underwritten, by the authority abovesaid, shall be deemed and adjudged heretics, and that every such offence shall be judged manifest heresy, and that every such offender and offenders shall therefore have and suffer judgement, execution, pain and pains of death by way of burning, without any abjuration, clergy or sanctuary to be therefore permitted, had, allowed, admitted, or suffered; and also shall therefore forfeit and lose to the King's Highness, his heirs and successors, all his or their honours, manors, castles, lands, tenancies, rents, revisions, services, possessions and all other his or their hereditaments, goods and chattels, terms and freeholds whatsoever they be, which any such offender or offenders shall have, at the time of any such offence or offences committed or done at any time after, as in cases of high treason.

02. And furthermore, be it enacted by the authority of this present Parliament, that if any person or persons, after the said twelfth day of July (12 July 1539), preach in any sermon or collation openly made to the King's people, or teach in any common school or to other congregation of people, or being called before such judges and according to such form of the law as hereafter shall be declared, do obstinately affirm, uphold, maintain or defend that the communion of the said blessed sacrament in both kinds, that is to say, in form of bread and also of wine, is necessary for the health of man's soul to be given or ministered to any person in both kinds, or that it is necessary so to be received or taken by any person, other than by priests being at mass and consecrating the same; or that any man, after the order of priesthood received as aforesaid, may marry or contract matrimony; or that private masses be not lawful or not laudable or should not be celebrated, had nor used in this realm, nor be not agreeable to the laws of God; or that auricular confession is not expedient and necessary to be retained and continued, used and frequented in the Church of God; or if any

priest, after the said twelfth day of July (12 July 1539), or any other man or woman which advisedly hath vowed or after the said day advisedly do vow chastity or widowhood, do actually marry or contract matrimony with any person, that then all and every person and persons so preaching, teaching, obstinately affirming, upholding, maintaining or defending, or making marriage or contract of matrimony as above specified, be and shall be by authority above written, deemed and adjudged a felon and felons; and that every offender in the same being duly convicted or attainted by the laws underwritten, shall therefore suffer pains of death as in cases of felony without any benefit of clergy or privilege of Church or sanctuary to him or her to be allowed in that behalf, and shall forfeit all his or her lands and goods as in cases of felony; and that it shall be lawful to the patron or patrons, of any manner of benefice which any such offender at the time of his said conviction or attainder had, to present one other incumbent thereunto, as if the same person so convicted or attainted had been bodily deceased.

03. Also be it enacted by the authority aforesaid that if any person or persons, after the said twelfth of July (12 July 1539) by word, writing, printing, ciphering or otherwise than is above rehearsed, publish, declare or hold opinion that the said communion of the blessed sacrament in both kinds aforesaid is necessary for the health of man's soul to be given or ministered in both kinds, and so ought or should be given or ministered to any person, or ought or should be so in both kinds received or taken by any person other than by priests, being at mass and consecrating the same as is aforesaid; or that any man after the order of priesthood received as is aforesaid, may marry or may make contract of matrimony; or that any man or woman which advisedly hath made or shall make a vow to God of chastity or widowhood, may marry or may make contract of matrimony; or that private masses be not lawful or not laudable or should not be celebrated, had nor used, nor be agreeable to the laws of God; or that auricular confession is not expedient and necessary to be retained and continued, used and frequented in the Church of God; every person being for every such offence duly convicted and attainted, by the laws underwritten, shall forfeit and lose to the King our Sovereign Lord, all his goods and chattels for ever, and also the profits of all his lands, tenancies, annuities, fees and offices during his life, and all his benefices and spiritual promotions shall be utterly void; and also shall suffer imprisonment of his body at the will and pleasure of our said Sovereign Lord the King; and if any such person or persons, being once convicted of any of the offences mentioned in this article as is aforesaid, do afterwards *eftsones* (i.e. again, *ed.*) offend in any of the same and be thereof accused, indicted or presented and convicted again by the authority of the laws underwritten, that then every such person and persons so being twice convicted and attainted of the said offences or of any of them, shall be adjudged a felon and felons; and shall suffer judgement, execution and pains of death, loss and forfeiture of lands and goods as in cases of felony, without any privilege of clergy or sanctuary to be in any wise permitted, admitted or allowed in that behalf.

04. Be it further enacted by the authority abovesaid, that if any person which is or hath been a priest, before this present Parliament or during the time of session of the same, hath married and hath made any contract of matrimony with any woman, or that any man or woman, which before the making of this Act advisedly hath vowed chastity or widowhood before this present Parliament or during the session of the same, hath married or contracted matrimony with any person; that then every such marriage and contract of matrimony shall be utterly void and of none effect; and that the ordinaries within whose dioceses or jurisdiction the person or persons so married or contracted is to be resident or abiding, shall from time to time make separation and divorces of the said marriages and contracts.

05. And further be it enacted by the authority abovesaid, that if any man which is or hath been a priest, as is aforesaid, at any time from and after the said twelfth day of July next coming (12 July 1539) do carnally keep or use any woman, to whom he is or hath been married, or with whom he hath contracted matrimony, or openly been conversant, nay kept company and familiarity with any such woman to the evil example of other persons, every such carnal use, copulation, open conversation, keeping of company and familiarity be and shall be deemed and adjudged felony, as well against the man as the woman; and that every such person so offending shall be inquired of, tried, punished, suffer, lose and forfeit all and every thing and things as other felons made and declared by this Act, and as in case of felony as is aforesaid.

06. And be it further enacted by authority abovesaid, that if any person or persons at any time hereafter contemn or contemptuously refuse, deny or abstain to be confessed, at the time commonly accustomed within this realm and Church of England, or contemn and contemptuously refuse, deny or abstain to receive the holy and blessed sacrament abovesaid at the time commonly used and accustomed for the same, that then every such offender being thereof duly convicted or attainted, by the laws underwritten, shall suffer such imprisonment and make such fine and ransom to the King our Sovereign Lord and his heirs as by his Highness or by his or their council shall be ordered or adjudged in that behalf; and if any such offender or offenders at any time or times after the said conviction or attainder so had, do *eftsones* (i.e. again, *ed.*) contemn or contemptuously refuse, deny or abstain to be confessed or to be communicated in manner and form above written, and be thereof duly convicted or attainted by the laws underwritten, that then every such offence shall be deemed and adjudged felony and the offender or offenders therein shall suffer pains of death and lose and forfeit all his and their goods, lands and tenancies, as in cases of felony.

07. And for full and effectual execution of the premises before devised, ordered and enacted by this Act, be it further enacted by the authority of this present Parliament, that immediately after the said twelfth day of July next coming (12 July 1539), sundry commissions shall be made from time to time into every shire of this realm and Wales, and in and to such other places within the King's dominions as shall please his Majesty, to be directed to the

archbishop or bishop of the diocese and to his chancellor or commissary, and to such other persons as shall be named by his Highness, or by such other as his Majesty at his pleasure shall appoint to name the same, which archbishop or bishop or his chancellor or commissary to be one, should hold and keep their sessions within the limits of their commission four several times of the year at the least, or oftener if they shall think it expedient by their discretions, and shall have power and authority by virtue of this Act and their said commission, as well to take information and accusation by the oaths and depositions of two able and lawful persons at the least, as to inquire by oaths of twelve men of all and singular the heresies, felonies, contempts and other offences above written, committed, done or perpetrated within the limits of their commission; and that every such accusation and information containing the matter, names and surnames and dwelling places of the offenders and the day, year, place and county when and wherein their offences were committed, shall be of as good force and effect in the law as if the matter therein contained had been presented by verdicts of twelve men.

08. And nevertheless it is further enacted that every of the said archbishops and bishops, and every of their chancellors, commissaries, archdeacons and other ordinaries, having any peculiar ecclesiastical jurisdiction within this realm or in Wales, or in any other the King's dominions, shall have full power and authority by virtue of this Act as well to inquire in their visitations and senys (possibly: synods, *ed.*), as there and elsewhere within their jurisdictions at any other time or place, to take accusations and informations as is aforesaid of the heresies, felonies, contempts and offences above mentioned, done, committed or perpetrated within the limits of their jurisdictions and authorities; and that every such accusation, information and presentment so taken or had as is aforesaid, shall be of as good force and effect as if the matter therein contained had been presented before the justices of peace in their sessions; and also that justices of peace in their sessions, and every steward, understeward or deputy of steward of any leet or lawday in their leet or lawday, shall have like power and authority by virtue of this Act to inquire by the oaths of twelve lawful men of all and singular the heresies, felonies, contempts and other offences above written, done, perpetrated or committed within the limits of their commissions and authorities.

09. And it is also enacted by the authority aforesaid, that every such person or persons, after whom any presentment, information or accusation shall be made or taken as is aforesaid, shall examine the accusers what other witness were by and present at the time of doing and committing of the offence whereof the information, accusation or presentment shall be made, and how many others than the accusers have knowledge thereof; and shall have power and authority to bind by recognizance to be taken afore them, as well the said accusers as all such other persons whom the same accusers shall declare to have knowledge of the offences by them presented or informed, every of them in five pounds to the King our Sovereign Lord, to appear before the commissioners afore whom the offender or offenders shall be tried at the day of the trial of such

offenders; and that all and singular indictments, presentments, accusations, informations and recognizances taken and had as is aforesaid, within twenty days next after the taking of the same shall be certified in due form by writing upon parchment by the taker or takers thereof under his or their seals, unto any one of the said commissioners to be appointed as is aforesaid, within the limits of whose commission the heresies, felonies, contempts and offences, whereof any such presentment, indictment, information or accusation shall be taken or had as is above written, shall be committed, done or perpetrated; and if any person or persons, which hereafter shall happen to take any such accusation, information, presentment or recognizances as is above said, do make default of the certificate thereof contrary to the form above rehearsed, that then every person and persons so offending shall forfeit to our Sovereign Lord the King for every such default ten pounds.

10. And it is further enacted by the authority abovesaid, that the said commissioners or three of them at the least, as is aforesaid by virtue of this Act, and their commission shall have full power and authority to make like process against every person and persons indicted, presented or accused in form as is above remembered, as is used and accustomed in case of felony, and that as well within the limits of their commission as into all other shires and places of the realm, Wales and other the King's dominions, as well within liberties as without, and the same process to be good and effectual in the law as in cases of felony; and upon the appearance of any of the offenders shall have full power and authority by virtue of this Act and the said commission to hear and determine the aforesaid heresies, felonies, contempts and other offences according to the laws of this realm and the effects of this Act.

11. And it is also enacted by the authority abovesaid, that every of the said commissioners, upon any such accusation, presentment or information, shall endeavour himself effectually, without affection, dread or corruption, to apprehend and take the offenders, and after the apprehension of any such offender or offenders, shall have full power and authority to let any person or persons so accused or presented upon sufficient sureties by their discretion to bail for their appearance, to be tried according to the tenor, form and effect of this Act.

12. And further it is enacted by the authority abovesaid that if any person or persons which hereafter shall be named and assigned to be commissioner or commissioners as is abovesaid, be accused, indicted or presented of or for any of the offences above written, that then all and every such commissioner or commissioners so accused, indicted and presented, shall be examined, put to answer and tried of and upon any such offence according to the tenor and effect of this Act, before such other person or persons as it shall please the King's Highness to name, assign and appoint by his grace's commission, to hear and determine the same.

13. And it is further enacted by authority abovesaid, that no person or persons which at any time hereafter shall be accused, indicted or presented, as is abovesaid, shall be admitted to the challenge of any person or persons, which

shall be empanelled for the trial of his or their offence, for any matter or cause other than for malice or enmity, which challenge shall forthwith be tried in like manner as other challenges be used to be tried in cases of felony.

14. And it is further enacted by the authority abovesaid, that all foreign pleas triable by the country, which at any time hereafter shall be pleaded by any person or persons hereafter to be arraigned, or put to answer upon any accusation, indictment or presentment, of or for any of the offences above specified or of or for any of them, shall be tried before the same commissioners afore whom such person or persons shall be arraigned or put to answer, and by the jurors that shall try the said offence or offences without any further respite or delay.

15. And it is further enacted by the authority abovesaid, that all mayors, sheriffs, stewards, bailiffs of liberties, gaolers and other officers and ministers, of what name, degree or condition soever they be, and every of them, shall from time to time truly and diligently receive and serve all and all manner the process, precepts and commandments to them or any of them by the said commissioners or any of them to be made, given or directed touching or concerning the premises or any parcel thereof; and shall also from time to time be obedient and attendant unto the said commissioners for the time being for the due execution of this present Act or of anything therein contained.

16. And it is also enacted that every person which shall be named to be commissioner in the said commission, after that he hath knowledge thereof, shall effectually put his diligence and attendance in and about the execution of the said commission; and before he shall take upon him the execution of the said commission, shall take a corporal oath before the Lord Chancellor of England for the time being, or before him or them to whom the said Lord Chancellor shall direct the King's writ of *Dedimus potestatem* to take the same, the tenor of which oath hereafter ensueth: "Ye shall swear that ye to your cunning, wit and power shall truly and indifferently execute the authority to you given by the King's commission made for correction of heretics and other offenders mentioned in the same commission, without any favour, affection, corruption, dread or malice to be borne to any person or persons, as God you help and all saints." And in case that any of the said persons named to be commissioners refuse to take the said oath, or willingly absent or eloin (i.e. distance, *ed.*) himself from the taking of the said oath, then every such person so offending, and the same offence estreated and certified into the King's Exchequer by the said Lord Chancellor, or by him or them to whom any such writ of *Dedimus potestatem* as is aforesaid shall be directed, shall forfeit and lose to our said Sovereign Lord the King for every time so offending, five marks of lawful money.

17. And it is also enacted by the authority abovesaid, that the said commissioners and every of them, shall from time to time have full power and authority by virtue of this Act to take into his or their keeping or possession all and all manner of books, which be or have been or hereafter shall be set forth, read or declared within this realm or other the King's dominions, wherein is or be contained or comprised any clause, article, matter or sentence

repugnant or contrary to the tenor, form or effect of this present Act, or any of the articles contained in the same; and the said commissioners, or three of them at the least, to burn or otherwise destroy the said books or any part of them, as unto the said commissioners or unto three of them at the least shall be thought expedient by their discretions.

18. And it is also enacted by the authority abovesaid, that every parson, vicar, curate or parish priest of every parish church within this realm or other the King's dominions, or his or their deputy, upon the Sunday next after the first day of September next ensuing (07 September 1539), and so from thenceforth once in every quarter of the year at the least, shall openly, plainly and distinctly read this present Act in the parish church where he is parson, vicar, curate, parish priest or deputy, unto his or their parishioners then assembled together to hear divine service; and that every such parson, vicar, curate, or parish priest making default of reading this Act, contrary to the form aforesaid, shall forfeit unto our said Sovereign Lord, his heirs or successors, for every such default, forty shillings sterling.

19. Saving to all and singular person and persons, bodies politic and corporate, their heirs and successors, and to the heirs and successors of every of them, other than all and singular such person and persons that shall be hereafter convicted or attainted of or for any of the offences or contempts above specified, their heirs and successors, and the heirs and successors of every of them, all such right, title, claim, interest, entry, possession, rents, reversions, fees, annuities, commons, offices, profits and demands whatsoever as they or any of them have, or then at the time of the said conviction or attainder had, shall have, of, in or to any honours, castles, lordships, manors, lands, tenancies, liberties, franchises, advowsons and other hereditaments, which any such person or persons being so convicted or attainted as is aforesaid, had or were entitled to have at the time of their offence or offences committed or at any time after, and that in as ample manner, form and condition to all intents, constructions and purposes as if this Act had never been had nor made; anything contained in this Act to the contrary in any wise notwithstanding. Provided always that the Lords shall not have nor claim any escheats of any offender or offenders that shall be judged to be burned by authority of this Act.

20. Be it also further enacted by the authority aforesaid, not giving advantage or detriment to any article aforesaid, that if any man, which is or hath been priest or hereafter shall be, at any time after the said twelfth day of July (12 July 1539), do carnally use and accustom any woman, or keep her as his concubine, as by paying for her board, maintaining her with money, array or any other gifts or means, to the evil example of other persons, that then every such offender being thereof duly convicted or attainted by the laws mentioned in this Act, shall forfeit and lose all his goods and chattels, benefices, prebends and other spiritual promotions and dignities, and also shall have and suffer imprisonment of his body at the King's will and pleasure; and that every of the said benefices, prebends and other promotions and dignities shall be to all intents and purposes utterly void as if the said offender had resigned or

permuted; and if any such offender or offenders, at any time after the said conviction or attainder, eftsones (i.e. again, *ed.*) commit, do or perpetrate the said offences or any of them next afore rehearsed, and be thereof duly convicted or attainted by the laws aforesaid, that then all and every such offence and offences shall be deemed and adjudged felony, and the offender and offenders therein shall suffer pains of death and lose and forfeit all his and their goods, lands and tenancies as in cases of felony, without having any benefit of clergy or sanctuary.

21. And be it further enacted by the authority aforesaid, that those women with whom all or singular of the foresaid priests shall in any of the foresaid ways have to do with or carnally know as is aforesaid, shall have like punishment as the priest.

22. And because disputations and doubts might perhaps arise hereafter upon these words in this Act, that is to say, advisedly made to God, be it therefore provided and enacted by authority aforesaid, that these words in the Act, that is to say, advisedly made to God, for vows of chastity or widowhood, shall be alonely taken, expounded or interpreted to bind such person or persons and none other (saving priests) to and by the same, which at the time of any of their so vowing, being thereto admitted, were or shall be of the age of twenty-one years or above, and then did or do consent, submit themselves or condescend to the same, and continue or continued in observation of it any while after; unless any such person or persons do or can duly prove any unlawful coercion or compulsion done to them or any of them, for making of any such vow.

21. CRANMER'S PREFACE TO THE GREAT BIBLE, 1540

History

Within months of the final break with Rome, the Convocation of Canterbury petitioned the King to order "that the Holy Scripture should be translated into the vulgar English tongue by certain good and learned men, to be nominated by his Majesty, and should be delivered to the people for their instruction." But even before the King could accede to this request, Miles Coverdale managed to produce a complete English Bible, which incorporated most of William Tyndale's work (1535). Two years later, John Rogers, using the pseudonym of Thomas Matthew, produced the so-called Matthew Bible, which also relied heavily on Tyndale's work.

Given this situation, the King's advisers thought it best to use Coverdale, and gave him the authority to make a further revision of Matthew's Bible. In 1538 the Second Henrician Injunctions directed that a copy of the Bible in English (which would in effect be this revision) should be placed in every parish church by Easter (06 April) 1539.

The work itself was soon ready, and was sent to Paris late in 1538 for typesetting and printing. Unfortunately, it fell foul of the Inquisition there, just as the printing was nearly complete, and the whole operation had to be started over, this time on English soil. The result was that the Great Bible, as it came to be called, was not ready until April 1539, too late to meet the requirement of the Injunctions. A new order was therefore issued, extending the target date to All Saints' Day (01 November) 1539. Once again there were difficulties, though this time it was because demand for the edition was such that supplies were soon exhausted!

A second edition was soon needed, and was ready in April 1540. For this edition, Archbishop Thomas Cranmer provided a Preface, which soon became its hallmark. The Great Bible, or "Cranmer's Bible" as it now came to be called, went through a total of seven editions before further publication was suspended, at the end of 1541. An eighth edition came out in 1549, and ninth appeared in 1553, though as a result of Queen Mary's accession, most of it remained unsold. Copies