

# CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 16: William Tyndale: Early Reformer & Bible Translator

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## William Tyndale: From the Publisher

How pleased we are to devote an issue to William Tyndale! His name is vaguely familiar to many modern Christians, but the majority of details about his fascinating life are familiar only to church history and literary scholars. Yet we will see with him, as we've seen with others treated in Christian History, that though he founded no modern movement, he nonetheless profoundly influenced our history and placed us enormously in his debt.

Tyndale's main opposition during his lifetime came from the Roman Catholic Church's supporters in England, with Lord Chancellor Sir Thomas More being among his most formidable foes. Thus, a special word of notice is in order for what the Catholic University of America Press is currently doing. CUAP is in the process of preparing newly revised editions of all of Tyndale's polemical works. This series of books, to be called "The Independent Works of William Tyndale," is scheduled for publication between 1992 and 1998.

Another notable part of this project is that Dr. Donald Smeeton, a contributor to this issue of Christian History, is set to coedit a major work in the series. Smeeton, a Protestant, is assistant dean at the International Correspondence Institute, a Christian correspondence school based in Brussels, Belgium. His doctoral dissertation was about Tyndale and, interestingly, he received his doctorate from the Catholic University of Louvain, the same school that Tyndale's betrayer attended long ago.

We see with Tyndale, as with so many other figures we've treated, how God used an individual devoted to the rigors of research to advance His work—a point worth considering by young Christians making career decisions, in an age when, even in religious circles, the trend often seems to be to choose style rather than substance.

We are also struck with the truth (though we've seen it before—for example with Jan Amos Comenius in Issue 13) that a man of God, with fierce loyalties to his homeland, can sometimes, because of unique circumstances, best exercise his patriotism and faith only in exile. For Tyndale, as for Comenius, exile was a crucible that served to release and refine his distinctive gifts.

Tyndale's story also reminds us that Christians who set no limits on their dedication can have massive positive influence on the powerful forces in control of societies. This is seen in the fact that Tyndale, who was once seen as the public's enemy, is today heralded as one of its greatest benefactors, and that the Bible in English is a recognized bestseller every year.

Those of you who've been reading Christian History since its early days know that it was born out of my work as a filmmaker, being conceived while I was producing *First Fruits*—a film about the beginnings of the Moravian missionary movement. I realized then that we simply could not provide, in the film, all the background material necessary to **really tell** that magnificent story. So this magazine format was devised and tested, and was well-received.

The magazine soon became an entity all its own, published by the Christian History Institute. But we at the institute are still always eager to tie our efforts to noteworthy film productions that cover subject matter we're also interested in treating. When used together, the film and print media can compliment each other and make for a penetrating communication experience. It opens up a new and compelling way to approach our history.

Two such opportunities currently present themselves. First, we are happy to announce that the Christian History Institute itself plans to soon begin production on a series of documentary films about the early church. Covering from the end of the New Testament's writing to the conversion of Constantine, this project was undertaken by CHI in cooperation with EO Television, a Christian TV network in Holland. More on this series in the future.

The second opportunity has to do with this issue. We were delighted to cooperate with Grenville Films in England on the production of a major new film on the life of Tyndale called ***God's Outlaw***. We commend the use of this issue with the viewing of the film, and express our gratitude for use of photography from the film that appears on the cover and these two pages.

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## William Tyndale: Did You Know?

That William Tyndale translated and published, in 1526, the first-ever mechanically-printed New Testament in the English language?

That he did this in an era when the English Catholic church had in effect a law that made it a crime punishable by death to translate the Bible into English, and when on one day in 1519, the church authorities publicly burned a woman and six men for nothing more than teaching their children English versions of the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments and the Apostles' Creed?!

That Tyndale's translations (he produced multiple editions) were so fundamentally correct and so generally smooth in word flow that more than 90 percent of his wordings appeared in the King James Version that was published nearly 100 years later, and more than 75 percent of his wordings appear in the Revised Standard Version of 1952?

That at about the age of 42, he was strangled and then burned at the stake for the heresies of translating the Bible into English and questioning the authority of the pope and the established church?

That many of the English Catholic parish priests in Tyndale's day were so corrupt that they were widely known as "common drunkards" and regular hosts at their abbeyes to "brothel women"? Even Cardinal Thomas Wolsey, the pope's personal representative in England, lived with a "wife" for several years and had two children, then gave her away to another man, complete with dowry!

That in their efforts to suppress circulation of Tyndale's first edition of an English New Testament, the English Catholic authorities wasted the equivalent of several thousand dollars trying to buy up and burn all the copies he'd had printed? And they did this twice! The waste to them was that their funds, funnelled secretly back to Tyndale, made it possible for him to print up even more copies of subsequent editions.

That this simple Englishman, probably of common stock, was reputed by at least one scholarly acquaintance to have mastered seven languages, including "Hebrew, Greek, Latin, Italian, Spanish, English [and] French"? In addition, he was obviously more-than-familiar-enough with German to translate and interpret even the finest points of Luther's writings.

That despite it being severely against the English Catholic church's law in that day to possess a copy of Tyndale's *Obedience of the Christian Man*, Lady Anne Boleyn possessed a copy and passed it on to King Henry VIII, who loved it and said, "This book is for me and all kings to read."

That soon after this, King Henry decided he needed a writer and scholar like Tyndale to advance his cause of gaining a divorce from his first wife and establishing himself as a higher authority in England than the pope, so he sent agents after Tyndale to offer him a salary and safe passage back to England?

That Tyndale respectfully refused this offer, saying he would return to England only if the king granted approval and made arrangements for the Bible to be translated into the English language?

That less than a year after Tyndale's martyrdom, Henry gave his official approval to an English Bible

that, unbeknownst to him, was nearly 70 percent composed of Tyndale's work? The king proclaimed, "If there be no heresies in it, let it be spread abroad among all the people!"

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## A Man for All People: Introducing William Tyndale

TONY LANE Dr. Tony Lane is a professor of Bible at London Bible College. This article is expanded from a chapter he wrote for the forthcoming book, *Great Leaders of the Christian Church* (Moody Press, 1988, edited by John Woodbridge)

Sometime in the early 1490s, probably between 1493 and 1495, a son to be named William was born to a Tyndale family that lived near the Welsh border. The Tyndales (who also called themselves Hutchins) were an important family in the west of Gloucestershire, but William, together with at least two brothers, apparently came from a lesser branch of the family.

Around 1512, Tyndale went as a student to Magdalen College at Oxford, which at that time was a sort of prep school attached to the university. At some point after gaining his M.A. in 1515, he moved to Cambridge University for a time. Cambridge was rife with Lutheran ideas around the early 1520s, and it's likely he acquired his Protestant convictions while studying there, if not before.

At a later date he expressed his dissatisfaction with the teaching of theology at the universities: "In the universities they have ordained that no man shall look on the Scripture until he be nozzled in heathen learning eight or nine years, and armed with false principles with which he is clean shut out of the understanding of the Scripture."

In 1521 he left the university world to join the household of Sir John Walsh at Little Sodbury Manor, north of Bath. It's unclear exactly what role he played in the household—he may have been the chaplain or a secretary to Sir John—but most probably he was a tutor to the children.

Many of the local clergy came to dine at the Walshes' manor, which gave Tyndale ample opportunity both to be shocked by their ignorance of the Bible and to become embroiled in controversy with them. To one such cleric he declared: "If God spare my life, ere many years pass, I will cause a boy that driveth the plow shall know more of the Scripture than thou dost."

Here Tyndale was echoing Erasmus' famous inscription in the preface to his Greek New Testament: "I would to God that the plowman would sing a text of the Scripture at his plow and that the weaver would hum them to the tune of his shuttle."

Tyndale began to clearly feel the call to translate the Bible into English and distribute it. At this time the only English translation available was the hand-copied Wycliffe Bible, which was distributed clandestinely by the Lollards, the followers of the 14th century's John Wycliffe (see *Christian History Issue 3*). But this had never been printed. Furthermore, it was inaccurate in many ways, having been translated only from the Latin Vulgate, rather than from the original Greek and Hebrew.

### **Ban the Bible!**

Because of the perceived threat of the Lollards, the Church had in 1408 banned translation of the Bible into English. So Tyndale left Little Sodbury in search of ecclesiastical approval for his projected translation. He went to London and obtained an interview with the bishop of London, Cuthbert Tunstall.

This was a shrewd choice, as Tunstall was a scholarly man and a friend of Erasmus. But at that time, Tunstall was more concerned to prevent the growth of Lutheranism than to promote the English Bible, so

Tyndale received no encouragement from him. Tyndale soon perceived that "not only was there no room in my lord of London's palace to translate the New Testament, but that there was no place to do it in all England."

The frustrated translator briefly lived in London, where he received financial support from a wealthy cloth merchant named Humphrey Monmouth. With the backing of Monmouth and other merchants, Tyndale resolved to leave the country in order to engage in the work of translation on the Continent.

So in 1524 he sailed for Germany, never to see England again. In Hamburg he worked on the New Testament, which was ready for the press by the following year. A suitable printer was found in Cologne, and the pages began to roll off the press. But one of Tyndale's assistants spoke too freely over his wine, and news of the project came to the ears of Johann Dobneck, alias Cochlaeus, a leading opponent of the Reformation. He arranged for a raid on the press, but Tyndale had been warned—just in time, he fled with the pages thus far printed. Only one copy of this incomplete edition survives.

Tyndale moved to Worms, a more reform-minded city, where the first complete New Testament printed in English was published the following year. Of the 6,000 copies printed, only two have survived. Yet this scarcity is easily explained. As more and more of the small testaments trickled into England, the bishops there did all they could to eradicate them. In 1526 none other than Bishop Tunstall preached against the translation and had copies ceremoniously burnt at St. Paul's Cathedral.

### **Buy the Bible?**

The following year William Warham, the archbishop of Canterbury, had the ingenious idea of himself buying up copies of the New Testament in order to get them off the market and then destroy them. Unbeknownst to him, the substantial monies he paid simply provided Tyndale with funding to produce a better, more-numerous second edition!

In 1530 Tyndale's translation of the Pentateuch was printed at Antwerp, where he had now settled. There were also several further editions of the New Testament. Tyndale continually revised the translation in the light of suggestions received and of his own further thinking. Some, but not all, of the editions contained marginal notes. The purpose of these was mainly to explain the meaning of the text, though at times Tyndale could not resist the temptation to apply the text against the papacy.

Tyndale translated directly from the Greek and Hebrew, with occasional reference to the Latin Vulgate and Luther's German translation. His style is homely and intended for the ordinary man, in keeping with his original aim to make the Bible widely accessible. In this extract from the 1526 edition (Romans 12:1–2), the original spelling has been retained. But the foretaste of English translations for centuries to come is obvious:

"I beseeche you therefore brethren by the mercifulness of God, that ye make youre bodyes a quicke sacrificise, holy and acceptable unto God which is youre resonable servynge off God. And fassion note youre selves lyke unto this worlde. But be ye chaunged [in youre shape] by the renuyng of youre wittes that ye may fele what thyng that good, that acceptable and perfaicte will of God is."

Tyndale planned to complete the translation of the Old Testament. In 1534 he attained a position of greater apparent security. He took up residence with the English merchants of Antwerp, as the guest of Thomas Poyntz, a relative of the Lady Walsh of Little Sodbury. The merchants paid him a regular stipend, and his influential hosts would have afforded him a certain measure of protection. But his newfound security proved to be illusory. In May of 1535 he was betrayed by a fellow Englishman named Henry Phillips.

### **Trap the Translator!**

This villain gradually befriended Tyndale, then induced Tyndale to venture onto the streets of Antwerp with him. There, Phillips signaled soldiers who ambushed Tyndale and seized him while he was walking down a narrow passage. He was taken to the state prison in the castle of Vilvoorde, near Brussels. After a year-and-a-half of confinement, Tyndale was strangled, then burnt at the stake in Brussels on October 6, 1536. His last words, reportedly, were "Lord, open the king of England's eyes!"

The authorities in England banned Tyndale's translation, and destroyed every copy that they found. But they did not find them all, and the influence of those that survived, as well as of his other writings, was considerable. And this even during the reign of Henry VIII who, despite Tyndale's prayer, continued to adamantly oppose Protestantism.

In 1535, while Tyndale was ebbing in prison, Miles Coverdale published the first-ever **complete printed edition** of the Bible in English, and received royal approval to distribute it. For diplomatic reasons Tyndale's name did not appear in it, though the translation was hugely dependent upon his work.

To its advantage was the fact that by this time England had an archbishop of Canterbury (Thomas Cranmer) and a vicar-general (Thomas Cromwell), both of whom were committed to the Protestant cause. They persuaded Henry to approve publication of the Coverdale translation, and by 1539 every parish church in England was required to make a copy of the English Bible available to all its parishioners. All the available translations were substantially based upon Tyndale's. Thus while Tyndale had not been personally vindicated, his cause had triumphed, as had his translation.

Tyndale can justly be called "the father of the English Bible." It would not be much of an exaggeration to say that almost every English New Testament until recently was merely a revision of Tyndale's. Some 90 percent of his words passed into the King James Version, and about 75 percent of them into the Revised Standard Version.

Certainly he was famous as a Bible translator, but this was by no means his only work. He wrote a number of books, of which the most-famous are his ***The Parable of the Wicked Mammon*** and ***The Obedience of a Christian Man***. The theme of the first book is justification by faith alone. It was heavily dependent upon Luther, in fact in some places it was merely a translation of Luther.

But it was original enough to show that Tyndale was not just parroting Luther, though he was more "Lutheran" than most of the succeeding reformers. The second book argues that Christians always have the duty of obedience to civil authority, except where loyalty to God is concerned.

Tyndale is also famous for his literary battles with Sir Thomas More. In 1529 More attacked this "captain of the English heretics" in his ***Dialogue Concerning Heresies***. Two years later Tyndale replied with an ***Answer to More***. More responded with a tedious ***Confutation***, two weighty volumes published in 1532 and '33.

The two men were unable to agree because of their different starting points. For More the true church was the historic Roman Catholic Church, which he deemed as infallible. Anyone who opposed the pope, any of his representatives, or the official church doctrine, was in More's eyes a heretic. It was because of this belief that More had many "heretics" burned at the stake, and it was because of this belief that he himself was prepared to go to the scaffold.

For Tyndale, on the other hand, the true authority for faith was to be found in Scripture, and any person or group who denied the authority of Scripture was in his perception under the control of Antichrist. This belief carried him to the scaffold, but it also lifted up and carried the movement that came to be called "the Great English Reformation."





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## The Church That Tyndale Fought

Corruption in the church has existed as long as there have been people in it (consider, for example, both Peter's denials and Judas's greed), but widespread corruption and resistance to the truth were especially acute during Tyndale's day.

For decades after the election of Rodrigo Borgia as Pope Alexander VI in 1492, the papacy was, in the words of Roman Catholic historian Father Bede Jarrett, "little else than a small Italian principedom ruled by some of the least reputable of the Renaissance princes."

The great Roman Catholic historian, Dr. Ludwig Pastor, says of Alexander that "his life of unrestrained sensuality was in direct contradiction with the precepts of Him whose representative . . . he was."

As with the head, so with the feet; most of the English priests leading masses, according to an archbishop of the time, were barely able to pronounce the Latin liturgies properly, much less comprehend them; leading clergymen throughout England were known for their illegitimate "wives" and children; and the business of indulgences was bringing huge sums into the Church's coffers.

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## William Tyndale: A Gallery of Characters in Tyndale's Story

### Sir Thomas More

One of William Tyndale's bitterest opponents, and one of the best-known men in 16th-century England—for his power, his intellect *and* his religious convictions. His was the central character in the prize-winning play and movie, *A Man for All Seasons*. A devout and intelligent Roman Catholic layman, he was appointed to the post of Lord Chancellor, then was commissioned by the king and the church to refute William Tyndale's arguments and to discredit his character. He wrote nine books against Tyndale, filling more than 1,000 pages with arguments and invective against the reformer, and always defending the ultimate authority of the pope and the Roman Catholic Church (see "The Pen-and-Ink Wars,").

Ironically, though More had many people executed because they denied the pope's authority, his immovable commitment to that authority eventually led to his own death. When King Henry insisted on getting a divorce contrary to papal proclamations, then went on to declare that the pope no longer had authority in England, More told the king that he disagreed and would have to resign his post. Henry could not tolerate the public humiliation of having his closest advisor visibly questioning his wisdom, so he had More executed on trumped-up charges.

### Cuthbert Tunstall

The bishop of London to whom Tyndale went in 1524, seeking patronage for his work of translating the New Testament into English. As far as the church hierarchy went, Tunstall was a shrewd choice on Tyndale's part. Tunstall was a learned man, a language scholar of some ability himself, and he had declared his affection for some of Erasmus's reform oriented ideas.

But Tyndale's request came at a time when things done in the name of reform were creating havoc in Europe: violent riots; overthrows of local authorities; attacks on clergymen .... So Tunstall was leery of anything that smacked of "Lutheranism," and it was Luther's common-language German version of the New Testament that figured prominently in the sources of the havoc. No matter how intelligent or concerned for scholarship he was, he was at that time unready to support any New Testament translation work, and so sent the young translator looking elsewhere for patronage. Later, he can be seen burning Tyndale's testaments and other pro-reform literature. Apparently politics had won out.

### Anne Boleyn

This French-trained English beauty was indirectly a friend to William Tyndale, though unfortunately for both her and Tyndale, she was not enough of a friend to her husband the king. This lady-in-waiting probably first came to Henry's attention about 1527, after his repeated attempts to conceive and raise up a healthy son with Catherine had aged her and frustrated him. So while he pursued getting a divorce from Catherine, he was also pursuing the affections of Anne. She teased him, but would not give herself to him until he had the divorce and married her. This done, she became queen. During her brief reign as queen (1533–36), she managed to lay hands on an ornate copy of Tyndale's 1534 edition of the English New Testament, as well as a copy of his "heretical" *The Obedience of a Christian Man* that she showed to Henry.

The king loved it, and for a time wanted Tyndale to be his court propagandist. But in the meantime, Anne was unable, like Catherine before her, to produce a healthy male heir. Plus, her prima donna attitude alienated many in the court, and some of them told the king of her sexual philandering with other men. Already disappointed in her, the incensed Henry had her quickly executed and the marriage declared void. Anyway, he had already set his eye upon Jane Seymour, and with Anne out of the way she soon became Henry's third wife.

### **Thomas Wolsey**

This power-hungry son of an English butcher became chaplain to the Archbishop of Canterbury at age 30, and chaplain to Henry VII at 34. Under Henry VIII's sovereignty, at age 44 he rose to Cardinal, and at 54 became the pope's personal representative in England. The corruption in his heart apparently went deep; he accumulated property and fineries that were exceeded in luxury only by King Henry's, and was well-known for having at least one "wife" and two or more illegitimate children. He became the king's right-hand man in several arenas, but especially in negotiating with the pope to get the king's way. Opposing and persecuting reformers was just another way to keep both king and pope happy and united against a common enemy. Unfortunately for Wolsey, he was unable to secure papal permission for Henry's divorce from Catherine quickly enough, and so was sentenced by the king to die "for treason." Just past 61 years of age, he died of fright and heart failure en route to his execution.

### **Bishop Stokesley**

The bishop of London after Cuthbert Tunstall, he became infamous as one of the cruelest opponents of Protestantism to ever hold church office in England. He was responsible for the martyrdoms of even more Protestants than Sir Thomas More, and was very likely the one who financed Henry Phillips, the man who searched Tyndale out and betrayed him.

### **The Poyntzes**

The English couple who took Tyndale in, when he was fleeing various agents of the king and the church, and gave him quarters at the English merchants' lodgings in Antwerp. Thomas Poyntz was related to Lady Anne Walsh. During Tyndale's stay with them, the Poyntzes encouraged him, gave him a place to study, guarded his secrecy, and warned him of their fears about Henry Phillips. After Phillips betrayed Tyndale, Thomas worked diligently trying to secure Tyndale's release, and himself was imprisoned for his persistence and his pro-reformation sympathies.

### **H. Monmouth**

Humphrey Monmouth was the London businessman who took young Tyndale in and briefly gave him lodging, before the translator abandoned hope of translating the New Testament in England and headed for Europe. Apparently a good-hearted Catholic who only briefly flirted with Protestantism, he later suffered appreciably for that flirtation; he was brought to trial by the church for harboring the "heretic."

### **Miles Coverdale**

A translator/scholar who Tyndale befriended at Oxford, he later helped Tyndale with his always continuing revision work on the New Testament translation. After Tyndale's death, it was an entire English Bible with Coverdale's name on it that Henry VIII officially approved to be spread "among all the people."

### **John Frith**

One of Tyndale's closest friends, and like Tyndale, one of England's ablest scholars, also educated at both Oxford and Cambridge. Three or four years younger than Tyndale, Frith probably sat at Tyndale's feet in the reform-oriented Bible studies that Tyndale led at Oxford, then later Frith was, like Tyndale, pursued around England and Europe for his reformation and translation efforts. A priest who married, Frith was captured and martyred some three years before Tyndale. One of Tyndale's Scripture-filled letters to the imprisoned Frith includes the encouragement that Frith's wife was "well content with the will of God, and would not for her sake have the glory of God hindered."

### **John and Anne Walsh**

Sir John and Lady Anne Walsh were the masters of Little Sodbury, the estate where Tyndale worked briefly after leaving Cambridge, probably as a tutor to their two young sons. They were known in the region for their hospitality to both nobility and clergy; it was at their table that Tyndale challenged a visiting cleric, "If God grant me life, ere many years pass I will see that the boy behind his plow knows more of the Scriptures than thou dost!" Exposed to reformation thinking by Tyndale, the Walshes gave him money to support himself in Europe, and later made efforts to get him released from Vilvoorde prison.

### **Thomas Cromwell**

He succeeded Sir Thomas More as chancellor to the king, and tried to be a friend to Tyndale when the reformer was sitting in prison. He is best-known for carrying out King Henry's order to suppress the monasteries in England, then for being executed by the king soon after the last monastery had surrendered. A man of Protestant sympathies, he attempted to get Tyndale set free from Vilvoorde prison by contacting the governor of the prison. He was obviously not successful, but he was successful in convincing the king to approve distribution of the English Bible translated by Tyndale and Coverdale.

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## Tyndale's Betrayal and Death

BRIAN EDWARDS Brian H. Edwards is the author of *God's Outlaw*, a 1976 book about William Tyndale, published by Evangelical Press and now in its third printing. This article is adapted from a chapter in that book, used by gracious permission of Brian and Evangelical Press. Brian is minister of a congregation in Surrey, England, and has authored four other books

By 1535, several englishmen had been or were engaged in the hunt for William Tyndale, under orders either from King Henry VIII, Sir Thomas More, or Bishop John Stokesley of London. These agents were hunting all over Europe, but only one of them actually succeeded in ferreting out the elusive Tyndale and bringing about his demise: a devious ne'er-do-well named Henry (or Harry) Phillips.

Henry Phillips arrived in Antwerp during the early summer of 1535. He came from a wealthy and therefore notable English family, and his father, Richard, had been three times a member of parliament and twice high sheriff. In addition, Richard Phillips held the lucrative post of Comptroller of the Customs in Poole Harbor.

Henry Phillips was the third and last son in the family, and in 1533 he registered at Oxford for a degree in civil law. And being a man of some ability, he was apparently well-set to gain a good position and follow a respectable life.

However, Phillips had another side to his character that now came to deter him. Entrusted with a large sum of money by his father to pay to someone in London, Henry reached the big city and gambled away his trust.

What his movements were immediately after that we cannot be sure, but three years later, in the winter of 1536–37, he wrote from the Continent a series of long, penitent letters home, expressing his terrible poverty and the fact that his dire straits would soon end his life in abject misery unless his parents held out a hand of forgiveness and assistance. He was by then being branded as a traitor and rebel, and had found himself pursued by government agents and without a friend in the world.

After squandering his father's money in London, Phillips had evidently come into contact with someone who was still anxious to apprehend Tyndale. Phillips was virtually stranded in Antwerp, afraid to return home and unable to leave the city. A young educated man from the university, with influential connections and a known disdain for the reformers, and now in a terrible financial mess, he was the ideal person to send on a new mission to kidnap Tyndale.

We may never know the identity of the powerful dignitary who so successfully used Phillips as his front man in the arrest of Tyndale, but the prime suspicion rests upon John Stokesley. His hatred of the reformers was venomous, and he boasted of the number of heretics he had killed. Beside Stokesley, even Thomas More appeared gentle.

Whoever his master was, Phillips received his orders, a servant and a liberal supply of money, then set off for Louvain. This city was in the province of Brabant, and the town, strongly against reform, was situated about 30 miles northeast of a small village of later historical importance called Waterloo. Phillips registered as a student at the university and, to explain his apparent wealth, spoke freely of holding two good benefices in the diocese of Exeter. From Louvain he could plan his strategy and ride along the direct road to Antwerp, less than 30 miles away.

## Winning Their Confidence

Phillips threw himself into the company of the English merchants, and by his silver tongue and golden hand won the confidence of all except Thomas Poyntz, the man who gave Tyndale safe lodging in Antwerp. It was not long before Tyndale, who was frequently invited to dine with the merchants, found himself in the same company, and Henry Phillips had come face to face with his prey.

Unsuspecting, the reformer felt attracted to the easy manner and eloquent speech of the young student lawyer, and before long he invited him to the Poyntzes' home. There he dined, admired Tyndale's small library, warmly commended his labors, and talked easily of the affairs in England and the need for reform. He even stayed overnight.

Thomas Poyntz had misgivings about the relative stranger, but when Tyndale assured him of the man's Lutheran sympathies, he put his doubts aside. This was the greatest mistake Tyndale ever made.

Phillips won the friendship of Poyntz, and after a few days the merchant took the visitor on a tour of Antwerp, readily answering all Phillips' inquiries about the alleys, buildings and chief officers of the town. They talked about the king and his affairs, Poyntz and his affairs, Phillips and his affairs. It was all very amicable. What Poyntz only later realized was that Phillips was also gently sounding him out to see whether, for a good bribe, he would be willing to sacrifice Tyndale. For all his astute business abilities, Poyntz apparently did not pick up the veiled message until it was too late.

Within a few days Henry Phillips had gone. He had learned enough from his new friends to know that it would be useless to work through the merchants or officers of Antwerp; a warning would almost certainly reach Tyndale before he could be seized.

He was right in this. Antwerp was full of eyes, ears and mouths. As early as April of that year the Imperial attorney in Brussels had issued a warrant for the arrest of the three leaders of English reform: Tyndale, Joye and Dr. Barnes. This warrant was passed to the leaders at the Bergen in case one of the wanted men should visit the great trade fair held in that town in April. A helpful note forewarned the Antwerp merchants of all these official communications.

Thus Phillips rode straight to the court of Brussels, 24 miles distant and just a few miles west from Louvain. Ambassador Hackett had died in October 1534 and neither Henry of England nor Charles of the great Imperial Empire was in a hurry to see him replaced. Henry had finally substituted Anne and himself for Catherine and the pope; the Bishop of Rochester, John Fisher, and the recent Lord Chancellor, Thomas More, were already on their way to the scaffold; the pope was putting the finishing touches to a Bull to excommunicate this great "Defender of the Faith," and Charles, because of all this, was not talking to King Henry.

Phillips therefore arrived at the Imperial Court at a time when he could act as his own ambassador and with valuable information against one of Henry's subjects. With little delay, he obtained the services of the Emperor's attorney and, with a small party of officers, set out on the road back to Antwerp.

Poyntz was sitting unusually lazily by his door when Phillips' servant arrived, inquired whether William Tyndale was at home, and assured the merchant that his master would shortly call back to see the translator. He did not call back, and three or four days later Poyntz left Antwerp to conduct some business at Barrow, some 18 miles from the town. He expected to be away for a month or six weeks and Phillips, knowing this, decided to strike without further delay.

He arrived at the Poyntz home about May 21, 1535, and, in his courteous and charming manner, invited himself to lunch. He then returned into the town, presumably to set the officers in their appropriate place

for ambush. Phillips' scheme was working according to plan, only requiring that Tyndale, who had already been invited out to lunch that day, cancel the arrangement made with Mrs. Poyntz and invite Phillips to join him in the town. In this he was not disappointed.

But Henry Phillips could not resist one more victory over his already-condemned prize. Almost as an afterthought he asked Tyndale if he would kindly lend him two pounds, on the pretext that he had, that very morning, lost his purse. Tyndale, who according to Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* was "simple and inexpert in the wily subtleties of this world," willingly handed over the money (enough for a poor family to live on for two months) and the two men left the house.

### **Ambushed!**

Antwerp was, like all medieval towns, laced with twisting, narrow alleys that in places refused to allow two men to pass, and were sunless by reason of the overhanging buildings. As they left Poyntz's home, just such an opening confronted them. Tyndale courteously stepped back to allow his guest to precede him. Phillips, a tall, handsome man, stood aside and insisted that the great reformer should have precedence.

Tyndale came to the opening and saw two officers ready to seize him, he hesitated and moved back, Phillips stood over him, pointing down with his finger as a sign that this was the man; he then jostled Tyndale forward into the officers, who bound him with ropes and brought him to the attorney's residence and finally to the grim castle of Vilvoorde, just six miles north of Brussels.

The castle of Vilvoorde had been erected in 1374 by one of the dukes of Brabant, and since it was modeled upon the infamous Bastille, built in Paris at about the same time, its moat, seven towers, three drawbridges and massive walls made it an impregnable prison. The castle was used as the state prison for the Low Countries, and Tyndale was thrown into one of the foul-smelling, damp dungeons with nothing for company but the lapping moat, the squabbling moorhens outside, and the dripping walls and scurrying rats inside.

Here, in his solitary darkness, Tyndale waited for the end. The merchants, with all their power at Antwerp, were powerless here, and few would risk their livelihood to try to save him. His work that remained undone could never be completed. Tyndale knew he had "finished the course."

When Thomas Poyntz galloped into Antwerp in reply to the urgent message from his wife, he discovered Tyndale's room ransacked and all his books and papers taken. Poyntz was furious. He blamed himself, he blamed the merchants, he blamed the governor of the English House, he blamed Tyndale's simplicity—but above all he blamed the authorities. This was an outrageous breach of the traditional privilege of the house of the English merchants. And the merchants lost no time in sending a strong letter of protest to the government of the Low Countries.

Letters of indignant complaint poured into the court at Brussels. Letters also began to arrive at the court of King Henry. And behind all this action was the never-tiring hand of faithful Thomas Poyntz. But it was a forlorn hope. Emperor Charles V was making up for lost time by turning upon the Lutherans with a vengeance, and Henry VIII, having toppled the pope over the cliffs of England, was anxious to prove he was still a loyal Roman Catholic and certainly no heretic. Just to demonstrate his point, 14 Dutch Anabaptists were sent to the stake in England within a few days of Tyndale's arrest.

Thomas Poyntz determined to do something. He wrote to his brother John, who was lord of the manor of North Ockenden in Essex, and urged him to make representation in the court. The death of Tyndale, Poyntz urged, "will be a great hindrance to the gospel and, to the enemies of it, one of the highest pleasure." The king never had a more loyal subject than Tyndale, suggested Poyntz, nor a man of higher reputation. Poyntz's letter breathes a zeal and loyalty to the reformer that reveals the close relationship

between the two men, and their common faith in Christ.

Though Poyntz failed in his attempts to rescue Tyndale, it must stand to the merchant's credit that he gave himself unstintingly to his attempts, regardless of the cost to himself. Eventually, he was banished from the Low Countries, lost most of his merchant interests in consequence, was separated from his wife and family for many years and, when he finally succeeded to his brother's estate at North Ockenden, was too poor to live there. He died in 1562, and his epitaph in the church building at North Ockenden speaks of his suffering and imprisonment, "for faithful service to his prince and ardent profession of evangelical faith."

It is little comfort to know that for his Judas-like betrayal Henry Phillips gained nothing either. He spent the next few years fleeing from King Henry's agents. They reached him in Rome, and then in Paris, where he arrived "altogether ragged and torn," and where he stole some clothes from an old friend who had helped him. He once returned to London, but was forced back to Louvain, from whence he wrote the begging letters home.

In the autumn of 1538 he arrived in Italy, as a Swiss mercenary with German boots having walked from Flanders. By 1542 he passes from history, as a prisoner under threat of losing his eyes or his life. Disowned by his family, by his country, by almost every prince on the continent and even by those with whom he collaborated in his terrible crime, he died, Foxe conjectures, "consumed at last with lice."

### **The Trial and Imprisonment**

But back in 1535, Tyndale, shivering in the dungeons of the Castle of Vilvoorde, was too great a man to entertain any petty hopes for revenge over Henry Phillips. He had never expected his death to be other than violent; he had been too long exposed to the dangerous life of the hunted exile to waste time mourning his present state.

He knew his trial would be little more than a formality; but during that event he might have opportunity for speaking of his Savior, and thus he must prepare his defense well. In addition, he continued with the work so close to his heart, his writing and translation.

As Tyndale toiled and the autumn of 1535 faded, his chest and head labored with heavy catarrh; he shivered through the day, and shivered all night as well. As he penned his little treatise, ***Faith Alone Justifies Before God***, winter drew on and the light began to fail; a few hours a day was all he could use for writing. The remainder of the time he sat in darkness. But he must finish his work, for this was to be his summary of the evangelical gospel; since he was going to die anyway, there must be no doubt as to ***why*** he died.

The winter was harsh, and though he was too bold for Christ to plead for release, and too wise to consider it of any value if he had, he determined to ask the prison governor, who also happened to be the Marquis of Bergen, for a few essentials to help him with his study, and to maintain a little longer the flickering life that shivered in his body. The letter was written in Latin, and it is the only letter in Tyndale's own hand that has survived (see a copy of it in *A Letter from Prison*).

The letter is typical of Tyndale; there is no cringing flattery, no frantic plea for mercy, no long and tedious defense or protests of loyalty, faithful service, humble obedience and so on, all of which is so familiar in letters from 16th-century condemned cells. Tyndale asks for his needs, determines to go on with his study, longs only for the salvation of his captors, and is ready for whatever God's sovereign purpose may be. Whether his request was granted cannot yet be told.

Finally, the long-awaited trial began. Tyndale had been in the castle for 18 months, and now everything was set. A long list of charges was drawn up:



"First, he had maintained that faith alone justifies.

"Second, he maintained that to believe in the forgiveness of sins, and to embrace the mercy offered in the gospel, was enough for salvation.

"Third, he averred that human traditions cannot bind the conscience, except where their neglect might occasion scandal.

"Fourth, he denied the freedom of the will.

"Fifth, he denied that there is any purgatory.

"Sixth, he affirmed that neither the Virgin nor the Saints pray for us in their own person.

"Seventh, he asserted that neither the Virgin nor the Saints should be invoked by us...." And so the list continued.

Early in August of 1536, the reformer was condemned as a heretic. A few days later the pageant of casting him out of the Church took place. In the town square a crowd gathered. The great doctors and dignitaries assembled in due pomp and array, and took their seats on the high platform. Tyndale was led out, wearing his priest's robes. He was made to kneel and his hands were scraped with a knife or a piece of glass as a symbol of having lost the benefits of the anointing oil with which he was consecrated to the priesthood.

The bread and wine of the mass were placed in his hands, and at once withdrawn. This done, he was ceremoniously stripped of his priest's vestments, re clothed as a layman, and handed over to the attorney for secular punishment. The Church would condemn, but always left it to the secular officers to stain their hands with the murder. But for Tyndale the end was not yet. He was taken back to Vilvoorde Castle and for some unexplained reason remained a prisoner for two more months.

## **The Execution**

Then, early in the month of October 1536, William Tyndale was led out of the castle toward the southern gate of the town. The sun had barely risen above the horizon when he arrived at the open space, and looked out over the crowd of onlookers eagerly jostling for a good view. A circle of stakes enclosed the place of execution, and in the center was a large pillar of wood in the form of a cross and as tall as a man.

A strong chain hung from the top, and a noose of hemp was threaded through a hole in the upright. The attorney and the great doctors arrived first, and seated themselves in state nearby. The prisoner was brought in and a final appeal was made that he should recant.

Tyndale stood immovable, his keen eyes gazing toward the common people. A silence fell over the crowd as they watched the prisoner's lean form and thin, tired face; his lips moved with a final impassioned prayer that echoed around the place of execution: "Lord, open the king of England's eyes."

His feet were bound to the stake, the iron chain fastened around his neck, and the hemp noose was placed at his throat. Only the Anabaptists and lapsed heretics were burnt alive. Tyndale was spared that ordeal.

Piles of brushwood and logs were heaped around him. The executioner came up behind the stake and

with all his force snapped down upon the noose. Within seconds Tyndale was strangled.

The attorney stepped forward, placed a lighted torch to the tinder, and the great men and commoners sat back to watch the fire burn. Not until the charred form hung limply on the chain did an officer break out the staple of the chain with his halbert, allowing the body to fall into the glowing heat of the fire; more brushwood was piled on top and, while the commoners marveled "at the patient sufferance of Master Tyndale at the time of his execution," according to Foxe, the attorney and the doctors of Louvain moved off to begin their day's work, never imagining that within months at least part of the plea in Tyndale's dying prayer would be answered affirmatively.

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# CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 16: William Tyndale: Early Reformer & Bible Translator

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## The Bible Translator Who Shook Henry VIII

What does it take to shake a king? Ask William Tyndale. Henry VIII was a very powerful king, but Tyndale shook him at least briefly—with a power even greater.

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Henry VIII, obviously the eighth king of England to bear the name of Henry, was a robust 33-year-old in 1524.

He had already excelled in many areas, had acquired a number of accolades, and could easily have felt that the world was at his feet. In fact, much of his surrounding world seemed to act as if it were lying at his feet.

With his impressive size, his impressive clothes, his impressive pomp and ceremony, his Renaissance education and his unflagging self-confidence, he appeared larger than life to most of his subjects, and was seen as a major force to be reckoned with in the European balance of power. He was at least what our age would call "an achiever," probably even "an over-achiever." He could play multiple musical instruments, dance, hunt game, lead an army, win at a joust, control his nobles and spend money like it grew on trees. Whatever constituted the stage, Henry VIII dominated it.

Even theology was not beyond the exertions of this highly confident King. When Martin Luther questioned the reigning theology of the period, with its minimal piety and its idolatry of popes, priests, saints and symbols, Henry considered himself quite capable of rebutting the troublesome Saxon monk, and soon produced his *Defense of the Seven Sacraments*. This appeared in 1520, about one year after Luther's writings began to achieve really-wide circulation, and was almost entirely Henry's work. For a while at least, it was the predominant theological apologetic in England for the traditional Catholic faith.

Although today, post-Reformation, we might question the *Defenses's* effectiveness in combatting "the Lutheran heresy," the pope at the time was apparently impressed with it. At least he was quite effusive in his praise of it (but of course nurturing good relations with kings was always a good political move for the pope). The pope named Henry "Defender of the Faith," another plaudit to add to his various other titles of accomplishment.

So at age 33, in his prime, Henry VIII had established himself as a powerful, "go-getter" king, and his kingdom was enjoying a period of relative economic and political stability that had been unknown in recent English history. With his gifts, personality and training, he was leading England out of the Middle Ages and into more-modern, less-tumultous times.

One might think his personal life would have reflected this less-tumultous ideal, and in many ways it promised to. He had an adoring wife, Catherine of Aragon, who was a daughter of the most powerful dynasty Spain had ever seen. Their marriage had secured an important diplomatic ally, establishing close family ties between Henry and Emperor Charles V, and had produced one child for the couple, a daughter they named Mary. However, this facade of domestic and political bliss was actually quite shallow, as a closer look at Henry will demonstrate.

In many ways, as history records him, Henry was more a picture of the “red-necked” blue-collar worker who curses at his wife, talks with his mouth full, and stands on the street corner boasting of his sexual exploits. Numerous records exist to show us that he was ostentatious, authoritarian, unpredictable, a bully, a braggart, and certainly not deserving of much trust. He forsook alliances and broke political promises without notice. At various moments he used his royal favors to tease court factions, foreign governments and even religious leaders, then disdained or even attacked these same people the next moment, depending on his royal whim. Unfortunately, it was this darker side that eventually came to dominate Henry’s life, not only destroying his first marriage and wife, but also the several that came after her.

However, in 1524, at age 33, Henry was still relatively restrained, probably imagining neither the extremes he would go to nor the trouble he would receive from an obscure English priest who slipped out of his kingdom and headed for the Continent that year. Perhaps later the king wished he would have learned more about this priest before the man left his kingdom, because it was only after leaving England that Tyndale began to cause Henry problems.

But Henry did not know, in 1524, about Tyndale’s frustration with the religious ignorance of the priests and abbots who visited Little Sodbury Manor.

Nor did he know about Tyndale’s disappointment when the bishop of London, Cuthbert Tunstall, denied the translator permission and help to do what he believed he had to do, no matter what the law said.

Tyndale’s request seems harmless enough today: he merely wanted to translate the Bible from its original languages into English. But at that time, a church law established in 1408 was still in effect, and that law said that all translation of the Bible into the vernacular language was absolutely forbidden, except by specific ecclesiastical permission.

So Henry did not know, in 1524, that Tyndale was determined that his countrymen would have the Bible in their own language. But Henry would soon clearly come to know that, as he heard about William Tyndale and his vernacular Bible many times in the next 12 years.

In the fall of 1525, in Germany, Tyndale saw something that no Englishmen had ever seen before. At Peter Quentel’s shop in Cologne, Tyndale witnessed pages of the New Testament translated from Greek coming off a printing press, the most-modern technology of the day. Not only was the text in English, but the books would be available at a price affordable to the common man.

However, informers and anti-reformers interrupted Quentel’s production of the New Testament before it could be completed, so Tyndale and his companion, William Roye, fled Cologne and found another printer—this one in reform-minded Worms—who would reset the text. By early 1526 this printer had produced several thousand copies of the first printed English New Testament.

Within the first three months of 1526, complete New Testaments and copies of the Cologne fragments were arriving in England by the hundreds. Most of the religious establishment was outraged, and the government issued proclamations prohibiting the importation—but the dissemination of the books could not be stopped. Probably the first time Henry VIII heard William Tyndale’s name was during the hubbub surrounding the clergy’s attempts to stop the smuggling in and black-market selling of the forbidden translations.

By the end of 1526, Tyndale had produced a theological introduction to the book of Romans, in which he set forth his understanding of salvation by faith alone. Two years later, from Antwerp, he published *The Parable of the Wicked Mammon* and *The Obedience of a Christian Man*. These two works also declared Tyndale’s views on justification, as well as several other areas in which he disputed the Roman

Church's teaching.

It had become obvious that Tyndale was the genius behind the translation, that he was a writer of considerable merit, and that he was an articulate theologian committed to the reformation cause. The English crown and the church saw that this man had either to be stopped, or co-opted to join their forces. Meanwhile, despite the official hostility toward Tyndale, his smuggled-in works were finding thousands of avid readers in a nation just awakening to the power of the printed page.

By this time, Henry's passion for a male heir to secure the throne had become his personal obsession, and hence, of course, a matter of public concern. After several tries Catherine still had not provided the desired boy-child, and Henry was convinced there must be a larger, metaphysical reason. Of course it was not his fault. And he could always have yet another affair, but the legitimacy of his son had to be beyond challenge. Something was desperately wrong about his marriage to Catherine, he concluded—perhaps it was cursed because, after all, Catherine was the widow of his deceased brother, and marrying your brother's wife was clearly prohibited in Leviticus 18:16, wasn't it? He must, he decided, be freed from Catherine if he was ever going to bear a son in wedlock. He needed his first marriage annulled.

But getting an annulment required the Church to make a special exception to its law, not normally an easy thing to accomplish. However, for people in high places, with power to wield, such exceptions were frequently made. Henry wanted such an exception, and he would have one.

But the pope procrastinated. Henry grew impatient. Furthermore, Henry could not forget that he had a responsibility for the spiritual welfare of his realm. If the pope would not free him from his "Spanish cow," he would free himself from papal obedience. He would lead the church in England himself.

In fact, he wanted to be free to marry the new attraction at his court, a young French-trained lady named Anne Boleyn. She was naturally enchanting (later Henry would declare she was bewitching!), and she especially worked to enchant the king. But despite her enticements, she refused to be his mistress. He must marry her first.

Henry, not one to be concerned with the details, leaned heavily in this matter on his friend and long-time advisor, Cardinal Thomas Wolsey. Wolsey was a competent and efficient administrator, who somehow served simultaneously both as Henry's Lord Chancellor and the pope's special representative to England! Wolsey was vain and insensitive, but Henry found him useful. However, Wolsey's limitations soon showed up; he was unable to secure the king's desires quickly enough. Wolsey, like others before and after him, felt the king's wrath. Henry would have his way, no matter who it hurt.

Once England's separation from Rome became a reality, then separation from Catherine was easy. Although there were some in England who rejoiced to see this king distance himself from the pope, there were many others who were horrified by these events. The king and his advisors concluded that such conservatives needed to be persuaded.

Thus a program of propaganda was launched to show the benefits of the change. And who would be better to have on the side of the king than the author of *The Obedience of a Christian Man*? In this work, Tyndale tried to answer the critics who said that the new view of faith would lead to fragmentation of society and rebellion against the established rulers. Tyndale's response to this charge was to set forth the doctrine that all subjects were to be obedient to those over them. According to one record, a copy of *Obedience* was brought to the king's attention, and he read several passages that had been marked for his consideration. His response was allegedly one of great delight, with him proclaiming, "This book is for me and all kings to read!"

Tyndale could be a powerful addition to the king's propaganda machine, thought Henry. Someone must find Tyndale and offer him safe conduct to return to England.

These efforts were chiefly carried out by Thomas Cromwell and his agent in Antwerp, Stephen Vaughan. But Vaughan's meetings with Tyndale proved unfruitful. The court had underestimated Tyndale's character. Love England and freedom as he might, he was not about to surrender his work as a translator, theologian and preacher in order to become merely another nationalistic propagandist.

In the meantime, Tyndale had continued translating, writing and publishing, such significant works as an English translation from the Hebrew of the first five books of the Old Testament, his ***Answer to Sir Thomas More*** and ***The Practice of Prelates***. From these last two it was obvious that Tyndale could not be bought off or controlled for the king's selfish purposes.

In ***The Practice of Prelates***, Tyndale argued from Scripture that divorce was against God's will, and specifically dared to assert that the king should stay with his first wife! He also developed a theme introduced in his earlier writings: that the Roman Church and the recent popes, thoroughly corrupted as they were, had successfully manipulated several naive kings, Henry implicitly included, in order to increase their own power.

Needless to say, this whole treatise was rather unflattering to Henry, and as was his custom when frustrated, he turned about and began to revile Tyndale. This suited the leading ecclesiastics in England quite well, because they were already reviling Tyndale and the pernicious influence his writings were having on the common people. His works were widely read and heeded—as is evident from royal proclamations dealing with Tyndale as well as from the testimony records of his final trial—and Henry jumped firmly in with those who wanted this influence stopped, no matter what the cost.

If Tyndale's books could not be effectively blocked, and if Tyndale himself could not be co-opted, then he could at least be destroyed, went the king's thinking. So he changed his tactics. He sent Sir Thomas Elyot to Brussels in 1531, with the overt mission of collecting opinions on the king's divorce. But Elyot's secret orders were to find and kidnap William Tyndale.

Elyot could not seem to find Tyndale, and after spending more time and money—mostly on "locater" bribes—than Henry had allocated, the king called him back to London. So Henry's will was thwarted and Tyndale remained free. Unfazed, he continued his work of writing Bible commentaries and preparing a revision of his New Testament translation. But other searches for Tyndale went on.

Finally, in 1535, Tyndale's place of residence in Antwerp was discovered by English informers, and he was betrayed. By May of that year, he was in the prison in Vilvoorde. And while there is no evidence to indicate that Henry was the culpable authority, it is definitely evident that he did nothing to secure the translator's release.

Yet even while Tyndale was shivering in his cold stone prison cell, a complete Bible in English, dedicated to King Henry VIII, was circulating freely in their shared homeland. This Bible was published by Miles Coverdale, a collaborator of Tyndale's, but it consisted in the main of Tyndale's work. By 1537 at least two other Bible versions had been published, both bearing these words on the title page: "Set forth with the king's most gracious license." These too largely consisted of Tyndale's work.

Others were to follow. What Henry and others had fought so hard to prevent—the Bible in English—eventually was ordered by his royal command. Though Henry would never have admitted it, it was an impressive tribute to the martyred Tyndale.

Certainly Tyndale was not the greatest influence in Henry's life during this period. But he was a prominent one. And especially noteworthy because Henry was not a man easily shaken. Yet Tyndale, the humble priest, with his translation of Scriptures and his forthright exposition of those Scriptures, was the translator who—at least briefly—shook the mighty Henry.



# CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 16: William Tyndale: Early Reformer & Bible Translator

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## Where Did Tyndale Get His Theology?

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Considering how much at variance he was with the predominant theology of his day, it's fairly amazing that so many people today would consider Tyndale's theology so excellent on so many points: on justification and sanctification; on which books are canonical; on the Lord's Supper; on vernacular Scripture; on theology's need to be practical and down-to-earth; on his concern for the poor and his conviction that the corruption of riches had sidetracked the church from its true spiritual role; and on several others.

Even though during his own day the religious establishment branded him a heretic of the vilest sort and his views those of Antichrist, his views have now been adopted by a large cross-section of the church.

But whose views was he touting? Acknowledging that all theologians' views are shaped by their own life experiences and acquaintances, who or what shaped Tyndale's theology, against the grain of the religious establishment, into one we would likely applaud today?

Because, unlike with Martin Luther, we know little or nothing about Tyndale's family, childhood, readings habits or teachers, it is difficult to say for sure. By concealing so much of his life from the authorities of his day, he left very few traces for historians. Thus it is not easy to know what shaped his thinking. But there are several very likely influences that history tells us about.

### The Renaissance Thinkers

A major force in the late 15th and early 16th centuries was the Renaissance; by the time Tyndale translated the New Testament into English, this wave of change was crashing across the entire European continent. It brought changes in art, in government, in economics, in literature, in learning—it even changed the way men thought about themselves: it stressed man's ability to think clearly and behave morally, and said that man could and should press to achieve new heights in every field of endeavor.

Called "humanists" because of their emphasis on humanity's potential, these people were tired of the hyper-spiritualized logic and fatalism that had previously dominated theology. Additionally, they opposed the reigning scholasticism, which assumed that everything needed to be divided and subdivided to be understood.

These rising Renaissance scholars had become exasperated by teachers and leaders seemingly content to do nothing but create new terms and have semantical arguments about them. They longed for a new world order based on the achievements of the Greek and Roman civilizations; hence they valued the original sources of Greek and Latin literature.

They longed for the day when educated men could pursue truth in peace, without arousing religious or nationalistic reactionism. Naturally, they were also critical of many of the abuses of traditional piety. Renaissance literature contains many satires about the failings of the church and the immorality of the clergy.



Although when Tyndale attended them the universities of Oxford and Cambridge were just beginning to be affected by elements of “the new learning,” he is almost certain to have been one of the students most attracted to their nascent forms. The groundwork was well-laid. Not too long before Tyndale came to Oxford, the scholar John Colet had sought to avoid the nit-picking of scholasticism and had aroused quite a stir simply by lecturing on the biblical text. Unlike other lecturers, he did not cite what the authorities said about the text; he straightforwardly quoted what the Bible itself said.

Only a little later at Cambridge, Desiderius Erasmus was establishing his reputation for Greek scholarship and study of the Bible in its original languages. Such men were still a minority at that time—as evidenced by the hostility they received from their conservative fellows—but a change was in the wind.

Exactly how much Tyndale was affected by such emphases is difficult to say, but somewhere he acquired a masterful knowledge of the biblical languages, as well as a disdain for obscurantism. He expressed his disgust with the Oxford doctors who argued passionately about the comparative moral benefits of virginity and widowhood, and, during his stay at Little Sodbury Manor, translated Erasmus’s *Enchiridion Militis Christiani* into English. Later he used the Dutchman’s Greek New Testament to prepare his own English translation. Undoubtedly he benefited from, and was apparently eager to use, the dictionaries, grammars and other linguistic tools that Renaissance learning was inspiring for the translation of Greek and Hebrew classics.

However, Tyndale was not so influenced by Renaissance thinking that he moved to the anti-supernatural, human-idolatry extremes of some Renaissance men. He denied that the Bible’s writers were merely duplicating ideological systems already established by pagan thinkers, or that pagan philosophers’ ideas had somehow crept into the Bible and irremediably distorted whatever truth it contained. He stressed the fundamental authority of Scripture.

Also, he was critical of Erasmus and others who advocated reforms but continued to identify themselves with an apostate church. He was greatly disturbed with Erasmus’s duplicity, for example, in the all-important matter of Bible translation; how could Erasmus keep advocating vernacular translations while still supporting those Roman Church authorities who were burning Tyndale’s English New Testaments? When Sir Thomas More accused Tyndale of mistranslating the text, Tyndale defended his work by telling More that he had only done in English what More’s “darling Erasmus” had done in Latin!

So Renaissance thinking was a significant, but not the entire, influence on Tyndale’s theology.

### **Luther and Other Reformers**

A second major influence on Tyndale, a major influence of the whole era, was of course that of Martin Luther and the other reformers. And certainly these other reformers, including Zwingli in Zurich, Lefevre in Paris and Farel in Geneva, each made significant contributions to the movement of Reformed theology and practice that were transforming the face of religion in Europe. But Luther’s was probably the most widely-felt influence, and the one with which Tyndale had his closest encounters—though his actually ever meeting Luther cannot be clearly established.

For Tyndale not to have been influenced by the Reformation would have been almost impossible. The whole of the European continent was in turmoil over it, especially the area today called Germany. Manifestations of the reforming spirit were everywhere, ranging from the irenic to the revolutionary. Most everyone talked about changing the church; some extremists, in the name of such reformation, turned to violence.

In several parts of Germany, the peasants rose up against the rulers and were only put down by terrible

bloodshed. And though Luther tried repeatedly to dissociate his cause from these events, words like **Lutheran** and **Reformation** had already been tainted.

By the time Tyndale started writing his theological works, Luther had been leading the church-reform movement for about a decade. Certainly Tyndale must have heard about these events, and almost certainly he had opportunity to observe some of the results of Luther's work during his visit to Wittenburg. From his translations and tracts, it's obvious he had read some of Luther's works and largely concurred with the contents of them.

Some scholars have therefore concluded that Tyndale was little more than an English mouthpiece for Luther, a star-struck young radical who merely parroted his German idol's ideas. This notion has a long history; in fact, it dates from the Reformation itself. Thomas More, for example, in his writings against Tyndale, frequently claimed that Luther was Tyndale's "master." And in many quarters of Europe in that day, this designation was anathema—but in few places more than in Henry VIII's and Cardinal Wolsey's England.

The last thing Henry wanted was for his kingdom to be ravaged by "the German plague," and he wasn't alone; the English bishops were among the most conservative and anti-reform in all of Europe. Evidence of this is clear: whereas many European nations had vernacular Bibles well before the Reformation, England did not. England still maintained a law made some 100 years earlier that said translation of the Bible into English was forbidden on penalty of death. English churchmen of the period pushed for this law in an effort to thwart the Lollards, followers of John Wycliffe who had encouraged translating the Bible into the common people's language.

But any hopes of keeping the English isle isolated from the "heresy" were dashed with the clandestine arrival of Tyndale's English New Testaments. Of course they came from Germany, where the "Lutheran devils" were prevalent and chaos was reputedly pandemic. Obviously, it was easy for English heresy-hunters to see Luther's shadow looming just behind Tyndale's.

And there were many links between the two men. As Luther first translated the New Testament into German, then the Old, so did Tyndale with the English. In his biblical translations, Tyndale straight-out used some of Luther's introductions and marginal notes. Tyndale defended Luther against the accusations of Sir Thomas More. Furthermore, the Englishman emphasized many terms that Luther had stressed, such as **law**, **gospel**, **grace** and **faith alone**. The most prominent evidence of Luther's influence on Tyndale is that some of the passages in Tyndale's polemical and devotional works are fairly verbatim translations from Luther's writings. The second half of Tyndale's meditation on the Lord's Prayer (see "A Dialogue on the Lord's Prayer") is a very close translation of one of Luther's meditations. Certain parts of Tyndale's **Introduction to the Book of Romans**, (which was published separately from the New Testament), his **Parable of the Wicked Mammon** and **An Exposition of Matthew 5–7** were also translated from Luther.

However, it is easy to **over**-emphasize Tyndale's dependence upon Luther. One should note that none of the works above were merely direct translation. In every one of them, Tyndale expanded, adapted and modified the original. Sometimes he even completely changed the sense of the original. One must also remember that Tyndale published approximately six other works that are in no way taken from Luther's work.

Moreover, on several important points of theology, Tyndale deliberately distanced himself from Luther. For example, while Luther taught Christ's "real presence" in the wine and bread, Tyndale stressed the Lord's Supper as a commemoration of Christ's death. And while Luther expressed his doubts about the authority of the book of James, Tyndale declared that it definitely should be included in the scriptural canon.

Tyndale's theological independence from Luther can also be seen in his emphasis on the importance of

good works in the life of the believer. The Englishman stressed that the Christian, prompted by the Holy Spirit and motivated by love, naturally produced good works. To illustrate this truth, he was especially fond of the biblical image of a tree producing fruit appropriate to its nature. Additionally, Tyndale wrote much more about God's covenants and Christ's promises than did Luther. And whereas Luther enjoyed music a great deal, both writing hymns and teaching Protestant congregations to sing, Tyndale was convinced that music tended to distract too much from the importance of preaching. To understand Tyndale as merely a translator of Luther is to do an injustice to the man's independent mind.

## **England and Wycliffe**

A third formative influence on Tyndale is not frequently mentioned in studies, but consideration shows it was nonetheless significant. Unquestionably, one of the shapers of Tyndale's theology was his own English background and context. In whatever ways Tyndale was touched by the Renaissance and the Reformation, he synthesized these contacts through his mindset as an Englishman, very possibly of common stock, who was deeply devoted to his country and people. Unlike Erasmus, Tyndale apparently did not write for the larger world of international scholarship. He played no part in the numerous transnational conferences intended to promote unity within the emerging Protestantism. He showed no desire to be linked—economically, politically or militarily—with any great goings-on outside of Britain's isles.

Rather, he wrote in English to all Englishmen about English concerns. Though his writing is rich in Scripture citations and allusions, which obviously made him a learned man, his writing style is precise, direct and down-to-earth-accessible to the common English people. He frequently employs similes, metaphors and illustrations drawn from the commoners' everyday life. He speaks of, and to, the farmer, the weaver, the tanner, the shepherd, the housewife and the mother. He often quotes folk proverbs, revealing his confidence in the wisdom of the common man. The man or woman at the plow or loom could not have read, much less related to, the Latin literary works of Erasmus. But these people could understand and identify with every line from Tyndale.

Just the fact that Tyndale wrote about God in English was extraordinary, for most Englishmen were told, and believed, that their language was too coarse to accurately express the delicate nuances of theology. Furthermore, many English clergymen believed that some theological topics were simply not the concern of laymen—nor most parish priests. The social stigma against learning God's truths firsthand was very strong: several times in the 15th and early 16th centuries, people were accused of heresy, imprisoned and even executed merely for possessing religious books in English or discussing religious topics in English.

This official paranoia against religion in English was directly traceable back to the furor caused in the 14th century by the pre-reformer John Wycliffe, and his followers, the Lollards. These people too were very likely influences upon Tyndale.

Court records from Tyndale's era make it clear that Wycliffism had by no means died out. Lollard ideas were still around and germinating. Though Wycliffe had died nearly a century before, his ideas continued to trouble the church. And despite official hostility, Wycliffite groups continued meeting in private homes to hear the Bible read and preached. Such groups were linked by itinerant preachers. These preachers apparently used Wycliffe sermons that had been translated and simplified from the don's tortuous Latin, then copied for distribution. Of course these secret gatherings, unauthorized preachings and contraband literature were strictly forbidden, but the people carried them on nevertheless.

Many of these Wycliffite sermons are still extant, and in both content and style, they reveal numerous similarities to Tyndale's works. Both appealed for the Bible to be released to the people in English, without any ecclesiastical glosses intended to mask the meaning of the text. Both assumed that the Bible could be understood in its literal meaning, without ecclesiastical assistance and without years of training. Both feared that the church authorities were intentionally trying to hide "God's law" while attempting to impose "man's law." Both said that morality was essential for salvation, and that to know what God required man must have easy access to His law. Both said that those obeying God's law would always be a minority,

because the church was by definition the elect "small flock" among the larger mass who obeyed Antichrist. Both claimed that the church of Rome was poisoned by wealth, and both called on the king to discipline the church, thereby pushing it to fulfill its spiritual role.

### **William Tyndale and God**

Although all the forces mentioned above certainly had some influence on Tyndale, altogether they still probably do not explain all the sources of his generally remarkable theology; the final sources we briefly suggest are Tyndale himself, and God. It appears clear that Tyndale was not a mindless slave to either Renaissance thinking, Lutheran thinking or Wycliffite thinking. In every case, he built upon what he saw as their strengths and discarded or opposed what he saw as their weaknesses. He said that by conscious choice, the greatest influence on his theology was Scripture, and thus God himself.

He is justly remembered as a translator. But he was also a theologian extraordinaire, though a commoners' theologian. Out of the milieu in which he lived, it was this man's particular gift to take these influences surrounding him and mold a cohesive theology that communicated clearly to the deepest needs of his own people.

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# CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 16: William Tyndale: Early Reformer & Bible Translator

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## William Tyndale: Christian History Timeline

The four decades of Tyndale's life, from the early 1490s to the mid-1530s, overlapped one of the most notable periods of change in Western history, including: the ending of the Dark Ages, the beginnings of the Renaissance, the claiming of the New World, the Spanish Inquisition, and the beginnings of the Reformation.

At the time Tyndale might have felt detached from it all, living the lonely and unrooted life of a fugitive and exile. But in the long view he was actually integral to some of the most significant moments and movements of the early 16th century—great societal upheavals, the aftershocks of which are still being felt in our modern world.

### William Tyndale

**c. 1492–95** Tyndale is born

**1508** A young teenager, he enters Magdalen College at Oxford

**1512** Completes his B.A. at Oxford

**1514–1515** Completes his M.A. at Oxford and is ordained, but refuses to enter monastic orders

**1519** Moves to Cambridge for doctoral studies, then quits

**1521–1523** Begins teaching at Little Sodbury, gets into disputes with priests

**c. 1524** Seeks patronage of Bishop Tunstall and is rebuffed; then, assisted by Monmouth, he travels to Germany and registers at the University of Wittenburg

**1525** In Cologne, he prepares to print an English New Testament; but he is discovered and escapes with only a few printed portions

**1526** He completes the printing in Worms, and smuggled copies of his New Testaments are soon being circulated throughout England

**1527** Bishop Tunstall orders the purchase and burning of all the testaments; but this serves only to finance Tyndale's second edition

**1527–1530** English agents seek to capture Tyndale on the Continent; he keeps moving, and writing

**1530** His translation of the the first five books of the Old Testament appears in England

**1531** He meets Henry's agent Steven Vaughan, but declines the king's invitation to return to England

**1531** Sir Thomas More begins writing against Tyndale

**1533** His good friend, John Frith, is burned at the stake in Smithfield

**1534** He moves into Thomas Poyntz's English merchants' boarding house in Antwerp

**1535** King's agent Henry Phillips arrives in Antwerp and befriends Tyndale, then arranges to have him arrested while the Poyntzes are out of town; Tyndale is cast into Vilvoorde prison near Antwerp

**1536** Fifteen months later at Vilvoorde, Tyndale is strangled to death and his body burned at the stake

## **Church History**

**1480** Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain appoint inquisitors against heresy among converted Jews

**1492** Inquisitor-general Torquemada gives Spanish Jews three months to convert or leave country

**1492** The promiscuous Rodrigo Borgia becomes Pope Alexander VI

**1497** The College of Cardinals discusses a church bill condemning "licentious clergy," but the idea is soon dropped

**1501** Papal bull orders the burning of any books questioning Church's authority

**1505** John Knox, the leader of the Scottish Reformation, is born

**1509** John Calvin, the Swiss Reformer, is born (d. 1564)

**1516** Erasmus publishes the New Testament in Greek and Latin

**1516** Sir Thomas More writes *Utopia*

**1517** Martin Luther posts his *95 Theses*

**1518** Luther refuses to recant at Diet of Augsburg

**1519** Luther questions papal infallibility in a debate

**1519** Zwingli begins Swiss Reformation

**1520** Luther publicly burns Pope Leo X's excommunication bull

**1522** Anabaptist movement begins in Germany

**1529** Luther and Zwingli dispute at Marburg about the Eucharist

**1534** Pope Paul III, the father of three illegitimate children, comes to power

**1534** Luther completes translation of Bible into German

## **World History**

**1452–1519** Leonardo da Vinci lives and observes human anatomy and constructs designs for “helicopters,” “machine guns” and water turbines

**1492–1504** Christopher Columbus discovers America, crosses Atlantic four times

**1509** Henry VIII assumes English throne

**1512** Ponce de Leon discovers Florida

**1512** Copernicus publishes that the earth actually revolves around the sun

**1513** Henry conducts brief invasion of France

**1515** Thomas Wolsey is appointed Cardinal and Lord Chancellor of England

**1516–1556** Charles I of Spain (Emperor Charles V) reigns

**1518–22** The Spanish carry out their conquest of Mexico

**1521** The Turks capture Belgrade

**1527** Charles V sacks Rome

**1534** Henry declares the Act of Supremacy, which made him ultimate authority in England, even above the Pope

**1537** Henry encourages the distribution of Matthew Coverdale’s English Bible—mostly comprised of Tyndale’s work virtually unaltered—“abroad among the people”

**1539** Henry encourages all printers and sellers of books to provide for the “free and liberal use of the Bible in our own maternal English tongue”

# CHRISTIAN HISTORY

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## The Pen-and-Ink Wars, or Tyndale vs. More

JOHN A.R. DICK Dr. John A.R. Dick is an assistant professor of English at the University of Texas in El Paso, and is co-editor of two of Tyndale's polemic works, *The Parable of the Wicked Mammon* and *The Practice of Prelates*, which will be included in the forthcoming Tyndale series from Catholic University Of America Press

Theological polemics—that is, public debates in print about religious topics—were big in Europe in the 1520s and '30s. And without question, Tyndale was among the leading polemicists.

Derived from the Greek *polemos*, which means “war,” the term aptly describes the conflicts that went on between the reformers and the anti-reformers, especially between William Tyndale and Sir Thomas More. But whereas More's polemics had the sanction of King Henry and the official church and could be fired with great frequency and publicity, like heavy artillery, the polemics of the exiled Tyndale had to be launched surreptitiously, like catch-as-catch-can guerilla attacks against a much larger and more-impressively arrayed army. Yet it was these “guerilla attacks” which effectively won the day, firmly paving the way for the English Reformation.

Hiding in exile from heresy-hunters, constantly employing different printers using false addresses, Tyndale turned out a succession of pamphlets arguing the claims of reformed theology. The plain little volumes were then smuggled into England in the holds of merchant ships. Probably few at the time recognized them as the first shots of a revolution, much less as landmarks of English prose.

In four works published between 1528 and 1531, Tyndale basically took the offensive, propagandizing for reformed doctrines and attacking the established ecclesiastical system. In *The Parable of the Wicked Mammon*, published in May of 1528, he translated and expanded upon a sermon first preached by Martin Luther.

The biblical text he expounds is Luke 16:1–9, usually known as “The Parable of the Unjust Steward.” Throughout this and his other polemical writings, Tyndale consistently explains New Testament passages from what we might call a Pauline-Lutheran perspective: faith alone justifies, but good works done with a willing spirit serve as evidence of living faith. In Tyndale's words, “This longing and consent of the heart unto the law of God is the working of the Spirit which God hath poured into thine heart, in earnest that thou mightest be sure that God will fulfill all his promise that He hath made thee.” Because the pope and the papal hierarchy had corrupted this key doctrine, Tyndale equates them with the Pharisees and the Antichrist: “... for Antichrist is a spiritual thing, and is as much to say as against Christ; that is, one that preacheth false doctrine contrary to Christ.”

*The Obedience of a Christian Man*, published in October of 1528, is Tyndale's longest and most original polemic work. In it he argues the need for a widely available English translation of Scripture as the basis for both knowledgeable faith and civil order. He refutes the charge that the reformers preach disobedience to governments by attacking the papacy in the same terms. He alleges that the clergy “have with subtle wiles turned the obedience that should be given to God's ordinance unto themselves.” They are engaged in an international conspiracy, he says, to repress scriptural truth, to undermine established governments, and to gain wealth and political power.

He repeats the same charges in even more angry terms in *The Practice of Prelates*, which was published in 1530. Looking for evidence of such clerical plots, he surveys both the history of the papacy



and the chronicle histories of England to point out what he asserts are indications of such. In this he reveals either a lack of political awareness, an intentionally simplistic view, or perhaps the partially clouded thinking of a harassed and persecuted exile. He insists that the church's hesitation in regard to King Henry's divorce was simply a papal plot, orchestrated by Cardinal Wolsey, to discredit the English crown. He ends the work with this interesting call to repentance: "And unto all subjects I say that they repent. For the cause of evil rulers is the sin of the subjects, testifieth the Scripture."

Sir Thomas More, who had been commissioned by the Church to refute Tyndale, had published his *Dialogue Concerning Heresies* in 1529. Tyndale's *Practice of Prelates* includes brief rebuttals of More's assertions in this book, and his *Answer to Sir Thomas More's Dialogue*, published in 1531, was a fuller response. One man was staunchly Catholic, the other staunchly Protestant and, indicative of the vicissitudes of chameleon-like Henry, both would be executed within five years for their differing views of the faith.

Their debate centered on the relation of the church, or Church, and Scripture. Tyndale argues that the gospel preceded the church, formed the church, and now provides the test for discerning the true church—made up of those people who read the Scriptures with eyes of faith. "For the whole Scripture and all believing hearts testify that we are begotten through the Word."

Viewed from the 20th-century perspective, Tyndale's polemics might seem harsh, full of personal attacks, occasionally illogical, and at times almost paranoid. His language *is* frequently rough, and he often abuses his opponents in personal-attack terms.

He calls Wolsey "Cardinal Wolfsee" because the cleric occupied more than one church office at the same time; he baits Sir Thomas More for his friendship with the Dutch scholar Erasmus ("His darling Erasmus" is Tyndale's mocking phrase). He begs the question, assuming as true the point he is trying to prove. When the histories do not record clerical intrigue, he assumes that the writers, clergymen themselves, have covered their own tracks.

Yet this was the prevailing style of religious argumentation during the 16th century. Luther is as abusive of Erasmus as Tyndale is of More, and More is equally likely to use circular logic and vitriolic language against him. But Tyndale perhaps had additional convictions moving him to use every polemical tool at his disposal: he was a proclaimed heretic, in exile, and was moving closer and closer to the certainty that he would soon die by burning at the stake. As he wrote in *The Parable of the Wicked Mammon*, recalling the English authorities' suppression of his 1524–25 New Testament translation: "In burning the New Testament they did none other than what I looked for. No more shall they do if they burn me also; if it be God's will, it shall so be." Living with the likelihood that he would soon be arrested and executed doubtless contributed to his polemical incisiveness.

Many of Tyndale's polemical writings still retain value. They are the initial English expression of Reformation doctrines, and they mark the first time that lengthy intellectual debate takes place in print in the English language. Tyndale's style—which will remind modern readers of the King James Version—is quite equal to the occasion. Like his theological expositions, his polemical writings are steeped in Scripture, using plain language, simple but elegant rhythms, and abundant biblical imagery. To illustrate, here is the first full statement of the doctrine of justification by faith in *The Parable of the Wicked Mammon*:

"This is therefore a plain and a sure conclusion not to be doubted of: that there must be first in the heart of a man, before he do any good work, a greater and a preciouser thing than all the good works in the world, to reconcile him to God, to bring the love and favor of God to him, to make him love God again, to make him righteous and good in the sight of God, to do away his sin, to deliver him and loose him out of that captivity wherein he was conceived and born, in which he could neither love God, neither the will of God. Or else how can he work any good work that should please God, if there were not some

supernatural goodness in him given of God freely whereof the good work must spring?"

In ***The Obedience of a Christian Man***, Tyndale berates the established church authorities for refusing to license an English translation of the Bible: "Will ye resist God? Will ye forbid Him to give His Spirit unto the lay as well as unto you? Hath He not made the English tongue? Why forbid ye Him to speak in the English tongue, then, as well as in the Latin?"

For some 450 years now, Christian religious discussion in the English-speaking world has borne Tyndale's accent. Through his intellectual energy and his stylistic gifts, both as a translator and as a polemicist, Tyndale established many of the terms and much of the prose rhythm of those later debates.

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# CHRISTIAN HISTORY

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## What Tyndale Owed Gutenberg

RAYMOND A. LAJOIE Raymond A. LaJoie is a veteran free-lance writer, with more than 3,000 published articles and several writing awards to his credit. He lives in Worcester, Mass

As much as English-speaking and reading Christians should consider themselves indebted to Tyndale, they should consider themselves equally indebted to Johannes Gutenberg—without him, Tyndale’s “revolution” might well have been almost inconsequential.

Of course Gutenberg was not the first man ever to have thought of or used movable, mechanical type for duplicating documents; Chinese and Korean printers had developed and begun using some forms of movable type as early as 1060 A.D.

But if Gutenberg—or someone like him—hadn’t designed and built the first **commercially effective** printing facility ever, in Mainz, Germany in 1450, then Tyndale would have had to publish his translation of the New Testament into English by means of hiring scribes to copy it by hand. And even the fastest of scribes could not have produced in one year the number of copies of the New Testament that a Gutenberg-like press could produce in just a few weeks.

Without Gutenberg, production and distribution of Tyndale’s translation would have been severely slowed down by merely technical problems, not to mention all the resistance Tyndale received from official Roman Catholic and government sources.

But because Gutenberg devised the means to print a Latin version of the Bible with movable type in an original edition of 150 copies on heavy paper, plus 30 on fine vellum, Tyndale was able to print thousands of copies of an English version of the Bible on regular paper, and get them distributed all across his native England. And while we are certainly indebted to Tyndale for his steadfastness against the official resistance, both we and Tyndale are indebted to Gutenberg for his steadfastness against resistance of a different sort.

It is difficult to piece together the details of Gutenberg’s early life, but it is not hard to imagine this son of a scribe spending his days watching his father at work, and anguishing. The scribe’s job saw him bent over his writing table for hours on end, sometimes in minimal light, with infinite pains copying long and intricate manuscripts over and over again for the nobility, clergy and lawyers—and all by hand. A single book could take months to copy, and then it might start all over again.

So Johannes apparently watched his father, and thought, and came to a paradoxical resolution. While he appreciated the beauty and craft of his father’s handiwork—the intricately illustrated initial letters and the carefully aligned rows of graceful text—he was also moved with compassion over the drudgery of his father’s work and determined to do something to bypass the excruciating slowness of the process. He was inspired by the majesty of the craftsman’s finished product, a book, but was somehow more inspired with the idea that he could by some means produce hundreds of beautiful pages in the time his father produced one. And without the errors and deviations from copy to copy that always appeared in scribes’ work, even his father’s, no matter how painstaking they might be.

But first he had to encounter the resistance, which would wrestle with him throughout his life and finally beat him at the end: the resistance of financial shortages, legal manipulators and industrial self-protection.

In 1428, the Gutenberg family had to move from Mainz (Johannes' boyhood home) to Strasbourg. It seems the trade guilds of Mainz succeeded in ousting the patricians, of whom the Gutenbergs were members. Today we would call this "unionism-out-of-control." By this time, the 28-year-old Johannes had already sunk large portions of his personal finances into printing experiments, and was looking for funds from others.

He continued this in Strasbourg, but finding lenders' capital in a new city was even more difficult than in Mainz. So in 1444 he returned to Mainz and continued experimenting, despite skepticism and resistance from the scribes' guilds. They didn't like the thought of losing their jobs, and so spread rumors that he was an alchemist working on "devilish" things in his shop. But he did nothing to quell such rumors—in fact his working behind drawn shades probably only aggravated them. Rather, he simply rededicated himself to his experiments, resolving that he would work until the books he produced were not only uniform in appearance but distinctly more beautiful than those produced by the scribes.

In his drive toward perfection, he devised several techniques that remained fundamental to the printing industry until only recently, when photo-processing and computerization came along. Out of steel, he cut each letter of the alphabet, both capitals and lowercase, in order to make raised stamps that could be pounded into blocks of copper to form molds. He dropped these into a hand-casting device that was closed and filled with soft alloy to make one distinctive piece of type. These characters, lined up in columns, were held tight by locking them into a "forme" of wood, which was broken down after each page was printed for use on another page.

After four years of experimenting with such techniques, and no noticeable profit in sight, Gutenberg's finances had dwindled to the point that he had to borrow some money from a relative—a small loan of only 150 guilders. But one year after that, in 1449, with his progress still only measurable in terms of how much deeper he was in debt, he decided to approach Johann Fust, a wealthy Mainz lawyer, and ask him for 800 guilders at six percent interest. As security, he pledged his entire printing apparatus. Fust gave him the loan, and Gutenberg began printing pamphlets, leaflets and indulgences as quickly as he could.

Finally, enough experimenting, and Gutenberg was ready to print his first book. And what book would it be? The Bible, of course. What other work was worthy of man's best efforts? Which Bible? The Latin Vulgate, of course, the only Bible a good Catholic like Gutenberg would have acknowledged. In fact, printing the Latin Bible had been his goal for a very long time. But he had never imagined how much it would actually prove to cost him.

He wanted to produce 188 copies of the Bible, and he needed a huge sum of money to purchase the 8,000 calf skins and 100,000 sheets of paper that would be necessary. So he went back to Fust. The wealthy lawyer shrewdly sensed Gutenberg's precarious financial position, and also the tremendous profits to be made from the new printing process. So he gladly loaned another 800 guilders to Gutenberg, on the condition that he be made a partner and glean a share of the profits. Gutenberg agreed, and in 1452 the first Bible was produced; a whole new basis for human communication was established; and profits rolled in.

But only three years later, in 1455, the cagey Fust sued Gutenberg and, with the help of the print shop's foreman, completely took over the operation. Gutenberg retained no interest, and after finally acquiring a minor job with the Archbishop of Mainz, he died in 1468, a poor and broken-hearted man.

Little did he imagine that less than 80 years later, presses based on his design would be funneling thousands of copies of Luther's and Tyndale's "common language," "Protestant" Bibles into the hands of German and English commoners, thus fueling the Reformation's fires and helping bring an end to the Dark Ages. Nor could he have imagined that some 500 years later one of the first copies of his Latin Bible

would be purchased by the University of Texas for \$2.4 million—a substantial increase over the tiny amount he charged for one, and a price that clearly acknowledges the enormity of what he did for man by making it possible to duplicate and distribute information more rapidly.

So what Tyndale and we owe Gutenberg includes his refinement of moving type and inks, his refinement of the printing press, and his opening the way so that book distribution among the common people became a more-common thing.

His genius literally placed millions of books in the hands, and ideas in the minds, of people all around the world—enormously multiplying our knowledge and the rate at which it has increased. But perhaps a greater gift, from a spiritual angle, is that his inventions helped us to easily gain access to God's Word in our own language.

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# CHRISTIAN HISTORY

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## Bible Translation Today

### Following in Tyndale's Amazing Footsteps

RICHARD K. BARNARD Richard K. Barnard is a minister in the Reformed Episcopal Church, a media consultant, and a writer living in Lewisville, Texas. For five years he was director of communications for the International Bible Society

The consensus is in: Bible translating is a very difficult job and, considering his situation and what he had to work with, William Tyndale did a remarkable job. Many reputable translators today acknowledge that Tyndale's work was an amazing accomplishment, and are full of examples as to why the task he undertook was so difficult in his time, as well as today.

Why, not even considering the numerous persecutions he endured, Tyndale's task and mission were difficult enough: almost certainly with no other English version of the Scriptures to refer to (Wycliffe's hand-written version from a century before was almost certainly not available to him), and using only very limited Greek, German, Latin and Hebrew sources, he almost single-handedly translated some two-thirds of the Bible into English. His linguistic work is even more laudatory because so much of it has stood the test of time.

Without any earlier version to set precedents, he had to make thousands of personal judgment calls in choosing "just the right words" or expressions to best convey the meanings of the original text. Sometimes he could find no equivalent English expression, so he would coin new words to get to the heart of the meaning. For example, his coinage of the phrase "loving-kindness" to express the meaning of the Hebrew word *hesed* used so often in the Old Testament.

His translating skill and verbal sensitivity are obvious, and not only in the fact that the "Authorized" or King James Version's translators used about 90 percent of Tyndale's choices. His genius is further confirmed by the fact that, in several cases where the KJV translators chose to disregard Tyndale, later translators with more manuscript backing chose to go back to Tyndale's choices. A good example is found in 1 Corinthians 13, where Tyndale translated agape as "love," the KJV translators translated it as "charity," and nearly all modern translations have gone back to "love."

Tyndale set a worthy example for modern Bible translators who, though they have more ancient sources and more-modern tools, like computers, still face an arduous and complex task.

In accurately communicating the message and intent of the original writer, modern Bible translators say they have several important jobs, including:

- To find out what the original language says, not just the meaning of the individual words, but the meaning of those words as they were understood by the person who wrote them and the people who read them for the first time;
- To say the same thing in words that the target audience will understand;
- To say it in such a way that the target readers will understand the subject in the same way that the readers of the original document did.

Straightforward as that may sound, Bible translation is far from a simple thing to do, and always

involves several potentially problematic steps.

First, the translator must find out what the original language says. This begins with an understanding of vocabulary—the words themselves. Vocabulary problems can be confusing—and often “confusing” means “comical.”

The classic example of misunderstood vocabulary occurs in one of the early Spanish translations of the New Testament. John 20:14f describes Jesus approaching the bereaved Mary Magdalene in the garden following his resurrection. She turned to face him and mistook him for the gardener.

But the early translator did not fully recognize the difference between the several Spanish words for turning. The word he chose is the same one the Indian women used to describe turning over a tortilla. The meaning it conveys is roughly the same as flipping a pancake. Taken literally, this translation would imply that the bereaved Mary was an acrobat: in order to turn and face Jesus, says this version, she did a flip.

One missionary translator considered himself fortunate when he found a member of his target language group who understood the phrase “What is this?” The missionary proceeded to point to an item and ask the man for its identifying name. The language helper gave him a word, and the missionary wrote it down. Then he pointed to a second item and asked again, but the helper gave him the same word as before. In fact, no matter what the missionary pointed to, he always got the same answer. The missionary had not yet discovered that members of this tribal group never used a single finger for pointing. So when the missionary stuck out his finger and said, “What is this?” his patient helper told him again and again—a finger.

Tyndale and the other translators of his era faced vocabulary problems all their own. Four centuries ago scholars knew much less about the ancient languages than they do today. In some cases the translators faced words they had never seen before. They could only guess at the meaning. That’s why the KJV, in Proverbs 30:31, says “greyhound” when it should say “rooster,” and in Job 30:29, it says “dragon” when it should say “jackal.”

In Matthew 6:2, Jesus says that people who make a public display of giving alms “have their reward.” Or so says the KJV. But the word translated here as “have” is the Greek word ***apectho***, which occurs nowhere else in the New Testament and nowhere in any other work of Greek known in the time of King James. So the translators made an educated guess based on similar known words. Only within the past 100 years have archaeologists discovered that the word was commonly used in Jesus’ day in regard to commercial transactions, with the noun ***apochē*** meaning “receipt” and the verb ***apectho*** meaning “paid in full.” Thus, modern translations have generally translated Jesus’ words as “they have received their reward in full.”

But solving the vocabulary problems is only the first step in solving the problems of translation. Several of those scholars who worked on the translation of the New International Version of the Bible are quick to point out that language is more than just words; language is the way people use words. A good translator must know how those words work together, they say, both in the original language and in the target language into which he or she is translating.

Dr. Bruce Waltke, a professor of Old Testament and Hebrew at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, emphasizes that words only come to their full meaning “within context.” Waltke talks about “the father of modern linguistics,” Ferdinand de Saussure, and how Saussure likened language to “a chess game.”

Waltke explains that “in a chess game, every piece on the board can make certain moves. But the value of any given piece depends upon the shape of the board, where the other pieces are. Every time you

move one piece you change the value of every other piece. Sometimes you can make a move that's very decisive, and it changes the total shape of the board.

"Words are like that," says Waltke. "Words can have differing meanings, but their true value is determined by every other word in the sentence. So you can't touch one word without changing the value of all the other words in the sentence."

Waltke illustrates: "If I say, 'I sang before President Reagan,' You might think that I sang in his presence, that I stood before him and sang. However, if I say, 'I sang before President Reagan spoke,' I've changed the value of the word before. In the first example it had to do with space. In the second example it had to do with time."

Obviously, then, the translator must know more than the meanings of mere individual words. He must deal with the words in context, in relation to the other words in the sentence, the paragraph and the entire work. He must deal with grammar and usage, which are almost always different in different languages. He must reach behind the string of individual words to find the heart and meaning in the phrases and sentences.

Some might ask, Doesn't this phrase-by-phrase rather than word-by-word approach mean a decrease in literal accuracy? The answer is, Not at all. In fact, the very opposite is true. Consider, for example, this word-by-word translation of a familiar passage:

"But if also is covered good news our in those perishing it is covered in whom the god of this age blinded the thoughts of the unbelieving so as not to beam forth to them the radiancy of the good news of the glory of the Christ who is image of God." Translated in this way, this passage is difficult, if not impossible, to understand—especially by readers unfamiliar with the Bible.

Now, here's 2 Corinthians 4:3, 4 in what the translators of the *New International Version* believe is a more dynamically equivalent rendering for 20th-century English-speaking readers:

"And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God."

In regard to this dynamic-equivalence concept, Dr. Ronald Youngblood, a translator and professor of New Testament and Greek at Bethel Theological Seminary, says, "There's a common misunderstanding that only a word-for-word translation can be a literal translation. When I use the term literal I mean a normal translation, one that gets across to the reader what the original author intended."

So even after considering the vocabulary, context, grammar and usage, the translator's job is still only beginning. For even when he has determined what the words say, he still must determine what the original writer intended those words to mean.

Dr. Larry Walker, a professor of Hebrew and Old Testament at Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary, says: "We have to decide sometimes whether to translate what the word says or what it means. And sometimes that's a big difference. For example, figures of speech. Obviously, what they say is not necessarily what they mean. If I say to you, 'Stop pulling my leg,' well, we know what the words say, but they don't mean stop pulling my leg."

Using a biblical example, Walker notes that "in Hebrew, you have many expressions that we do not use in English. In Hebrew you can speak of the heart as the center of emotions and feeling. We do that in English. No problem speaking of love in our heart. But the Hebrew will also use other organs of the body, in addition to the heart, to express these concepts. You also see words like *bowels*, *liver* and



**kidney** used to express seats of feeling. All of these have to be translated according to what they mean rather than to what they say.

"When the prophet Jeremiah was very upset over the fall of Jerusalem," says Walker, "he said his liver was poured out on the ground. That's exactly what the Hebrew says. There's no question about what it says. But it doesn't mean that his liver was poured out on the ground. It means he was very upset and distraught."

Youngblood, in describing the approach used in translating the **New International Version**, says: "We wanted to make an idiom-for-idiom translation rather than a word-for-word translation, because sometimes literal idioms don't translate well into other languages. If I were, for example, to say to someone who lives in Japan, 'Five years ago my grandfather kicked the bucket,' that Japanese person would have no idea what I was talking about. Or, if he did, he would picture my grandfather going out into the back yard and booting a pail around .... There are idioms that cannot be translated word-for-word into English without making nonsense."

The importance of treating every idiom so carefully is highlighted by remembering that the goal of translation is faithfully and accurately communicating the intent of the author in a different language.

"Faithfulness moves in two directions," says Dr. Kenneth L. Barker, academic dean of Capital Bible Seminary and a professor of Old Testament and Hebrew. "On the one hand, it moves back toward the original Hebrew and Greek. On the other hand, faithfulness relates to the target or receptor language. It is just as important to be faithful to the target language as it is to be faithful to the original language from which one is translating."

Says Dr. Murray Harris, a professor of Greek and New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School: "The art of translating is like a high-wire act; the essence of the art is maintaining one's balance. The balance for the translator is between an accurate translation on the one hand and a contemporary translation on the other. There is always the danger of falling off one side or the other—of being accurate but not contemporary, or of being contemporary but not accurate."

Careful attention to the original language without equal care and respect for the target language results in only half a translation. And there's still another element. When the translator has considered the meanings of the individual words, their context and the idioms and grammar and usage of both the original language and the target language, there is more work to do.

"For example," says Larry Walker, "there is no punctuation in the original that corresponds really to English. There is some punctuation in Greek, but it's not exactly what we work with. There's no punctuation in Hebrew, basically. So in talking about everything from periods to question marks to commas to semicolons to colons to dashes to hyphens to parentheses to brackets, all of these are put in by the translators. And they have tremendous ramifications.

"Even a small comma can make a complete difference in meaning," says Walker. He uses a modern-English example: "'John having left, his wife, Kathy, needs our prayers.' That means one thing. But look what happens if I move the commas around a bit: 'John having left his wife, Kathy needs our prayers.' That changes the meaning completely."

Exhaustive knowledge of vocabulary in both languages. Exhaustive knowledge of context in both languages. Exhaustive knowledge of idioms, grammar and punctuation in both languages. Exhaustive understanding of the original writer's intent.

All these are prerequisites for the perfect Bible translator, who of course does not exist in this world. Still, many people around the world have committed themselves to moving closer to this ideal, both by

studying and by translating, by daily wrestling with the multiplexity of English and hundreds of other languages.

Obviously, their work is not simple—and never has been. A translator some 400 years ago, one Martin Luther, said in his old age, “It is good for me that I have been involved in translating the Bible, for otherwise I might have died with the fond persuasion that I am learned.”

Today, men and women of conviction and discipline carry on the legacy of those, like Luther and Tyndale, who devoted themselves to getting the Bible into the languages of all peoples. These determined people continue to press for ways to cross every language barrier .

With pens and paper, with typewriter and computer keyboard, they press on, typically in very difficult circumstances. Increasingly, in several parts of the world, there is opposition to Bible translators, sometimes including physical assault and abuse. Some, like the Wycliffe Translators’ Chet Bitterman, have even been killed.

Tyndale, no doubt, would not have been surprised nor chagrined. In fact, he asserted all through his persecutions that the task of getting the Bible into the language of the people was worth the risk of his life. He would encourage these who follow in his footsteps. As he translated the Bible into the language you are reading now, so they translate it into other languages, so that people in all the world may share the truth that the English Bible makes available to us.

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# CHRISTIAN HISTORY

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## The Origin and Growth of the Bible in English

This graph shows the many versions through which the English Bible has developed, and the varying degrees to which the successive versions were based upon earlier versions, all the way back to the original manuscripts. Of course the original manuscripts have long since disintegrated, but more handwritten copies of those original autographs exist than for any other ancient writing of note. The graph also makes obvious how discoveries of more ancient manuscripts than those available to Tyndale have further sharpened the reliability of the newest English versions.

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## So Many Languages, So Few Translations

Despite there being today nearly 30 times as many different Bible translations as existed in Tyndale's time (and **hundreds** of English versions and editions), the need for Bibles in all the world's languages is far, far from met.

According to the Wycliffe Bible Translators' International Linguistics Center in Dallas, Texas, of the more-than-5,000 known language groups in the world, at least 3,186 (some 60 percent) have no translation of the Scriptures in their language at all: no Bibles, no New Testaments, not even a single book of the Bible. The number of people in each of these language groups ranges from less than 100 in some groups to more than 22 million in one.

The Wycliffe Center says that translation work is underway for at least 1,333 of these 3,186 languages, and that translators enter a new language group on an average of one every 8–10 days.

However, translation is a long process, so translations do not come out nearly that often. Up to 15 years may pass between a translator's first contact with a new language group and the actual publishing of just a New Testament in that language, according to the center. And it has occasionally taken 30 years for that to be accomplished.

Currently, according to the center, 1,837 of the world's language groups possess all or parts of the Bible in their native tongues. Of that number 293 language groups possess the entire Bible, and another 637 possess the entire New Testament.

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## From the Archives: A Letter From Prison, in Tyndale's Own Hand

*The only known writing in Tyndale's hand still extant, this correspondence came from Tyndale sometime in the winter of 1535, as he was imprisoned in Vilvoorde Castle. It was addressed to the governor of the castle, that very Marquis of Bergen to whom Lord Chancellor Thomas Cromwell had already appealed on Tyndale's behalf. It appears here in Tyndale's hand, along with a printed transcription of Tyndale's Latin and an English translation of that Latin. Note Tyndale's respectful tone and concern for the governor's spiritual well-being, and the centrality of Tyndale's request for his Bible-translating books.*

### The Latin Transcribed

Credo non latere te, vir praestantissime, quid de me statutum sit. Quam ob rem, tuam dominationem rogatum habeo, idque per Dominum Jesum, ut si mihi per hiemem hic manendum sit, solicates apud dominum commissarium, si forte dignari veldt, de rebus meis quas habet, mittere calidiorem birettum; frigus enim patior in capite nimium, oppressus perpetuo catarro qui sub testitudine nonnihil augetur.

Calidiorem quoque tunicam, nam, haec quam habeo admodum tenuis est. Item pannum ad caligas reficiendas. Diplois detrita est; camiseae detritae sunt etiam. Camiseam laneam habet, si mittere velit. Habeo quoque apud eum caligas ex crassiori panno ad superius induendum; nocturna biretta calidiora habet etiam: utque vesper; lucernam habere liceat; tediosum quidem est per tenebras solitarie sedere.

Maxime autem omnium tuam clementiam rogo atque obsecro ut ex animo agere velit apud dominum commissarium quatenus dignari velit mihi concedere Bibliam Hebraicam, Grammaticam Hebraicam, et Vocabularium Hebraicum, ut eo studio tempus conteram. Sic tibi obtingat quod maxime optas modo cum animae tuae salute fiat: Verum si aliud consilium de me ceptum [sic] est, ante hiemem perficiendum, patiens ero, Dei expectans voluntatem, ad gloriam gratiae Domini mei Jesu Christi, Cujus Spiritus tuum semper regat pectus. Amen.

W. Tindalus

### The English Translation

I believe, right worshipful, that you are not ignorant of what has been determined concerning me [by the Council of Brabant]; therefore I entreat your Lordship, and that by the Lord Jesus, that if I am to remain here [in Vilvoorde] during the winter, you will request the Procurer to be kind enough to send me from my goods, which he has in his possession, a warmer cap, for I suffer extremely from cold in the head, being afflicted with a perpetual catarrh, which is considerably increased in the cell.

A warmer coat also, for that which I have is very thin; also a piece of cloth to patch my leggings: my overcoat has been worn out; my shirts are also worn out. He has a woolen shirt of mine, if he will be kind enough to send it. I have also with him leggings of thicker cloth for the putting on above; he also has warmer caps for wearing at night. I wish also his permission to have a candle in the evening, for it is wearisome to sit alone in the dark.

But above all, I entreat and beseech your clemency to be urgent with the Procurer that he may kindly permit me to have my Hebrew Bible, Hebrew Grammar, and Hebrew Dictionary, that I may spend my

time with that study. And in return, may you obtain your dearest wish, provided always it be consistent with the salvation of your soul. But if any other resolutions have been come to concerning me, before the conclusion of the winter, I shall be patient, abiding the will of God to the glory of the grace of my Lord Jesus Christ, whose spirit, I pray, may ever direct your heart. Amen.

W. Tyndale

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## From the Archives: Dear King Henry,...

*This is a letter from Vaughan, the king's agent, to his master and commissioner, King Henry VIII himself, regarding one of the conversations that Vaughan had with Tyndale while he was trying to persuade the translator to return to England from Europe. Note the apparent respect that Vaughan had for Tyndale, and the apparent respect that Tyndale had for the king, albeit he had greater respect for the Scriptures.*

I have again been in hand to persuade Tindal [a common spelling of the reformer's name in that day]; and, to draw him rather to favor my persuasions, and not to think the same feigned, I showed him a clause contained in Master Cromwell's letter, containing these words: "And notwithstanding the premises in this my letter contained, if it were possible by good and wholesome exhortation to reconcile and convert the said Tindal from the train and affection which he now is in, and to extirpate and take away the opinions and fantasies forcibly rooted in him, I doubt not but the king's highness would be much joyous of his conversion and amendment. And so, being converted, if then he would return into his realm, undoubtedly the king's royal majesty is so inclined to mercy, pity and compassion that he refuseth none which he seeth to submit themselves to the obedience and good order of the world."

In these words, I thought to be such sweetness and virtues as were able to pierce the hardest heart of the world, and as I thought, so it came to pass; for after sight thereof, I perceived the man to be exceedingly altered, and to take the same very near unto his heart, in such wise that water stood in his eyes, and he answered:

"What gracious words are these! I assure you," said he, "if it would stand with the king's most gracious pleasure to grant only a bare text of the Scriptures to be put forth among his people, like as is put forth among the subjects of the emperor in these parts, and of other Christian princes, be it the translation of whatsoever person shall please his majesty, I shall immediately make faithful promise never to write more, nor abide two days in these parts after the same; but immediately repair unto his realm, and there most humbly submit myself at the feet of his royal majesty, offering my body to suffer whatever pain or torture, yea, whatever death his grace will, so [long as] this be obtained. And till that time, I will abide the aspersions of all the chances, whatsoever shall come, and endure my life in as many pains as it is able to bear and suffer. And as concerning my reconciliation, his grace may be assured that, whatsoever I have said or written, in all my life, against the honor of God's Word, and [if that be] proved, the same shall I, before his majesty and all the world, utterly renounce and forsake, and with most humble and meek mind embrace the truth, abhorring all error soever sooner at the most gracious and benign request of his royal majesty, of whose wisdom, prudence and learning I hear so great praise and commendation, than of any other creature living. But if those things which I have written be true, and stand with God's Word, why should his majesty, having so excellent a guide of knowledge in the Scriptures, move me to do anything against my conscience?"

[And so he continued] with many other words which were too long to write. Finally, I have some good hope in the main, and would not doubt to bring him to some good point, were it that something now and then might proceed from your majesty toward me, whereby the man might take the better comfort of my persuasions.

I advised the same Tindal that he should not put forth the same books till your most gracious pleasure were known, whereunto he answered that mine advisement came too late, for he feared lest one that had his copy would put it very shortly in print, which he would hinder if he could; if not, there is no

remedy. I shall stay it as much as I can; as yet it is not come forth, nor will not in a while, by that I perceive.

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# CHRISTIAN HISTORY

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## From the Archives: Dear Mr. More,...

***Sir Thomas More's Dialogue, published in 1529, was the first attack in the polemic war that developed between More and William Tyndale. Published about a year after the Church gave More permission to read the works of "heretics" so that he could refute them, the dialogue was a "true believer's" defense of the Roman Catholic Church.***

***Tyndale's Answer to Sir Thomas More's Dialogue was published in 1531, printed probably at Antwerp, and was a point-by-point response to More's onslaughts. In this selection, Tyndale focuses on justification being by faith, rather than by the works endorsed by the Church.***

Our love and good works make not God first love us, nor change him from hate to love, as the Turks, the Jews, and the vain popish mean. No, **His** love and deeds make **us** love, and change **us** from hate to love. For He loved us when we were evil, and His enemies, as testifieth Paul in divers places; and chose us to make us good and to show us love, and to draw us to Him, that we should love again.

The father loveth his child, when it hath no power to do good, and when it must be suffered to run after its own lusts without law; and never loveth it better than then, to make it better, and to show it love, to love again. If ye could see what is written in the first epistle of John, though all the other Scripture were laid apart, ye should see all this.

And ye must understand, that we sometime dispute forward, from the cause to the effect; and sometime backward, from the effect to the cause, and must beware that we be not therewith beguiled. Sometime we say, "Summer is come, and therefore all is green"; we dispute forward, for summer is the cause of greenness. Other time we say, "The trees be green, and therefore summer is come"; we dispute backward from the effect to the cause, for the green trees make not summer, but make summer known.

So we dispute backward: the man doth good deeds, and profitable unto his neighbor; he must therefore love God. He loveth God; he must therefore have a true faith and see mercy. And yet my works make not my love, nor my love my faith, nor my faith God's mercy. But contrary, God's mercy maketh my faith; and my faith, my love; and my love, my works. And if the pope could see mercy, and work of love to his neighbor, and not sell his works to God for heaven, after Master More's doctrine, we needed not so subtle disputing of faith.

And when M. More allegeth Paul to the Corinthians, to prove that faith may be without love, he proveth nothing, but jugglETH only. He saith, "It is evident by the words of Paul, that a man may have a faith to do miracles without love, and may give all his good in alms without love, and his body to burn of the name of Christ, and all without charity." Well, I will not stick with him: he may so do, without charity, and without faith thereto. Then a man may have faith without faith.

Yea, verily, because there be many differences of faith, as I have said; and not all faiths one faith as Master More jugglETH. We read in the works of St. Cyprian that there were martyrs that suffered martyrdom for the name of Christ all the year long, and were tormented and healed again, and then brought forth afresh. Which martyrs believed, as ye do, that the pain of their martyrdom should be a deserving, and merit enough, not only to deserve heaven for themselves, but to make satisfaction for the sins of other men thereto; and gave pardons of their merits, after the example of the pope's

doctrine; and forgave the sins of other men, who had openly denied Christ, and wrote unto Cyprian, that he should receive those men who had denied Christ into the congregation again, at the satisfaction of their merits; for which pride Cyprian wrote to them, and called them the devil's martyrs, and not God's ....

If I work for a worldly purpose, I get no reward in heaven. Even also if I work for heaven, or an higher place in heaven, I get there no reward. But I must do my work for the love of my neighbor, because he is my brother, and the price of Christ's blood, and because Christ hath deserved it, and desireth it for me; and then my reward is great in heaven.

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## From the Archives: A Dialogue on the Lord's Prayer

*Tyndale wrote this treatise to, he writes, "fill up the leaf of the paternoster" [as he would have known the Lord's Prayer]. The treatise is, he says, "very necessary and profitable, wherein—if you mark it—you shall perceive what prayer is and all that belongs to prayer."*

*The harsh and irritated tone of God's language in the piece is at times somewhat jarring; but the importance of this to the dialogue is explained in Tyndale's preface:*

"The sinner prays the petitions of the paternoster, and God answers by the law, as though He would put him from his desire. The sinner acknowledges that he is worthy to be put back, but nevertheless, faith cleaves fast to God's promises and compels Him, for His truth's sake, to hear the petition. Mark this well and take it for a sure conclusion: when God commands us in the law to do anything, He commands not therefore that we are able to do it, but to bring us unto the knowledge of ourselves, that we might see what we are and what a miserable state we are in, and to know our lack, that thereby we should turn to God to acknowledge our wretchedness unto Him, and to desire Him that of His mercy He would make us what He bids us be, and to give us strength and power to do that which the law requires of us .... The office of the law is only to utter sin, and to declare what miserable damnation and captivity we are in. Is it not a miserable, yes, a fearsome and horrible damnation ..., when our very hearts are so fast bound and locked unto the power of the devil that we cannot once as much as consent unto the will of almighty God, our Father, Creator, and Maker?"

*Tyndale writes that we should elaborate upon the Lord's Prayer like this:*

**The Sinner:** Our Father who is in heaven, what a great space is between Thee and us. How therefore shall we, Thy children here on earth, banished and exiled from Thee in this vale of misery and wretchedness, come home to Thee into our natural country?

**God:** The child honors his father, and the servant his master. If I am your father, where is My honor? If I am your lord, where is My fear? (Malachi 1). For My name through you and by your means is blasphemed, railed upon and evil spoken of (Isaiah 52).

**The Sinner:** Alas, o Father, that is true. We acknowledge our sin and trespass. Yet be Thou a merciful father, and deal not with us according to our deservings, neither judge us by the rigorousness of Thy will, but give us grace that we may so live that Thy holy name may be hallowed and sanctified in us. And keep our hearts, that we neither do nor speak, no, that we not once think or purpose anything but that which is to Thy honor and praise, and above all things make Thy name and honor to be sought of us and not our own name and vain glory. And of Thy mighty power bring to pass in us that we may love and fear Thee as a son his father.

**God:** How can My honor and name be hallowed among you, when your hearts and thoughts are always inclined to evil, and yes in bondage and captivity under sin, moreover seeing that no man can sing My laud and praise in a strange country (Psalm 136).

**The Sinner:** O Father, that is true. We feel our members, yes, and also our very hearts, prone and ready to sin. And that the world, the flesh, and the devil rule in us, and expel the due honor of Thy

holy name. Wherefore we beseech Thee, most merciful Father, for the love that Thou hast unto Thy son Christ, help us out of this miserable bondage, and let Thy kingdom come, to drive out the sin, to loose the bonds of Satan, to tame the flesh, to make us righteous and perfect, and to cleave unto Thee, that Thou only may reign in us, and that we may be Thy kingdom and possession, and Thee obey with all our power and strength, both within and without.

**God:** Whom I help, them I destroy. And whom I make living, safe, rich and good, them I kill, condemn and cast away, make them beggars and bring them to nought. But so be cured of me, [and] you will not suffer (Psalm 77). How then shall I heal you, yes, and what can I do more? (Isaiah 5).

**The Sinner:** That is to us great sorrow and grief, that we can neither understand nor suffer Thy wholesome hand. Wherefore help, dear Father, open our eyes and work patience in us, that we may understand Thy wholesome hand and also patiently suffer Thy godly will to be fulfilled in us. Furthermore, though Thy most wholesome cure be never so painful unto us, yet go forward therewith, punish, beat, cut, burn, destroy, bring to nought, damn, cast down unto hell, and do whatsoever Thou wilt, that Thy will only may be fulfilled and not ours. Forbid, dear Father, and in no wise suffer us to follow our own good thoughts and imaginations, neither to prosecute our own will, meaning and purpose. For Thy will and ours are clean contrary one to the other, thine only good (though it otherwise appear unto our blind reason), and ours evil (though our blindness see it not).

**God:** I am well served and dealt withal, that men love me with their lips and their hearts are far from me, and when I take them in hand to make them better and to amend them, then run they backward, and in the midst of their curing, while their health is aworking, they withdraw themselves from me, as you read (Psalms 77). *Conversisunt in die belli*;. They are turned back in the day of battle, that is to say, they which began well and committed themselves unto me, that I should take them in hand and cure them, are gone back from me in time of temptations and fulfilling of the flesh, and are returned to sin and unto dishonoring me again ....

**The Sinner:** O Father, have mercy on us, and deny us not that bread of love. It grieves us sore, even at the very root of our heart, that we cannot satisfy Thy words and follow it. We desire thee, therefore, to have patience with us, Thy poor and wretched children, and to forgive us our trespass and guilt, and judge us not after Thy law, for no man is righteous in Thy presence. Look on Thy promises. We forgive our trespassers, and that with all our hearts, and unto such hast Thou promised forgiveness—not that we through such forgiveness are worthy of **Thy** forgiveness, but that Thou art true, and of Thy grace and mercy have promised forgiveness unto all them that forgive their neighbors. In this Thy promise, therefore, is all our hope and trust.

**God:** I forgive you often and loose you often, and you never abide steadfast. Children of little faith are you. You cannot watch and endure with me a little while, but at once fall again into temptation (Matthew 26) .... I am righteous and right in my judgment, and therefore sin cannot go unpunished ....

**The Sinner:** For as much, then, as adversity, tribulation, affliction and evil which fight against sin give us temptation, deliver us out of them, finish Thy cure and make us thoroughly whole, that we, loosed from sin and evil, may be unto Thee a kingdom, to laud, to praise and to sanctify Thee. Amen. And seeing that Thou hast taught us thus to pray, and hast promised also to hear us, we hope and are sure that Thou wilt graciously and mercifully grant us our petitions, for Thy truth's sake, and to the honoring of Thy truth. Amen.

Finally, some man will say haply, "What and if I cannot believe that my prayer is heard?" I answer, "Then do as the father of the possessed did in the 9th [chapter] of Mark, when Christ said unto him, 'If you could believe, all things are possible unto him that believes.' The father answered, 'I believe, Lord help my unbelief,' that is to say, heal my unbelief and give perfect belief and strengthen the weakness of my faith and increase it."

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# CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 16: William Tyndale: Early Reformer & Bible Translator

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## From the Archives: From The Obedience of a Christian Man

*According to Tyndale experts, the translator's basic purpose in this treatise was to set forth, based on Scripture alone, his understanding of the real duties of a Christian—and to show how the abuses and imbalances of the institutional church of the time were leading people away from these "true duties." In the book's several chapters, Tyndale treats, in order, the expectations God outlines in Scripture for children, wives, servants, and the king's subjects. He then proceeds to God-ordained duties for husbands, masters, landlords, judges and king's officers, showing how, in his interpretation, each ought to rule. Then he suggests ways in which the papacy's abuses had usurped the authority allotted to these other powers, hence dealing with the sacraments, the Antichrist, baptism, wedlock, monastic orders, penance, confession, contrition, absolution, anointing, miracles, the adoration of saints, and prayer. He then analyzes and critiques the four approaches to Scripture interpretation that were prevalent at the time, and concludes with "a compendious rehearsal of that which goeth before." This extract is from that "rehearsal."*

I have described unto you the obedience of children, servants, wives, and subjects. These four orders are of God's making, and the rules thereof are God's Word. He that keeps them shall be blessed—yea, is blessed already—and he that breaketh them shall be cursed.

If any person, from impatience or a stubborn and rebellious mind, withdraw himself from any of these, and get him to any other order, let him not think thereby to avoid the vengeance of God in obeying rules and tradition of man's imagination.

If thou shavest shine head in the worship of thy Father, and breakest His commandments, shouldest thou so escape? Or, if thou paintest thy Master's image on a wall and slickest up a candle before it, shouldest thou therewith make satisfaction for the breaking of His commandment? Or, if thou wearest a blue coat in the worship of the king and breakest his laws, shouldest thou so go quit?

Let a man's wife make herself a sister of the chatterhouse, and answer her husband, when he bids her hold her peace. My brethren keep silence for me, and see whether she shall so escape. And be thou sure that God is more jealous over His commandments than man is over his, or than any man is over his wife.

Because we are blind, God has appointed in the Scripture how we should serve Him and please Him. As pertaining unto His own person, He is abundantly pleased when we believe His promises and the holy testament which He has made unto us in Christ, and [hence] for the mercy which He there showed us, [we] love His commandments.

All bodily service must be done to man in God's stead. We must give obedience, honor, toll, tribute, custom and rent unto whom they belong. Then if thou have ought more to bestow, give unto the poor which are left here in Christ's stead, that we show mercy to them ....

Therefore, I say, is a Christian called to suffer even the bitter death for his hope's sake, and because he will do no evil. I showed also that kings and rulers, be they ever so evil, are yet a great gift of the goodness of God, and defend us from a thousand things that we see not.

I proved also that all men, without exception, are under the temporal sword, whatsoever names they

give themselves. Because the priest is chosen out of the laymen to teach this obedience, is that a lawful cause for him to disobey? Because he preaches that the layman should not steal. is it therefore lawful for him to steal unpunished? ...

Moreover, Christ became poor, to make other men rich, and bound, to make others free. He left also with His disciples the law of love. Now love seeketh not her own profit, but her neighbor's .... The spirituality [the clergy], therefore, are condemned by all the laws of God, who through falsehood and disguised hypocrisy have sought so great profit, so great riches, so great authority and so great liberties; and have so beggared the laymen, and so brought them into subjection and bondage, and so despised them, that they have set up franchises in all towns and villages, for whosoever robs, murders or slays them, and even for traitors unto the king's person also.

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# CHRISTIAN HISTORY

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Issue 16: William Tyndale: Early Reformer & Bible Translator

## William Tyndale: Recommended Resources

***The Independent Works of William Tyndale*** (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, scheduled for release between 1992 and 1998). Yale University Press is publishing newly annotated editions of the works of Sir Thomas More, including his polemic writings against Tyndale, and CUAP's series will feature Tyndale's rebuttals, as well as several of his expositions of Scripture.

Lewis Lupton, ***Tyndale, Translator*** and ***Tyndale, Martyr***, from which several of the illustrations in this issue were taken. Published by The Olive Tree Press, Chiswick, England, these books are part of a multi-volume history that Lupton, a retired artist, is writing about the English Bible. No mechanical printing appears in these remarkable books, as Lupton has completely hand-lettered and -illustrated them himself.

### Other Good Tyndale-Related Works:

Brian H. Edwards, ***God's Outlaw*** (Phillipsburg, NJ: Evangelical Press, 1976; reprint, 1986).

Henry Walter, ed., ***The Works of William Tyndale, Parker Society Series*** (Cambridge: The University Press, 1848–50; reprint London: Johnson Reprint Corp., 1968).

George Duffield, ed., ***The Works of William Tyndale, The Courtenay Library of Reformation Classics*** (Berkshire: The Sutton Courtenay Press, 1964).

J.F. Mozley, ***William Tyndale*** (Westport, CO: Greenwood Press, 1971 reprint).

Donald Dean Smeeton, ***Lollard Themes in the reformation Theology of William Tyndale*** (Published by the Sixteenth-Century Study Council, 1987).

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