

Review: Anonymous, *The Forbidden Book*, Lollard House, Shippensburg, Pennsylvania (PA), 1992

Pages: 129

Neglected History of the Greatest Book

A concise and dramatic history of reformation events centered around two themes; the life and spirit of William Tyndale and God's hand in orchestrating history. Both caused the English Bible's publication and dissemination to what became the undisputed best seller in spite of supernatural opposition.

Historical threads are woven together proving the miracle of the English Bible's existence:

*In tradition, seeds sown in England by Joseph of Arimathea, also a missionary visit by Paul. The ancient Culdee Church of Iona kept a light burning there during the Dark Ages.

*Wycliffe translating an English bible (from the Latin Vulgate) by hand, and sending out his Lollards to certain death for the gospel's sake. Wycliffe was protected from Rome by Queen Anne of Bohemia and Sir John of Gaunt.

*Wycliffe's Bohemian students on exchange from Prague returned with his doctrine to that place during the time of martyr Jan Hus. After Hus' murder in 1415 a reformation in Europe was ignited, defended by the military giant Jan Ziska, all 100 years in advance of Luther.

*Near simultaneous invention of the printing press with movable type, and fall of Constantinople to Islam which caused Westward migration of Greek manuscripts and learning.

*John Colet unlocking the Bible in English from Greek at St. Paul's, and Erasmus' NT published in time for Luther, then Tyndale's translations.

*Prince Philip's support of Luther in Germany and an external threat of Islam tying Charles V and Rome's hands of persecution.

*Tyndale's gift for languages aiding translation and concealment in Europe. His persecutor Bishop Tunstal financed the work buying up inferior first editions to burn them!

*Henry VIII's divorce causing a break with Rome and the death of Tyndale's enemies Cardinal Woolsey and Sir Thomas More.

The product of a gifted scholar, exiled, hunted, impoverished, betrayed and murdered was “a thing not having his full shape” that became 90% of what was fully formed in 1611, the Authorized Version.

The spirit imparted by the Book is best summarised in martyr Thomas Bilney, who, dejected after recanting from Tunstal's torture resolved one day in 1528 to “go up to Jerusalem” at the Lollard's Pit.

The book contains a Prologue, Preface, Introduction, Epilogue and some scripture examples from 1551 Tyndale/Taverner NT.

Prologue

At the beginning we have the ten northern tribes of Israel having been separated for 700 years and exiled Jewish people in Babylon c500 B.C. had refused to return. Palestine was a Roman territory ruled by Herod.

Rome became the seat of Christendom when the Briton Constantine became Caesar. Augustine records when Pope Gregory sent him to proselytise Britain it had been Christian for centuries.

Tradition records Joseph of Arimathea established the mother church in England, 36 A.D. at Glastonbury. It spread to Wales, Cornwall, Ireland and Scotland leaving Druidism in its wake. The work settled on Iona, a small island (2.5mi*1.5mi) off the west coast of Scotland (due to Romish persecution). There, a famous missionary from Ireland, Columba, settled and began a school of prophets or a lone light during the Dark Ages.

Disciples were known as 'Culdees'.

In 1297 the Culdee Church was persecuted by Rome and driven underground. It is claimed John Wycliffe was a Culdean; in 1494 near Glasgow thirty Lollards ('the Lollards of Kyle') were charged with practising doctrines of the ancient Culdee Church.

Key figures used by God were Wycliffe and Huss in the 14th C, John Colet and Savonarola in the 15th C, and Martin Luther and William Tyndale in the 16th C.

Circumstantial evidence points to John Colet being the leader of the Lollard's; he financed Erasmus and influenced Tyndale by 'letting Paul speak'. In a similar vein Staupitz encouraged Luther to read the Bible and preach.

c66 AD Paul finished his epistle, II Timothy before being beheaded by Nero. Thirty-three years later the NT would be completed, to be translated into Latin, Armenian, Syriac and Coptic. The Council of Carthage in 397 A.D. canonised 27 books in the NT and accepted the LXX as the OT with the condition the fourteen books of the Apocrypha were for historical purposes only.

In Bethlehem Jerome under Pope Damasus created a Latin Vulgate from Greek manuscripts, but for the OT used the Hebrew Tanakh, abandoning the LXX. Over time (c500 years) this Vulgate became greatly corrupted. With Latin restricted to scholarly circles within each generation the Bible became inaccessible. This was the background of Erasmus and Luther's time.

Preface

In 1417 John Oldcastle sought freedom through rebellion against the Romish Church in England. What couldn't be done by force, Tyndale managed through the Word.

He was fluent in seven languages: Hebrew, Greek, German, Latin, Italian and French in addition to his native tongue. This made him an ideal tool for God to work with. His mission was to know his calling and never

deviate. He was supported only by Christ, not by any Church and would have relied heavily on his personal relationship with Jesus and direct access to God.

Introduction

20thC philosophy and Reformation action are poles apart which is why today revival seems impossible. Reformation gave the English Bible, Commonwealth of Free Nations and renewed Christianity.

It was an event with many dependent actors – Luther would have been stopped without Tyndale and England's support or worse Henry VIII's return to Rome, and Tyndale would have failed without Luther and his sympathetic assistance on the Continent.

Tyndale was born 1494 near Bristol, just after Columbus discovered America in 1492 and the 'New Learning' was percolating through Europe after the Fall of Constantinople in 1453.

I) Wycliffe and the Rise of the Lollards (pp. 1-14)

Since the founding of Constantinople and the Eastern Roman Empire, political power in the West and Germany was filled by the Roman Church. It is said freedom from Rome was inversely proportional to its proximity. Monasteries were strategically placed to control the spiritual lives of the community.

This period was known as the Dark (500-800) and Middle (800-1500) Ages. Learning was restricted to Latin and kept from the masses, scripture reading forbidden, heresy was punishable by death, and the Papacy held ecclesiastical and (in many places) civil power (e.g. the Papal States). The Pope's effective spy network grew to become the Inquisition, 600 years from 1233.

It is conjectured Paul visited Britain, and sayings are attributed to him:

“Obedience to God is resistance to tyranny.”

“There are three kinds of men: the man of God who renders good for evil,

the man of men who renders good for good and evil for evil, and the man of the devil who renders evil for good.”

Events that sowed seeds of discontent with Romanism included:

*100,000 prostitutes were in employ of the Church, Augustine's “necessary evil”.

*'Artifacts of Jesus' were enshrined at many places to encourage profitable pilgrimages.

*Indulgences were granted for money. Pope Julius (1503-1515) gave one to future Pope Leo X (1515-1521) who was married with two children. Bishop Tetzel was the famous collector on the Continent and target of Luther. Leo X: “How profitable the fable of Christ has been to us.”

Resistance in England to popery was centered on resistance to pilgrimages, idolatry, transubstantiation and Bible reading restrictions. This Lollard movement came to a violent head under John Oldcastle in 1417, after which anyone caught practiced recantation or ignorance to survive.

Professor at Baliol College, Oxford, John Wycliffe was the driving force of Lollardy. He was a university ('one versed in all'), a scholarly giant.

His friendship with Anne of Bohemia (King Richard II's wife) and John of Gaunt, Prince of Wales and monarch in absentia protected him from Rome. Nevertheless his position at Oxford was revoked, so he set upon translating an English Bible from the Latin, at Lutterworth church in 1375.

With only ink and paper work was slow and tedious, taking ten months for a single Bible. Also, Lollards faced deadly clerical opposition-King Henry V c1414 hanged and burned Lollards, as evidenced in woodcut drawings.

Wycliffe died 1384 but his ideas took hold in Bohemia with Jan Huss, due to students attending his Oxford lectures and importing his doctrines (1365-1375). Huss was burned 1414 by Rome with Wycliffe's transcribed writings used as tinder.

An interesting prophecy is implied to Wycliffe by the author from

Ecclesiasticus 50:

“Even as the Morning Star being in the midst of a cloud...so doth he shine and glister in the temple and Church of God.”

Wycliffe was succeeded by John Purvey, who circulated Wycliffe's *The Wicket* in the thousands. Impact on the English language's development was great, inspiring the famous works of Geoffrey Chaucer (a fact ignored by secularists). Chaucer is said to have written “Tale of the Parson” in *The Canterbury Tales* about Wycliffe.

Even Rome testified for Wycliffe, Archbishop Arundel of York in 1394 at Queen Anne's funeral said she was more learned than the prelates due to his books which he declared 'good and true'. By 1408 Arundel had changed his mind:

“We therefor decree...no unauthorised person shall translate any part of the Holy Scripture into English.”¹

By order of Pope Martin V, Wycliffe's bones were dug up in 1428 and burnt. This is strong evidence of his continued influence after death.

Johannes Gutenberg's printing press invention in 1454 in Mainz, Germany was critical for dispersal of this new knowledge.

II) Colet and Erasmus (pp. 15-24)

When the Turks took Constantinople in 1453 Greek manuscripts came West with the refugees. These also included Patristic writings, Aristotle, Plato and Socrates.

John Colet, Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral studied this material in Italy (there influenced by Savonarola) and upon returning in 1496 began to teach the Greek in English and so errors of the corrupted Vulgate were soon exposed. Political connections offered protection.

Colet's exposition in English was direct and more literal. This was in opposition to the Alexandrian exegetical method from Origen's days, with layers of literal, then allegorical, then moral, and finally anagogical (“to

rise”). This often perverted scripture.

Erasmus was also a student of Colet, leaving Rotterdam for England to pursue his studies. He was an intellectual diplomat not a reformer, notwithstanding a great zeal for desiring scripture translated into the language of the people:

“I utterly dissent from those...unwilling...Scriptures should be...translated into their own...tongue.”

And,

“I wish...even the weakest woman should read the Gospels.”

Erasmus was a friend of papist Sir Thomas More; archenemy of Tyndale.

For his translation ambitions he was expelled from Cambridge in 1514 and migrated permanently to Basel, Switzerland for the work. In 1515, a Swiss printer Froben undertook printing of the Erasmus Greek NT and it was printed in 1516. Froben supplied manuscripts to Erasmus, apart from two loaned by Colet from St. Paul's library. They were 10th century and incomplete meaning Erasmus had to gap-fill from the Latin Vulgate.

Erasmus managed to gain Pope Leo X's approval for the diglot: “We are greatly pleased.” This work was banned in England.

A parallel work begun 1514 by Cardinal Ximenes was being undertaken at Alcala, Spain: Greek NT & LXX, Hebrew OT and a Latin translation of everything). It took till 1518 to complete.

Colet, in turn influenced Tyndale with the Greek learning.

III) Early Life of Tyndale (pp. 25-38)

Being born near Bristol, a sea port, Tyndale would have had exposure to world events. In 1515, age 21, he had received his M.A. at Oxford. The M. A. was a rigorous course which took seven years. It consisted of the trivium (grammar, rhetoric, logic), quadrennium (music, arithmetic, geometry, astronomy) and philosophies (natural, moral, metaphysical).

Lollardy was reported at Oxford by Bishop Russell from 1491 suggesting Tyndale was exposed to its doctrine. Despising the 'Schoolmen' and after an inquisitorial book purge by Cardinal Woolsey, he abandoned further academic pursuits for self-study at Cambridge. There he joined the White Horse Inn Society², a 25 member group most of whom would be burnt at the stake.

In 1517, Coventry, five men and two women were burned at the stake for teaching their children the Lord's prayer and the Ten Commandments in English.

Finding no support for translation aspirations, in 1521 Tyndale left Cambridge for Little Sodbury Manor, north of Bristol. There he was family chaplain and tutored the children of Sir John Walsh and Anne Poyntz, who were friends with Henry VIII. His room there survives to this day.

Exposure to Romanists came via the family's frequent dinners and is the source of Tyndale's famous plough boy quote. Despite having truth on his side, Tyndale found reputation held more weight, such as Erasmus'. He decided to translate Erasmus' youthful 1501 Latin work *The Manual of a Christian Knight*³ and this won over Lady Walsh. This work attacked the prelate's wealth and time-wasting on useless debate among other things.

Emboldened, Tyndale began to preach in the surrounding area, for which he came to the authority's attention and was summoned in 1523 before the local Bishop. His relationship with Walsh secured his protection in this matter.

He sought the Bishop of London, Tunstal, to sponsor his translation work. Tunstal was also a scholar so Tyndale thought he would be well received. He was wrong.

Finding a benefactor in Henry Monmouth, a merchant and also a member of the White Horse Inn, Tyndale chose self-exile on the dangerous continent, leaving England forever in 1524. Only the Low Countries and Germany offered some freedom from the Pope and Tyndale chose to first live in Hamburg⁴, arriving in May.

IV) The First English Bible (pp. 38-50)

Locomotion on the Continent was by foot, boat or horse and due to banditry extreme care was required.

On 10 December, 1520, Luther burned Pope Leo's bull of excommunication. In 1521 under a safe conduct guarantee Luther went before the Diet of Worms (a fair distance SW of Wittenberg). There he made his famous speech before being abducted by friends and taken to a castle in Elector Philip's castle.

Tyndale is said to have met with Luther c1524/5 and they found common ground, due to Luther's *αδιαφορα* doctrine-all doctrines apart from the salvation message are non-essential.

Luther had taken on Rome, Emperor Charles V and won by having his German NT circulated. Prince Philip's protection placed Charles in a straitjacket, for civil war would weaken the empire against the threat of the Turks.

Luther's co-labourers Spalatin and Melancthon brought their protest to a head in 1529 and the Diet of Speyer granted recognition to Lutherans, coining the term Protestant.

Tyndale left Wittenburg 1525 for the Romish city of Cologne, a bold psychological tactic. There, services of a sympathetic printer Peter Quentel were employed. Soon there were 3,000 quarto editions printed with a prologue, marginal and reference notes. A bounty hunter Cochlaeus found the operation by local printers. He arrived with a Town Senate order minutes after Tyndale and Roye has fled with their printed sheets, down the Rhine river to Worms.

At Worms Tyndale continued in the shop of Peter Schoeffer, who happened to be the son of the partner of Johannes Gutenberg. There, late 1525 the NT was completed in octavo size and smuggled into England in flour bags and cloth bales.

Only two copies remain today; a testament to the thorough purging of

Tunstal and Henry VIII. In 1526 Tunstal preached against the NTs claiming errors and burnt them at St. Paul's cross. This publicity was invaluable and demand for the Bible soared.

The story of merchant Augustine Packington is memorable. Sought out by Tunstal, he agreed to procure all Tyndale's NTs, for a price. Tunstal got the books, Packington the thanks and Tyndale the monies. Though they were to be burnt the act would generate public outrage and the money allowed Tyndale to pay off debt and finance better Bibles.

When Thomas More was torturing a man named Constantius at his house to find out Tyndale's network, he replied Bishop Tunstal was their helper!

Tyndale's 1525 NT used Erasmus' 1522 Greek NT edition, Luther's German NT and the Latin Vulgate. It the effort of a hunted outlaw with a single aide. He stated it was a work in progress that would need to come into full shape in due time. His 1534 revision would make up 90% of the AV.

V) Chains of Freedom (pp. 51-74)

The Lollard's Pit is a place in Norwich, east England where at least 300 were burned at the stake from 1390-1550, including Thomas Bilney, the first English martyr of the Reformation.

In 1517, Bilney procured a Greek NT and was moved by I Timothy 1.15, as recorded in his confession to Tunstal, 1527. He became a priest in 1519 and received licence to preach. His confession to 'Father' Latimer helped convert him to the truth.

Until 1527 Bilney preached and distributed literature. He was apprehended then charged with heresy and preaching Lutheranism.

Tunstal tortured him and managed to elicit a recantation. Bilney was broken spiritually, so in 1528 he told friends he was "going up to Jerusalem" whereupon he left Cambridge and began preaching again. He was soon arrested and burnt; he placed his hand in the fire first because with it he had signed the recantation.

Meanwhile, in 1527 Tyndale had moved to Marburg, Hesse-Cassel in Prince Philip's territory. The University there attracted many reformers and refugees. Tyndale was given respite when Henry and Wolsey came to disagreement over Henry's divorce with Catherine of Aragon. Along with Luther he advocated Henry's divine right and independence from Rome, put down in his *Obedience*. Henry liked the book after getting it from Anne.

Henry soon acted; Wolsey died of fright the night before but More would have to be executed.

Tyndale also translated Luther's *Justification by Faith* as *The Wicked Mammon*.

In 1528-9 the Pentateuch was translated and Hamburg was chosen for printing. Unfortunately a storm took the ship and manuscript with it. Tyndale took another ship there and met with John Rogers and Myles Coverdale who became his disciples. Coverdale was a diplomat like Erasmus, also patronised by More.

In 1531 the Hebrew Pentateuch was completed a second time, printed at Antwerp, the most important commercial city in Europe but also under jurisdiction of Charles V. Tyndale saw Hebrew had a great affinity for English.

After publishing *Practice of Prelates*, in the same year, which condemned Henry's divorce Tyndale's exile was set in stone. After being on the run another two years he settled in the English House at Antwerp owned by Thomas Poyntz, relative of Lady Walsh of Little Sodbury Manor. Each week Tyndale spent two 'days of pastime', relieving English refugees, and seeking out any poor persons to relieve them.

In England Tyndale's friend and the brains of the English Reformation, John Frith was imprisoned in the Tower by Bishop Cranmer due to his attack on transubstantiation. Cranmer urged him to escape but Frith was called to stand on principle and decided to go to the stake.

In 1535 an agent Henry Philips managed to gain Tyndale's trust, despite Poyntz' misgivings. Philips laid a trap one day and soldiers had Tyndale

imprisoned at Vilvoorde castle. He spent 500 days there in miserable conditions writing a letter requesting a cap, warmer clothes, lamp for the dark, and his Hebrew Bible, grammar and dictionary. It is unknown whether these requests were granted.

The Council of Brabant carried out execution October 6, 1536:

“Lord, open the King of England's eyes.”

VI) Tyndale's Influence on English (pp. 75-82)

Tyndale's work is the most overlooked aspect in the English language's history. He stated it was a thousand times easier to translate into English than the romance languages. His translation was in the common language, like the Greek which before 1900 the scholarly form was erroneously thought to have been used in Biblical manuscripts.

Coverdale was licensed to print the Bible in 1536 then Rogers in 1537. Coverdale had the Great Bible published with royal injunction in 1539. Every church was mandated to own one and had till 1541.

With Bloody Mary's ascension in 1553, 300 reformers were martyred in her papish ambitions for England. Scottish Reformer John Knox fled to Geneva, Switzerland and collaborated with Jean Calvin on the 1560 Geneva Bible. This was the Bible of the Puritans, taken on board the Mayflower, and used in America for a hundred years before giving way to the Authorised Version. The catalyst may have been the aftermath of the English Civil Wars and execution of Papist King Charles I by Oliver Cromwell.

The Geneva Bible had thousands of footnotes which prompted Queen Elisabeth to authorise the Bishop's Bible of 1568.

In 1582, Tyndale was vindicated by the Catholic Church's act in issuing the Rheims New Testament, translated from the Clementine Vulgate.

The era of the King James Bible gave the world John Newton, Charles Wesley and Augustine Toplady (“Rock of Ages”), missionary pioneer to India William Carey (1790).

It influenced the Bill of Rights, American Constitution and Declaration of Independence and gave courage to rebel from England. Though England was undefeated they still lost the war.

Since 1611, the Bible was the best seller every year except 1951 which was the printing of Mao Tse Tung's Little Red Book.

VI) Faith Rediscovered (pp. 83-90)

Tyndale personified defiance of earthly circumstance-an eleven year exile of shipwreck, poverty, hunger, separation, illness, betrayal ending in execution.

The Whore of Babylon, Rome, is alluded to but left unnamed (p. 86), an 'earthly hierarchy of false prophets' or the papacy.

T.S. Elliot, *Murder in the Cathedral*, "A martyr is always made by design of God for his love of men, to warn them, and to lead them back to His ways."

Epilogue

Samples of Tyndale's 1551 Bible with modern spelling.

¹Samuel Bagster, *English Hexapla*, 1841, p. 4.

²It was nicknamed "Little Germany" for obvious reasons.

³At ~118 pages it would have been a great translation task.

⁴Likely due to its great distance from Rome and therefore safety. Also, Reformation headquarters were just down the river at Wittenburg, where Luther nailed hi 95 theses on the Church door in 1517.