MORGAN, WILLIAM (c. 1545 - 1604), bishop, and translator of the Bible into Welsh

Name: William Morgan
Date of birth: c. 1545
Date of death: 1604
Spouse: Catherine ferch George
Parent: Lowri ferch William ap John ap Madog
Parent: John ap Morgan ap Llywelyn
Gender: Male
Occupation: bishop, and translator of the Bible into Welsh
Area of activity: Literature and Writing; Religion; Scholarship and Languages
Author: Glanmor Williams

Born at Ty Mawr, Wybrnant, in the parish of Penmachno, the son of John ap Morgan ap Llywelyn, a copyholder on the Gwydir estates, and his wife Lowri, daughter of William ap John ap Madog. Reputed to have received his early education at the hands of a former monk, he entered S. John's College, Cambridge, as a sub-sizar in 1565. He graduated B.A. in 1568, and M.A. in 1571; and later became a B.D. (1578) and D.D. (1583). It is unlikely that Morgan was a pupil of the eminent Hebrew scholar, John Immanuel Tremellius, who was a tutor at Cambridge from 1550 to 1553 only, though he did visit London for a period in 1565. However, Morgan could have used Tremellius's Latin translation of the Old Testament, which was published in Frankfurt in 1575 and reprinted in London in 1579-80. It was probably about this time that he first imbibed Protestant doctrines. He was ordained deacon at Ely, 15 April 1568; his application states that he was then 23 years old; he was priested 21 December in the same year.

From 1572-7 he may well have held the vicarage of Llanbadarn-fawr, Cardiganshire. He afterwards became vicar of Welshpool (1575-9), sinecure rector of Denbigh (1575-96), vicar of Llanrhaeadr-ym-Mochnant (1578-1595?) and of Llanarmon (1578-95?), rector of Llanfyllin (1579-1601), and parson of Pennant Melangell (1588-95). Life was made very difficult for him at Llanrhaeadr by the hostility of some of his parishioners. Chief among his enemies was Evan Meredith of the family of Lloran Uchaf, whose enmity was first roused when Morgan thwarted his nephew's aspirations by securing the marriage of a wealthy heiress to Robert Wynn of Gwydir. In 1579 Morgan testified in an action concerning the validity of Meredith's marriage, and during the hearing of the case first came into contact with archbishop Whitgift who greatly encouraged him in his work of translation. The upshot of these quarrels was a suit brought by Morgan, and countersuits by his enemies, in the Court of Star Chamber and the Council of the Marches, 1589-91. The Star Chamber records reveal Morgan as being on the whole a conscientious parson much harassed by the malice of his enemies.

It is just possible that Morgan began to translate the Bible before leaving Cambridge; certainly he completed it during his sojourn at Llanrhaeadr - a remarkable fact in face of the bitter quarrels there. Thanks to the hospitality of Gabriel Goodman, he was able to supervise the printing of his *Bible*, which began in London towards the end of 1587. It was published some time between September and 20 November 1588. In his dedication to the queen, Morgan eloquently argued the pressing need for the translation. Though the language of his *Bible* was somewhat pedantic, he incorporated with the vigour and purity of the medieval classics a new flexibility and wider range of expression. His work marks the real beginnings of the literature and Protestantism of modern Wales. In 1588, also, his translation of the Psalms appeared separately.

On 30 June 1595 he was consecrated bishop of Llandaff, retaining his living of Llanfyllin and possibly others. Translated to the slightly wealthier see of St Asaph in 1601, he resigned his other benefices, but held the archdeaconry of St Asaph 'in commendam.' As a bishop, he showed notable zeal in encouraging preaching and rebuilding. His determination to safeguard the temporal possessions of the see led him into sharp conflict with David Holland of Teirdan, and into an even more bitter controversy with Sir John Wynn. He died 10 September 1604. Morgan married Catherine, daughter of George, widow of William Lloyd, but died *s.p.*

For Morgan's use of Tremellius's Old Testament and his methods as a translator see Isaac Thomas , *Yr Hen Destament Cymraeg, 1551-1620* (1988) and *Y Testament Newydd Cymraeg, 1551-1620* (1976). For Morgan's status as a scholar see also R. Geraint Gruffydd , ' *The Translating of the Bible into the Welsh Tongue*,' 1988.

Author

Sir Glanmor Williams

Sources

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Charles Ashton, *Bywyd ac Amserau yr Esgob Morgan, cyfieithydd cyntaf y Beibl Cymraeg* (Treherbert 1891)

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W. J. Gruffydd, *Llenyddiaeth Cymru o 1450 hyd 1600*

T. E. Jacob, *The Life and Times of Bishop William Morgan, the translator of the Bible into Welsh* (1890)

H. B. Thomas, *A History of the Diocese of St. Asaph* (1874)

Venn, *Alumni Cantabrigienses*

his application for orders is printed in *The Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion*, 1922-3, 128

Further Reading

Isaac Thomas, *William Morgan and His Bible* (University of Wales Press 1988)

Wikipedia Article: William Morgan

Works

William Morgan, *Y Beibl cyssegr-lan: sef Yr Hen Destament, a'r Newydd* (London 1588)

William Morgan, John Davies and Richard Parry (eds.), *Y Bibl Cyssegr-lan: sef Yr Hen Destament, a'r Newydd* (Llundain 1630)

Additional Links

NLW Archives: NLW MS 13181B: Hebrew bible, [1525x1858]

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