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# BULLETIN

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# William Tyndale: A Review of the Literature

by Donald Dean Smeeton

Fall 1986 marks the three hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the martyrdom of pioneer Bible translator William Tyndale. There will be some notice of this in the popular religious press, and therefore it seems wise to suggest some sources by which the reader can filter the myth and the hagiography of William Tyndale from the historical record.

The quality of Tyndale's life and the significance of his contribution is remarkable enough that it does not need to be "puffed" by polemical or sectarian motives. Although his name—and thus, by implication, his mantle—are claimed by a number of evangelical enterprises, there have been few serious investigations of Tyndale's life and theology. Of course, he is associated with the translation and production of the first printed New Testament; but beyond that many Christians seem to know very little about the man who gave his generation access to the Bible and gave all generations such words as "longsuffering," "scapegoat," and "peacemaker." Additionally, C. S. Lewis (who established his credentials as a *literati* long before he became an evangelical cult guru) credits Tyndale with such phrases as "die the death" and "a land flowing with milk and honey." It is almost ironical that Tyndale has been given more serious consideration for his linguistic contribution than for the cause which cost him his life, namely, his faith.

Popular biographies of Tyndale such as those by Edwards (1976), Vernon (1967), and Loane (1954) make exciting reading, but the authors usually use J. F. Mozley as their main source. Mozley's *William Tyndale* remains the only option for the serious reader. In fact, it would be difficult to challenge the assertion that there has not been an original scholarly biography of Tyndale published since Mozley released his study in 1937. This fact probably explains why this work has recently been reprinted (1971) by Greenwood Press of Westport, Connecticut. Mozley complemented his analysis of Tyndale by studies of John Foxe (1940) and Coverdale (1953), so it is impossible to read much in this field without confronting Mozley. The word *confronting* is a deliberate choice because he is usually partisan and sometimes inaccurate. A more penalizing disability, however, is Mozley's lack of an adequate footnoting apparatus; but he does sometimes explain his methodology, and thus allows the reader to look over the historian's shoulder and draw independent conclusions. Unlike many biographers, Mozley revealed himself to be more of a detective examining evidence than a romantic telling a story.

Mozley benefited from earlier studies by Richard Demaus (1871) and Christopher Anderson (1862). However, beyond general references and a few academic articles, the contemporary investigator of Tyndale's life will have to study the original sources. *Letters and Papers*, John Foxe, and Edward Halle continue to be important sources that probably have not surrendered all their clues. One also should not overlook current studies of the early English Reformation, for our understanding of this period has changed considerably since the pre-war years of Mozley.

Although C. S. Williams leans heavily on Mozley for biographical detail, his study of Tyndale (1969) provides a sound evaluation and a *status quaestionis* of investigations up to that

period. It is unfortunate that this succinct and splendid book does not enjoy wider availability.

Tyndale's own writings yield few biographical passages, but are foundational to any investigation. During the middle of the last century, the Parker Society prepared three volumes of Tyndale's collected works. The volumes, entitled *Doctrinal Treatises* (PS I), *Expositions and Notes* (PS II), and *An Answer to Sir Thomas More's Dialogue* (PS III), remain standard, accessible sources suitable for most purposes. The purists will have to wait for an editor and publisher with enough vision to tackle the creation of a "complete works" series comparable to what Yale University Press has done for the writings of Tyndale's nemesis, Thomas More. If such a possibility is judged to be attractive, the editor would find that critical editions of several of Tyndale's works have already been prepared as Yale dissertations. The dissertations include *First John* by Donald J. Millus in 1973, *Wicked Mammon* by John Alexander Dick in 1974, *Matthew* by Stephen James Mayer in 1975, and *Obedience* by Anne Maureen Richardson in 1976. The existence of these editions might not only be an encouragement for future publication but already provide an authoritative text for the scholar.

There appears to be little hope of discovering additional original documents about Tyndale's early life or his study at Magdalen in Oxford, if indeed they are not the same. It is more realistic to hope for a clearer picture of his life between the time he left Oxford in 1516 and when he arrived at Little Sodbury Manor in 1522. The assertion that he studied at Cambridge hangs on very weak evidence and the theory that he was part of the crowd at the White Horse Inn on no evidence at all. What then was Tyndale doing during those years when the storm of reformation brewed over the Empire, and the thunder from Wittenberg was first heard in the universities and pubs of England? Where was he ordained and what was the nature of his ministry? Why did he go to Little Sodbury, and why did he leave within a year? Tyndale's stay in London is documented because his host was later charged with heresy. But what was Tyndale's motivation for lingering in England after his appeal for help from Bishop Tunstall was refused? What was the nature of Tyndale's experience in Germany? How did the English heretic with his sober lifestyle attach himself to the capitalistic English merchants in Antwerp? These lingering questions are crucial to tracing Tyndale's life and comprehending his contribution. Is it too much to hope that whatever archival sources remain unexplored in England or on the continent might yet yield additional information concerning Tyndale's life?

If much of Tyndale's life is irremediably hidden in the historical darkness, it is probably because that is what he chose. He was a fugitive most of his adult life. A record of his activities or a trail of his movements would have meant almost certain death. Yet, there is something in Tyndale's temperament itself that may have motivated an unobtrusive entry on the stage of life. He confessed that, after having produced the first parts of the English Bible translated from the original languages at great personal sacrifice, he had only done his "duty."

Perhaps Tyndale would have wanted the focus on his writings rather than on his life; yet at one time, he vowed that he would not compose one more piece on the condition that the vernacular Bible would be allowed free circulation in his native

land. Although there has been much discussion about Tyndale's theological orientation, all sides agree that the Bible was foundational to Tyndale's thought, and his enduring fame rests on his role as a Bible translator. Studies of Tyndale's skills as a translator usually give him exceptionally high marks considering the tools and knowledge of his period. The dated, but still authoritative, judgment of B. F. Westcott in *A General View of the History of the English Bible* (1868) has been verified by others. Required reading would also include S. L. Greenslade's contribution to *The Cambridge History of the Bible* (1963), H. W. Robinson's *The Bible in its Ancient and English Versions* (1940), and C. C. Butterworth's *The Literary Lineage of the King James Bible 1340-1611* (1941).

Concerning the relationship between Bible translation and Renaissance values, one should read the somewhat dated (1955) study by W. S. Schwarz, *Principles and Problems of Biblical Translation: Some Reformation Controversies and Their Background*. Heinz Holeczek (*Humanistische Bibelphilologie als Reformproblem bei Erasmus von Rotterdam, Thomas More und William Tyndale*, 1975) used the same categories as Schwarz

made apparent." The view that Tyndale was essentially a translator of Luther was not difficult to support for some of Tyndale's writings show obvious borrowing from Luther's texts. This view, which still finds supporters (e.g., J. E. McGoldrick, 1979), judges Tyndale to be an uncreative imitator of marginal originality.

A re-interpretation of Tyndale challenged this alleged dependence on Luther and credited Tyndale with a major contribution to later puritanism. M. M. Knappen's "William Tyndale—the First Puritan" (*Church History*, 1936) and L. J. Trinterud's "The Origins of Puritanism" (*Church History*, 1950) and "A Reappraisal of William Tyndale's Debt to Martin Luther" (*Church History*, 1962) did much to establish this new view. This interpretation posits that Tyndale was dominated by a law-covenant scheme originating with the so-called "Rhineland theologians" which include Zwingli, Bullinger, Oecolampadius, Bucer, and Capito. In his provocative *England's Earliest Protestants* (1964), William Clebsch combined the two interpretations by claiming that Tyndale underwent a radical conversion from Lutheranism to covenantalism about

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and updated the earlier work, but his analysis of Tyndale is less than satisfactory.

The fact that Tyndale knew Hebrew well enough to translate from that language does not need to be challenged, but there have been few extensive investigations of this aspect of his work. One notable exception is *A Study of Tyndale's Genesis* by E. W. Cleaveland, which was first published in 1911 but reprinted by Archon Books in 1972. Non-Jewish knowledge of Hebrew was so primitive in Tyndale's time that a detailed analysis of Tyndale's work might reveal which of the available linguistic tools he used, how he set about his task, or even where or under whom he studied. Tyndale's movements about the continent, covering a period of about two years (1522-24), cannot be traced, but one might assume that some of this time was invested in the study of Hebrew. Although neither Luther nor Tyndale refer to any personal contact with each other, the evidence indicates that Tyndale visited Wittenberg during this period. Hebrew was known by Luther and certain of his colleagues, but it is equally possible that Tyndale acquired a knowledge of the language in some non-university setting elsewhere in the Empire.

Although theological summaries and evaluations of Tyndale's views can be found in virtually all studies of the early English Reformation, these statements usually reflect the author's assumptions about Tyndale's theological orientation and thus provide widely differing conclusions. (One of the best compendia of Tyndale's theology, especially his soteriology and ecclesiology, is the Marquette University dissertation of Judith Moberly Mayotte, 1976.) Until the middle of this century, few challenged the assumption that Tyndale's theology was essentially Luther's thought converted to English idiom. This position originated in the polemics of the sixteenth century and were restated by H. E. Jacobs (1892) and A. Hauck (1917). Even Gordon Rupp, in *Studies in the Making of the English Protestant Tradition* (1949), said "Tyndale was concerned to make known the teaching of Luther in English dress. He had to walk delicately for the works of Luther were everywhere proscribed, but he succeeded so well that down to our time the full extent of his debt to Luther has not been

1530. According to Clebsch, Tyndale became disenchanted with justification by faith alone and, in its place, incorporated a scheme of good works and law keeping for the Christian. Even if many scholars, like Mayotte and C. H. Williams (*William Tyndale*, 1969), have taken issue with Clebsch on one point or another of his work, one cannot ignore his research and conclusions.

A third interpretation was pioneered by J. Yost in his Duke dissertation (1965) and popularized in several journal articles. Rather than seeing Tyndale in theological terms, Yost understood the English reformer's orientation to be moralistic. According to this view, the formative influence came from Christian humanism rather than from the Reformation, so that Tyndale's mentor was Erasmus, not Luther. Yost points out that there is no evidence to demonstrate Tyndale's borrowing from the Rhineland theologians. Although Yost's research showed the weakness of the previous conclusions, his alternative has not found wide acceptance.

By extensive textual comparison in her University of London dissertation (1961), Anthea Hume demonstrates that Tyndale's textual dependence on Luther is much less than has commonly been assumed. Topical studies of specific areas of Tyndale's theology have also tended to distance the Englishman from both Luther and Erasmus. Generally the result of such studies has been a greater appreciation for Tyndale's independence and for the creative synthesis in his thought. Because of the centrality of Scripture in Tyndale's thinking, one should not overlook a 1959 article in the *Nederlands Archief voor Kerkgeschiedenis* in which E. Flesseman-van Leer published his analysis of the use of Scripture in the Tyndale-More debate. The next year he published an equally helpful article, "The Controversy about Scripture and Tradition Between Thomas More and William Tyndale," in the same journal. Tyndale's soteriology was the center of Paul Alan Laughlin's dissertation (Emory University, 1975) entitled, "The Brightness of Moses' Face: Law and Gospel, Covenant and Hermeneutics in the Theology of William Tyndale." Also important in this field is Dewey D. Wallace's study, "The Doctrine of Predestination in the Early English Reformation"

(*Church History*, 1974). Although other writers have noted the contribution of other reformers (especially Calvin, Luther, and Bucer) to an evangelical pneumatology, Tyndale's pneumatological emphasis has been overlooked. Elsewhere I have tried to fill this lacuna (*Pneuma*, 1981).

Although this review of the literature has focused on theology, Tyndale's work in other fields is also important. Because Tyndale applied his theological premises to political realities, his contribution in this area should not be overlooked. The student should start with *Political Thought in England: Tyndale to Hooker* (1953) by Christopher Morris. An extensive study of Tyndale's political thought is contained in Bernard Emile La Berge's University of Tennessee dissertation (1972).

It would be worthwhile to investigate Tyndale's continuing theological influence on Anglo-Saxon Christianity in general and on Anglicanism in particular. In the 1530s, Tyndale's writ-

ings appear frequently in the court records and are listed in almost every prohibition; but the Elizabethan theologians, including the Puritan divines, only rarely mention him and seldom, if ever, cite him. In fact, Tyndale was essentially overlooked until he was rediscovered during the nineteenth century by those interested in the history of the English Bible. Such an attempt to define Tyndale's theological influence would be an interesting contribution to English historiography as well as to historical theology.

Tyndale deserves to be remembered as a translator and a theologian, as a polemical tractarian and a political theorist, as a coiner of words and, above all, a Christian. During 1986, when we recall his great sacrifice, his translations, and his contribution to our language, we could do no greater justice to the English exile than to rediscover—perhaps even discover—the essence of this thought.

## Evangelical Theology in the Two Thirds World

by Orlando E. Costas

The last decades have witnessed a resurgence of evangelical theology and action. Indeed, one could argue that evangelicals have ceased to be a marginal sector of Protestant Christianity, and have moved into the mainstream of contemporary society. However, we err if we assume that the so-called "evangelical renaissance" (Bloesch) is just a Euro-American phenomenon, or that it is theologically, culturally and socially homogeneous. As Emilio Castro, General Secretary of the WCC, has stated in a recent essay on "ecumenism and evangelicalism": "In the past . . . evangelical perspectives on spirituality and [theology] came basically from theologians in the North Atlantic region"; today they are coming from all over the world (p. 9). He also points out that evangelicalism is going through the same process and change which the ecumenical movement has experienced in the last decades, because of the diverse socio-cultural settings of its adherents. Castro's comment is verified by the published reports of several world gatherings during the last decades and by a growing body of publications.

It is my contention that while evangelicals around the world share a common heritage, their theological articulation is by no means homogeneous. To be sure, evangelicals in the North Atlantic world have had an enormous influence in what I like to call the "two thirds world"—that planetary space which is the habitat of most of the poor, powerless and oppressed people on earth, which are to be found in Africa, Asia, the Pacific, the Caribbean and continental Latin America. One cannot deny the strong presence and pressures exercised by Euro-American evangelicalism on the Two Thirds World through the missionary movement, literature, the electronic media and theological institutions. Notwithstanding this reality, however, there seems to be developing in the Two Thirds World a different kind of evangelical theology which not only addresses questions not usually dealt with by evangelical mainstream theologians in Euro-America, but also employs a different methodology and draws out other conclusions.

To argue my case, I propose, first, to outline briefly, as I understand it, the nature of evangelicalism and its leading

theological tenets, especially as it has developed in the United States. I shall then proceed to analyze the emerging evangelical theological discourse in the Two Thirds World, taking as reference representative statements from several theological conferences held within the last five years. I shall conclude with some observations on the mutual challenges of evangelical theology north and south and east and west.

### Evangelical Theology in the One Third World

If there is one single characteristic of evangelical theology, it is its missionary intent. Evangelicalism, as its name suggests, has a burning passion for the communication of the Gospel, especially in those areas where it has not yet been proclaimed. It is not surprising that the Wesleyan Movement, which made such a dramatic impact in the British Isles during the 18th century and in many ways became the basis for Britain's world mission in the 19th century, has been described as "the evangelical awakening." Nor is it accidental that Joan Jacobs Brumberg's scholarly study of the life, career and family of Adoniram Judson, the American Baptist pioneer foreign missionary, is used as the key to her analysis of "evangelical religion" in the U.S. during the 19th century. Wesleyan and Baptist preachers, evangelists and missionaries aptly demonstrate the burning passion of the evangelical movement for world mission and evangelism.

This missiological characteristic is undergirded by four theological distinctives: the authority of Scripture; salvation by grace through faith; conversion as a distinct experience of faith and a landmark of Christian identity; and the demonstration of "the new life" through piety and moral discipline. The first two are derived from the Protestant Reformation; they are the formal and material principles of the Reformation. The other two are tied to the so-called Second Reformation (the Pietist Movement, including the Evangelical Awakening, which sought to complete the First [or theological] Reformation by advocating the reformation of life). The last two principles are also connected with American Revivalism and the Holiness movement.

These four theological distinctives have in various ways affected the historical development of the evangelical move-

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