

WILLIAM TYNDALE
Covenant Theologian, Christian Martyr
Part 2: Later Biography

by Jules Grisham

THE 1526 NEW TESTAMENT

Tyndale sailed for Hamburg in 1524, never to return to England. While there, he remained under the patronage of the Christian Brethren, who, with a powerful mixture of religious radicalism and risk-taking entrepreneurship, were profiting handsomely from their book-smuggling trade. Concealed in bales of cloth, sacks of grain, and barrels of wine, the books they smuggled through the English ports were soon being transmitted all along the cloth-trade networks where they were eagerly purchased.¹ Interestingly, this term “Christian Brethren,” the self-designation of these London merchants engaged in importing books by English Protestants on the continent, was also applied to the Lollards and their book-exchanging networks. “So,” notes Dickens, “in men like Monmouth we see the linkage between the international world of Lutheranism and the older English networks of Lollards.”²

Tyndale and his amanuensis William Roye, an Augustinian friar of Jewish background from Calais, worked together on translating the New Testament using Erasmus’ Greek New Testament, the Vulgate, and Luther’s German Bible as sources. In the spring of 1525, they moved on to Cologne, a center of printing, and by autumn of that year they handed a finished copy to a Cologne printer who managed to print out 3,000 copies of the first eighty pages before the local authorities ordered him to stop. The anti-Lutheran controversialist known as Cochlaeus had infiltrated the ranks of the printers and had discovered their plot to flood England with these Tyndale Testaments before the king or cardinal could discover it. He saw to it that further printing was expressly forbidden, and he promptly fired off letters to Henry VIII, Cardinal Wolsey, and the bishop of Rochester to warn them “that they might take diligent precautions at all the English ports to prevent these pernicious wares being imported.”³

To get a sense of just how threatened many English churchmen were by the prospect of translated Bibles being disseminated without any controls, see this letter from Edward Lee, later Archbishop of York, to Henry VIII:

“I nede not to aduertise your grace, what infection and daunger maye ensue heerbie, if it bee not withstoded. This is the next waye to fulfill

¹ Felipe Fernandez-Armesto, and Derek Wilson, *Reformations: a Radical Interpretation of Christianity and the World* (New York: Scribner, 1996), 140.

² Dickens, *English Reformation*, 93.

³ Pollard, *Records of the English Bible*, 108.

your realme with lutherians, for all Luthers peruerse opinions bee grownded vpon bare wordes of Scriptur not well taken ne vnderstanded.”⁴

Temporarily forestalled, Tyndale and Roye fled from Cologne with the 3,000 partially printed copies, and they raced along the Rhine to Worms. There they handed off the manuscript to a local printer, and in February 1526 the first English New Testament translated from the Greek was printed. Copies began arriving in London within a month.⁵

The Lutheran influence on Tyndale’s Testament was pervasive. This fact may indicate that the Englishman had moved closer to the Lutheran position since his disappointment with what we might refer to as the “non-populist humanism” of Cuthbert and since his arrival in Germany. On the other hand, it may merely indicate that he was freer now to express the Lutheran opinions which he had held already. Or perhaps some combination of both explanations is true. In any event, Tyndale’s prefaces to Romans, First Corinthians, and Galatians were essentially translations of Luther’s own. Even more importantly, Tyndale’s prologue, epilogue, and marginal glosses were distinctly Lutheran in their emphasis on the priority of justification by faith. As an example of this emphasis, consider this passage from the Tyndale’s epilogue:

Note the difference of the lawe, and of the gospell. The one axeth and requyreth, the wother perdoneth and forgeveth. The one threateneth, the wother promyseth all good thynges, to them that sett their trust in Christ only... Applye the gospell, that is to saye the promyses, vnto the deservynge off Christ, and to the mercye of god and his truth, and soo shalt thou nott despeare: butt shalt feale god as a kynde and a mercifull father.⁶

This strong law-gospel contrast is Lutheran, and it stands opposed to the Lollard emphasis on the overarching unity of the Bible as “God’s law.”

Certainly Henry VIII saw Tyndale’s work as having been instigated by Luther, and responded accordingly. Listen to this letter he wrote in response to an earlier letter to him from Luther:

“[Luther is accused of instigating] one or two leude persons, borne in this our realme, for the translatyng of the Newe testament in to Englysshe, as well with many corruptions of that holy text, as certayne prefaces, and other pestylent gloses in the margentes, for the aduauncement and setting forthe of his abhomynable heresyeyes, entendynge to abuse the gode myndes and deuotion, that you oure derely beloved people beare, towards the holy scrypture, and to enfect you with the deedly corruption

⁴ Ibid., 109.

⁵ Daniell, *Tyndale’s New Testament*, xvii.

⁶ Pollard, *Records of the English Bible*, 115.

and contagious odour of his pestylent errours... [Therefore, it is determined that] the sayde corrupte and vntrue translatyons be brenned, with further sharpe correction and punysshment against the kepars and redars of the same.”⁷

These words of the king were followed by a formal episcopal prohibition. Cuthbert Tunstall, the bishop of London who had rebuffed Tyndale earlier and referred to Tyndale and Joye as “children of iniquitie mainteiners of Luthers sect,” wrote of the arrival of these new translations in terms of a public health crisis:

[These books] conteining in the english tongue that pestiferous and moste pernicious poyson dispersed throughout all our dioces of London in great number, whiche truely without it be spedely forsene without doubt will contaminate and infect the flocke committed vnto vs, with most deadly poyson and heresy... Wherefore we Cuthbert, the bishop aforesaid ... straightly enjoyne and comaund you ... vnder payne of excommunication, and incurring the suspicion of heresie, they do bring in and really deliuer vnto our vicar-generall, all and singular such books conteyning the translation of the new testament in the English tongue [within thirty days].⁸

Tunstall worked furiously to stem the flood of New Testaments which were being smuggled into London from the continent, but came quickly to realize that his battle against the demand-side only effort (“interdiction,” to use the phrase of our modern drug war) was doomed to failure. So, he determined to address the supply-side, too. He worked out a deal with a certain London merchant, Augustine Packyngton, who had connections with the Christian Brethren in Germany. Tunstall’s plan was to buy up all copies of Tyndale’s New Testament, right off the press, in order to burn them. Packyngton is reported as having come to Tyndale and explained the situation, and Tyndale apparently reacted with some glee:

“I am the gladder said Tyndale for these two benefites shall come therof, I shall get money of hym for these bokes, to bryng myself out of debt... And the ouerplus of the money, that shall remain to me, shall make me more studious, to correct the Newe Testament, and so newly to imprint the same once again.”⁹

So the deal was done, Cuthbert got his books, and Tyndale got out of debt and began his revisions.

Now the printers ran a second printing. When Cuthbert began to hear reports of still more copies of the book flooding into London, he was vexed and called Packyngton before him, asking,

⁷ Ibid., 117-8.

⁸ Ibid., 131-2.

⁹ Ibid., 132.

“Sir how commeth this, that there are so many Newe Testaments abrode, and you promised and assured me that you had bought al? then saied Packyngton, I promes you I bought all of them that then was to bee had: but I perceiue that thei haue made more sence... the bishop smiled at hym and saied, well Packynton well, and so ended this matter.”¹⁰

Well, not quite. George Constantine, a Cambridge graduate and circulator of Lutheran books, was shortly afterward apprehended by Sir Thomas More, the Lord Chancellor of England. He inquired of Constantine:

“There is beyond the sea Tyndale, loye, and a great many more of you. I knowe thei cannot liue without helpe, some sendeth theim money and succoueth theim, and thy self beyng one of them, haddest parte thereof, and therefore knowest from whence it came. I praie thee who be thei that thus helpe them? My lorde, quod Constantine, will you that I shal tell you the truthe? ... It is the Bishoppe of London that hath holpen vs, for he hath bestowed emong vs, a great deale of money in New Testamentes to burne them, and that hath and yet is our onely succoure and comfort!”¹¹

LOLLARD-LUTHERAN LINKAGES

Tunstall would oversee his dramatic book burning in London in St. Paul's churchyard, which included the Testaments he had purchased from the German printers and many others. Yet despite this, and despite the ban on Tyndale's work, the Bibles were making their way into English society and beginning to make an impact. One significant development for which we find evidence is the linking up of the remaining Lollards and Lollard-sympathizers with the Lutherans, a class-breaching linkage facilitated by Tyndale's superb English translation. It is reported that a certain Lollard named John Tyball, and another man, also Lollard, journeyed to see Robert Barnes, the leader of the White Horse Inn, the Lutheran circle at Cambridge we spoke of earlier. Tyball showed Barnes their Lollard manuscripts, but Barnes essentially dismissed these, arguing that the Tyndale New Testament was “of more cleaner English,” and then sold a copy to them.¹² Here we see crucial evidence of a positive “meeting-up” of the older, native, and lower class Lollard networks with the new, international Lutheran movement, through the shared medium of Tyndale's translation.

This is by no means the only evidence of such linkage. There is also the interesting case of Thomas Harding, a Lollard from Chesham who was prosecuted for heresy in 1532. He was found to have hidden under his floorboards several works of Tyndale, including *The Obedience of the Christian Man* and *The Practice of Prelates*. Lambert informs us,

¹⁰ Ibid., 132.

¹¹ Ibid., 134.

¹² Lambert, *Medieval Heresy*, 373.

“At his trial he was convicted of a series of customary Lollard heretical beliefs, with a small admixture that was unquestionably Lutheran, derived, no doubt, from his reading of Tyndale. He had remained what he had for so long been – a determined Lollard, with views on images that were Lollard rather than Lutheran, for example, but quiet study had begun to carry him on in the direction of continental Protestantism.”¹³

MORE'S ATTACK ON TYNDALE

Obviously, the prospect of emerging linkages between Lollardy and Lutheranism were dangerous from the point of view of the ecclesiastical establishment. Accordingly, Tunstall granted Thomas More a license to read Tyndale's Testament to expose its errors and heresies and thus to prove the validity of the episcopal prohibition on his work. Now, Thomas More is a saint of the Roman Church who was martyred for the faith in 1535 when he refused to support Henry's breach with the papacy and self-exaltation as supreme head of the English Church. He was also a man of great learning, one of the foremost humanist scholars of his day. One might have, and perhaps should have, expected such a man to have behaved differently than he did when dealing with opponents. But the fact is that he behaved shamefully. He oversaw the burning of several Protestant heretics, and he pursued Tyndale with an almost maniacal intensity, the two engaging in a war of words which escalated beyond all reason and restraint. The key to More's thinking was the inerrancy of the Church in matters of faith and practice, and on this point he would not budge, even in light of scriptural evidence to the contrary. It is a tragic story, but one which shows the deep cleft in the humanist ranks between those who were prepared to accept the authority of the Bible and those who were not.

In his letters directed against Tyndale, More accused the translator of evil purpose in corrupting and changing the words and sense of Scripture “from the good and holsom doctryne of Criste to the deuylysh heresydes of theyr own.” Specifically, he charged Tyndale with mischief in changing three key words throughout the whole of his Testament, such that “priest,” “church,” and “charity” of customary Roman Catholic usage became in Tyndale's translation “elder,” “congregation,” and “love,” respectively. As for calling priests “elders,” More wrote that “nether were all prestes chosen old ... nor euery elder man is not a prest.” Moreover, Tyndale “wold make hyt seme that the scripture dyd neuer speke of eny prestys dyfferent from leymen amonge chrysten peple.” With regard to “congregation,” More objected to the replacement of “church” by a weak word which “is comen to a company of cristen men or a company of turkys.” As for “love,” More charged Tyndale that to make the Lutheran “heresy” of justification by faith alone appear more biblical, he had changed “that name of holy vertuouse affeccyon, in to the bare name of loue comen to the vertuouse loue that man berith to god, and to the lewd loue that is bytwene flekke and his make.” [This last phrase is a

¹³ Ibid., 372.

contemptuous expression for a man and his paramour.]¹⁴ In this entire argument over words, More was defending against what he saw as Tyndale's malicious attack on the very integrity of the Church. More, and Tunstall as well, were dead set against allowing such "poison," as they referred to Lutheran doctrines, to infect their flock. In defense of his position, More was prepared to do what he must to destroy Tyndale, who, he perceived, would otherwise destroy the Church.

Tyndale's answer to More was simple and powerful. In a letter written to John Frith, Tyndale said with regard to all these charges of malicious intent and false translation,

"I calle God to record agaynst the day we shall apere before our lorde Iesus to geue a reconyng of our doynge, that I never altered one sillable of goddes worde, agaynst my conscyence nor wolde do this daye, yf all that ys in yerth, whether yt be honour, pleasure or rychis, mighte be geuen me."¹⁵

More's answer was to call Tyndale "a beast," one of the "hell hounds that the devil hath in his kennel," discharging a "filthy foam of blasphemies out of his brutish beastly mouth," "a deceiver," "a hypocrite," "puffed up with the poison of pride, malice, and envy." To say the least, Tyndale's breaking of the 1408 ban on unauthorized English language translations had angered the Church establishment, and the Catholic authorities began to seek every opportunity they could to take Tyndale into custody, try him as an heretic, and hand him over to the secular authority for execution.

THE PENTATEUCH OF 1530 AND AFTERMATH

Soon after the publication of his New Testament at Worms in 1526, Tyndale moved to Antwerp and stayed with and under the protection of the Merchant Adventurers of Antwerp, another group of English merchants who were sympathetic to the Lutheran cause and were actively involved in the lucrative book-smuggling trade. During this period, Tyndale must have learned Hebrew in preparation for his work on the Old Testament. He would not have been able to have learned it earlier in England because the language was wholly unknown there.¹⁶

By 1529 he began his monumental work of translating the Five Books of Moses from Hebrew. When it was finished, he had coined several new terms, including "Jehovah," "Passover," "scapegoat," "shewbread," "peacemaker," and "mercyseat."¹⁷ He also emerged from the project with a transformed theological outlook. Until this time Tyndale had emphasized the difference between law and grace, but from this point on

¹⁴ Pollard, *Records of the English Bible*, 126-131.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 131.

¹⁶ Daniell, *Tyndale's New Testament*, xvii.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, xvii.

he came to place increasing stress upon law, upon the covenant between God and his people, as the key to understanding Scripture as a whole. This is an important doctrinal development, and we will return to it shortly. But let us first return to the narrative of his life.

Having completed his translation of the Pentateuch, Tyndale sailed for Hamburg in order to have it published there, but he was shipwrecked en route. In this disaster he lost all his books, writings, and copies, and was compelled to begin all over again. With the help of Miles Coverdale – a former Augustinian friar and follower of Robert Barnes – he set to once again to work, this time in Hamburg. Between Easter and December, 1525, he finished the Pentateuch again. Finally, the work was printed in January, 1530, and copies began arriving in London by the summer of that year.¹⁸ The book of Jonah would be published in 1531, and Tyndale continued to work with Coverdale on the history portions of the Old Testament. Ultimately, he would complete all the books through Chronicles, plus Nehemiah.

The arrival in London of the translated Pentateuch set in motion the wheels of repression once again. This time the king himself issued a proclamation in 1530, asserting that the function of these translations was “to pervert and withdraw the people from the true catholic faith, and also to stir and incense them to sedition and disobedience against their princes, sovereigns, and heads.” Accordingly, the king’s subjects were enjoined not to buy, receive, or have any of these books in their possession if they wished “to avoid his high indignation and most grievous displeasure.” They were further commanded to turn over all such books to the ecclesiastical authorities, on pain of punishment by the civil authority. Then, in a remarkable passage, the king answered those subjects who had argued that it was not only expedient but necessary that the Scripture be translated into the English tongue:

“It is not necessary, the sayde Scripture to be in the englisshe tonge, and in the handes of the comen people: but that the distribution of the sayd Scripture, and the permytting or denyenge therof, dependeth onely vpon the discretion of the superiours, as they shall thynke it conuenient. And that hauing respecte to the malignite of this present tyme, with the inclination of people to erronious opinions, the translation of the newe testament and the olde in to the vulgare tonge of englysshe, shulde rather be the occasion of contynuanse or increace of errorrs amonge the sayd people, than any benefyte or commodite towarde the weale of their soules. And that it shall nowe be more conuenient that the same people haue the holy Scripture expounded to them, by preachers in their sermons, accordynge as it hath ben of olde tyme accustomed before this tyme.¹⁹

¹⁸ Pollard, *Records of the English Bible*, 92.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 163-9.

But a sequence of stunning events was about to cause a dramatic reversal of English royal and ecclesiastical policy with regard to the vulgar Bible, which would in a few years completely negate Henry's decree. During this whole period, Henry's battle with the Church establishment was escalating rapidly. In 1532, the king suspended payment of the clerical tax. In May of that year, Thomas More resigned as chancellor. In May 1533, Henry's marriage to Mary was annulled, and in September the new queen Ann Boleyn gave birth to Elizabeth. The following year, 1534, saw Henry confirmed as supreme head of the Church, and this royal supremacy was backed up by loyalty oaths which led to 400 executions, including that of Thomas More. Meanwhile, Cranmer had been appointed the archbishop of Canterbury and Cromwell had been made "viceregent of spirituals," like the Chancellor of a Lutheran state. In the midst of these titanic events, it was decided by decree of the Upper House Convocation of 1534 "that the holy Scripture shall be translated into the vulgar English tongue by certain upright and learned men to be named by the said most illustrious king and be meted out and delivered to the people for their instruction." Though it retained the ban on translations with "suspect doctrines" (read "Tyndale"), still this decree represented a sea change in English ecclesiastical policy. For the first time, an English Bible translation was authorized. The problem was that no one of the authorized bishops stepped forward to do it, while they insisted on ignoring the superb translation already available from Tyndale.

THE 1534 NEW TESTAMENT (AND 1535 REVISION)

Meanwhile, back in Antwerp, Tyndale continued his work. In 1534 he published a completely revised version of the New Testament, with a completely new preface bearing no relation to the distinctly Lutheran 1525 prologue and 1526 epilogue. Nevertheless, his prologues to the various books remained largely the same, and most importantly, the prologue to Romans remained essentially a translation of Luther's own prologue to that epistle. But in the prologue of this 1534 version (as well in as the slightly revised 1535 version), we read the doctrinally mature Tyndale, the man who had been so profoundly affected by translating the Pentateuch. He retained his Lutheran grounding in the gospel, but incorporated it into a vast theme of covenant. As Tyndale understood it, God covenants with his people and promises to bless them upon the condition that they then keep his law. In fact, this theme of covenant pervades both the prologue and his marginal notes. Here are just a few examples of this "covenant theology" which emerges from his prologue:

"The general covenant wherein all other are comprehended and included, is this. If we meek ourselves to God, to keep all his laws, after the example of Christ: then God hath bound himself unto us to keep and make good all the mercies promised in Christ, throughout all the Scripture... Now if we love our neighbours in God and Christ, then we may be bold to trust in God through Christ and his deserving, for all mercy...

As Christ's works justify from sin and set us in the favour of God, so our own deeds through working of the spirit of God, help us to continue in the favour and the grace, into which Christ hath brought us; and that we can no longer continue in favour and grace than our hearts are to keep the law.²⁰

Note that he retains his emphasis on the priority of faith: "We can do no good works unto God, but receive only of his mercy with our repenting faith."²¹ Or again, "He looketh with what heart thou workest, and not what thou workest."²² And again, "Deeds are the fruit of love, and love is the fruit of faith."²³ But now faith is emphasized in a context in which we are not so much freed from the law as that we are enabled to keep it, as we abide in the love of Christ through faith:

"God worketh with his word and, when his word is preached, faith rooteth herself in the hearts of the elect; and as faith entereth, and the word of God is believed, the power of God looseth the heart from the captivity and bondage under sin, and knitteth and coupleth him to God and to the will of God."²⁴

Thus knitted,

"Christ is thine, and all his deeds are thy deeds. Christ is in thee, and thou in him, knit together inseparably. Neither canst thou be damned, except Christ be damned with thee; neither can Christ be saved, except thou be saved with him."²⁵

These words could have been written by Richard Baxter or any of the other Puritans of the seventeenth century, so developed is this idea of the simultaneity of Christ's righteousness being made our own and of the continuing covenant responsibility of God's elect. In reading through the later thought of Tyndale, one sees little that conflicts with the theology of the seventeenth century and the Westminster Confession, except perhaps Tyndale's weakness on the matter of persistence of the saints. Tyndale did not elaborate the full-blown, predestinarianism grounded in God's Trinity which the Westminster divines restored as the key to the whole system God's sovereign, fore-ordained, unconditional, effectual, and irresistible grace. Even so, a good argument can be made that Tyndale was, in a very real way, a precursor to the later Puritan movement.

²⁰ Daniell, *Tyndale's New Testament*, 4-7.

²¹ Tyndale, *Doctrinal Treatises*, vol. I, 466, quoted in Hughes, *English Reformers*, 84.

²² *Ibid.*, 100, quoted in Hughes, *English Reformers*, 111.

²³ *Ibid.*, 57, quoted in Hughes, *English Reformers*, 103.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 55-55, quoted in Hughes, *English Reformers*, 75.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 79, quoted in Hughes, *English Reformers*, 76.

In light of all this we are led to see that Tyndale played an important role in the English Reformation, above and beyond the sheer (and frankly monumental) fact of his having translated Scripture. We come to see that his was also a role of linkage. As we have seen, connections emerged between the native, lower class Lollards and the internationally, academically oriented class of Lutherans, and it was their shared devotion to God's Word in the common tongue – in short, Tyndale's translation – which served as their linkage point. Such class-breaching linkages are surely significant, the stuff of societal transformation. But in addition to the vertical dimension of class linkage, there was also a horizontal linkage by which Tyndale's emerging covenant theology linked the older, proto-Protestant Lollard emphasis on Law with the later, Puritan emphasis on Law grounded in justifying faith. It may be argued that by incorporating Luther's central insight on the priority of the gospel, and by moving beyond Luther's rejection of the Law, Tyndale's theology linked with older emphases and laid a new groundwork in England for what would gradually emerge as Puritanism.

EPILOGUE – TYNDALE'S MARTYRDOM

In 1535 Tyndale was living with his friend and protector Thomas Poyntz in Antwerp. At this time, the villain Henry Phillips enters our story. An Englishman, he was the son of a well-to-do family, but he had stolen a sum of money which his father had entrusted for someone else, and had as a consequence fallen into disgrace and poverty. He moved to Louvain, a city near Antwerp and a center of anti-Protestantism. Professing a thorough hatred of Lutherans, he planned to lure Tyndale from the protective custody of the English merchants and to hand him over to the imperial authorities as a heretic. He must have been on the payroll of the anti-Tyndale forces in England (David Daniell suspects it was Stokesley, the bishop of London),²⁶ because he spent a lot of money dining with Tyndale and gradually building up his confidence to think him a friend. Tyndale's protector, Poyntz, did not trust the new character, but Tyndale assured him that he was fine. Then in May, 1535, Phillips talked Tyndale into going out for dinner. But when Tyndale walked beyond the protective care of his compound, he was arrested by the imperial procurer-general and charged as being a "Lutheran heretic." He was brought to the castle of Vilvorde, an extra-security fortress.

The English Merchants sent letters to the imperial court at Brussels and to the English government, protesting this violation of their diplomatic privilege. Cranmer, now archbishop of Canterbury, tried to intervene but was ineffective, and political events complicated matters. On top of all that we have seen, in 1534 – in a development which must have shaken the religio-political establishment of England – continental radicals made contact with the Lollards in London. It seems that several Dutch Anabaptists had come to England during that year, and English delegates seem to have attended an anabaptist conference in Amsterdam in the winter of 1534-5. The English authorities responded to these developing linkages between March and June of 1535 by arresting, examining, and executing foreign anabaptist sympathizers. Several were also deported

²⁶ Daniell, David, *Tyndale's New Testament*, 260.

back to the Low Countries to be dealt with by the regent Mary, Queen of Hungary. This served Henry as a useful symbol of his continuing orthodoxy.²⁷ Working for the release of Tyndale at that time would have worked against English policy in these matters.

However, while the English officialdom delayed, Phillips did everything he could to hasten events. Poyntz tried to intervene, first by writing letters to help his friend and then actually by going to the procurer-general. But Phillips informed on him, and Poyntz found himself arrested too. After being subjected to charges and interrogations over a period of twelve or thirteen weeks, Poyntz managed to flee to England, broke and forever banished from the Netherlands where his wife opted to stay.

Meanwhile, Tyndale's last letter from Vilvorde led Daniell to compare it with Paul's second letter to Timothy from the Mamertine:

"I suffer greatly from cold in the head, and am afflicted by a perpetual catarrh, which is much increased in this cell... My overcoat is worn out; my shirts are also worn out... And I ask to be allowed to have a lamp in the evening: it is indeed wearisome sitting alone in the dark. But most of all I beg and beseech your clemency to be urgent with the commissary, that he will kindly permit me to have my Hebrew Bible, Hebrew Grammar, and Hebrew Dictionary, that I may pass the time in that study."²⁸

Finally, Tyndale's trial concluded; the outcome was never really in doubt. Tyndale was taken to the place of execution on the morning of October 6, 1536. He was formally defrocked as a priest and ceremonially stripped of his vestments. He was then tied to a stake atop a large mound of wood, and covered almost to the head in kindling. According to the imperial law, only Anabaptists were to be burned alive. As a non-repentant, first-time convicted Lutheran, Tyndale was treated in a more humane manner: he was strangled first, then his dead body was burned.²⁹ His last recorded words had been, "Lord, open the king of England's eyes."

Even before Tyndale died, his translations were being incorporated into the first complete Bible printed in English, the work of Miles Coverdale in Cologne. And only a few months later, Henry VIII licensed the first official translation, which would be called "Matthew's Bible," a fictitious cover for Tyndale's and Coverdale's work to make it appear to conform to the decree of the Upper House Convocation of 1534. This first official English Bible, printed at Antwerp, incorporated Tyndale's 1530 Pentateuch and Old Testament work as far as Chronicles, as well as the 1534 New Testament. In this "Matthew's Bible" a large "W.T." was placed between Malachi and Matthew in silent acknowledgment of the martyred translator's immeasurable gift to the English people. There would be several versions and many printings of the Bible right until the

²⁷ MacCulloch, Diarmaid, *Thomas Cranmer* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 147.

²⁸ Daniell, *Tyndale's New Testament*, xiii.

²⁹ Demaus, *William Tindale*, 542.

Authorized Version of 1611, which also incorporated the Tyndale portions largely as they were.

There's a wonderful letter written by Cranmer in August, 1537, which captures something of his reaction upon first receiving and reading Matthew's (i.e., Tyndale's) Bible. Cranmer had been in the forefront of pushing for a Bishops Bible to conform to the decree of 1534, but now he wrote urgently to Cromwell, entreating him to use his influence with the king to get from him "a license that the same may be sold and redde of every person withoute danger of any acte, proclamacion or ordinaunce heretofore graunted to the contrary, untill such tyme that we the bishops shall set forth a better translation, which I thinke will not be till a day after Domesday."³⁰

As we conclude our examination of the life of William Tyndale, it seems most appropriate to recall these words written by Hughes:

"The magnitude of the harvest of Tyndale's faithfulness is beyond all calculation. He rendered the Scriptures into the purest English of all time, and through his obedience a whole nation has been blessed and enriched."³¹

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³⁰ Pollard, *Records of the English Bible*, 16.

³¹ Hughes, *English Reformers*, 32.

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William Tyndale (/ˈtɪndəl/; sometimes spelled Tynsdale, Tindall, Tindill, Tyndall; c. 1494 – c. 6 October 1536) was an English scholar who became a leading figure in the Protestant Reformation in the years leading up to his execution. He is well known for his (incomplete) translation of the Bible into English. Tyndale was influenced by the work of Desiderius Erasmus, who made the Greek New Testament available in Europe, and by Martin Luther. A number of partial translations had been made from the TYNDALE (tinˈdal), WILLIAM: Biblical translator and martyr; b. most probably at North Nibley (15 miles s.s.w. of Gloucester), England, in 1484; d. at Vilvoorden (6 miles n.e. of Brussels), Belgium, Oct. 6, 1536. He was descended from an ancient Northumbrian family, went to school at Oxford, and afterward to Magdalen Hall and Cambridge, and about 1520 became tutor in the family of Sir John Walsh, at Little Sodbury in Gloucestershire.