

“William Tyndale and the English Bible”

By Tim Bench, Abilene, TX



In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the Roman Catholic Church was at its zenith of power. The Papacy and the Pope not only exerted complete and de facto dominance of organized religion, but its power was so great and so dominating that the RCC controlled entire governments, as well. The Catholic Church largely manipulated untold millions of people's lives, from cradle to grave, over the course of multiple centuries.

William Tyndale, 1494-1536

- ◆ Ordained a priest 1515
- ◆ Studied at Cambridge (under Erasmus?)
- ◆ “I defy the Pope, and all his laws; and if God spares my life, I will cause the boy that drives the plow in England to know more of Scriptures than the Pope.”
- ◆ Based on Hebrew and Greek manuscripts
- ◆ First English translation printed (in Europe)
- ◆ Opposed Henry VIII's divorce
- ◆ Condemned by Cardinal Wolsey, strangled and burned at the stake



Holy Trinity Adult Forum, Advent 2007: the King James Bible

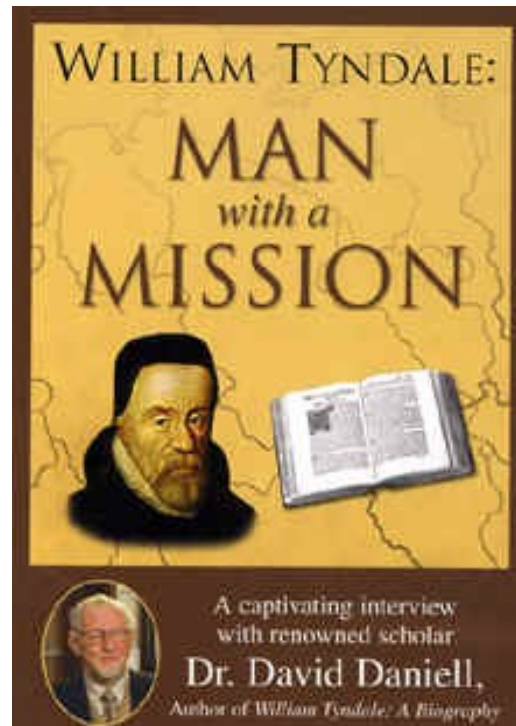
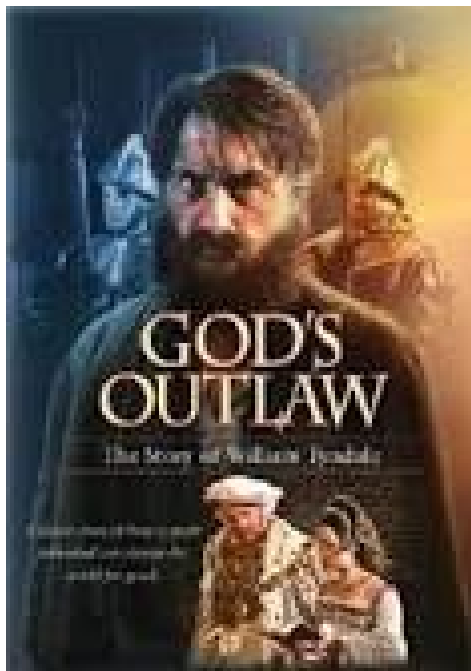
During this era, the Catholic Church was determined to make absolutely certain of two specific things.....#1, that the Bible would NOT be made available to the general masses.....and #2, that “Latin” (even some 500 years ago an archaic and “dying” language) would be decreed to be and to remain the “official” “language” for translation, interpretation, and application of the Bible. Translations into languages such as German, French, or into the emerging language of English were criminal acts, punishable by death, under order from the Roman Catholic Church.

Several well-known opponents of the Papacy would emerge during this time, to do battle with the Church and do everything within their powers to get the Bible into the hands of the masses, Martin Luther most notably, but also including others such as Jan Hus, John Wycliffe, and others. In this brief article, I would like for us to spend just a few moments looking at one man in particular.....

“God, who foresaw the coming greatness of the English-speaking world, prepared in advance the agent who early would give direction to the course of its thinking. One man stands out silhouetted against the horizon above all others, as having stamped his genius upon English thought and upon the English language.

That man was William Tyndale.”

from “Our Authorized Bible Vindicated”, 1930, by Benjamin Wilkinson.



In 1525, with the assistance of Martin Luther, Tyndale completes the first Bible translation into English.^{1,2} Tyndale's goal was simple: to make the Bible accessible to EVERY man and woman, in their native tongue, allowing people to study the words of God for themselves (which would obviously enlighten people to Catholic farces and deception, such as the infamous sale of “indulgences” for the removal of sin, which Luther so detested and served as the fulcrum for his posting of the “95 theses” on the door of the Wittenburg Church, effectively declaring war on the catholic Church. Tyndale had fled Germany due to bounty hunters on his trail, the price on his head courtesy of the Pope. The Catholic Church burns every Tyndale Bible it could seize, claiming it contains

thousands of errors and possession of a Tyndale Bible is punishable by death.

“An estimated 6,000 English New Testaments began to flood into England inside bags of wheat and bales of cotton. Nearly all were confiscated and burned in front of St. Paul's Cathedral by order of Catholic Church and the King. An act of Parliament (35 Hen. VIII. cap. 1) forbade the use of all copies of Tyndale's "false translation.”

His translation angered Catholics and the King not only because the scriptures were published in English, but he deliberately selected the word ecclesia as ‘Congregation’ instead of Church; ‘elder’ in place of ‘priest’; and ‘repentance’ for ‘penance’.”

from www.Gospelhall.com.

“As soon as Tyndale’s English New Testament reached England there was a great demand for it, by the common people, that they might read it, and by the ecclesiastical authorities, that they might burn it. The (Catholic) Bishops liberally contributed to buy up whole editions to consign to the flames....an English merchant at Antwerp by the name of Packington was a friend both of Bishop Tunstall and of Tyndale. The Bishop made a contract with Packington to buy all the books he could, at any cost, and send them to him so that he might burn them at St. Paul’s Cross.”

“The Ancestry of our English Bible” by Ira Price, page 247, 1906.

Why did Tyndale oppose the Catholic Church so vehemently as the enemy of all mankind?

"The preaching of God's word is hateful and contrary unto them. Why? For it is impossible to preach Christ, except thou preach against antichrist; that is to say, them which with their false doctrine and violence of sword enforce to quench the true doctrine of Christ. And as thou canst heal no disease, except thou begin at the root; even so canst thou preach against no mischief, except thou begin at the bishops"

from [The Obedience of A Christian man, 1528.](#)

"I defie the Pope and all his lawes..."

www.storyofredemption.org.

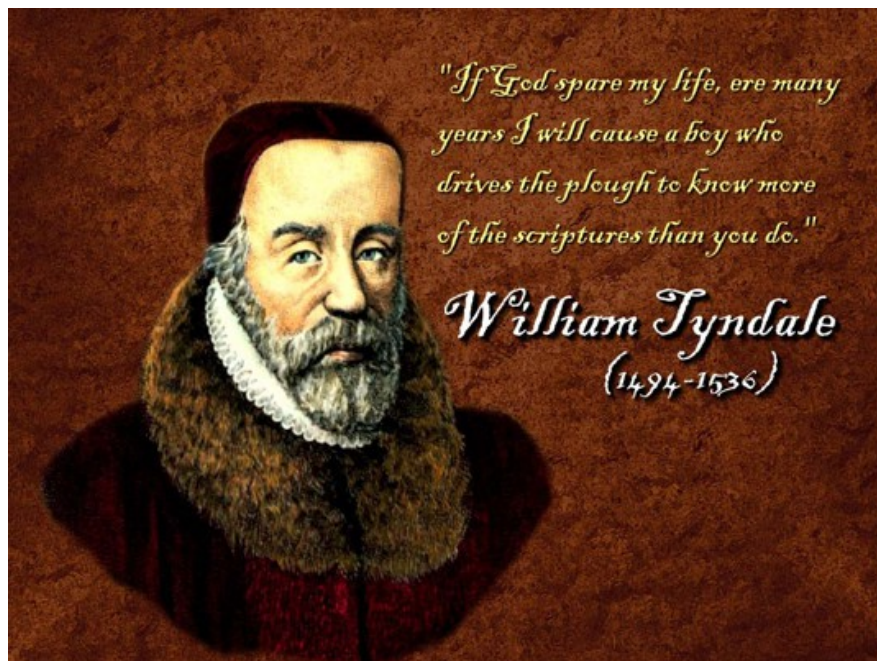
Tyndale comments, which would ultimately stir the Catholic Church into action and retaliation.....

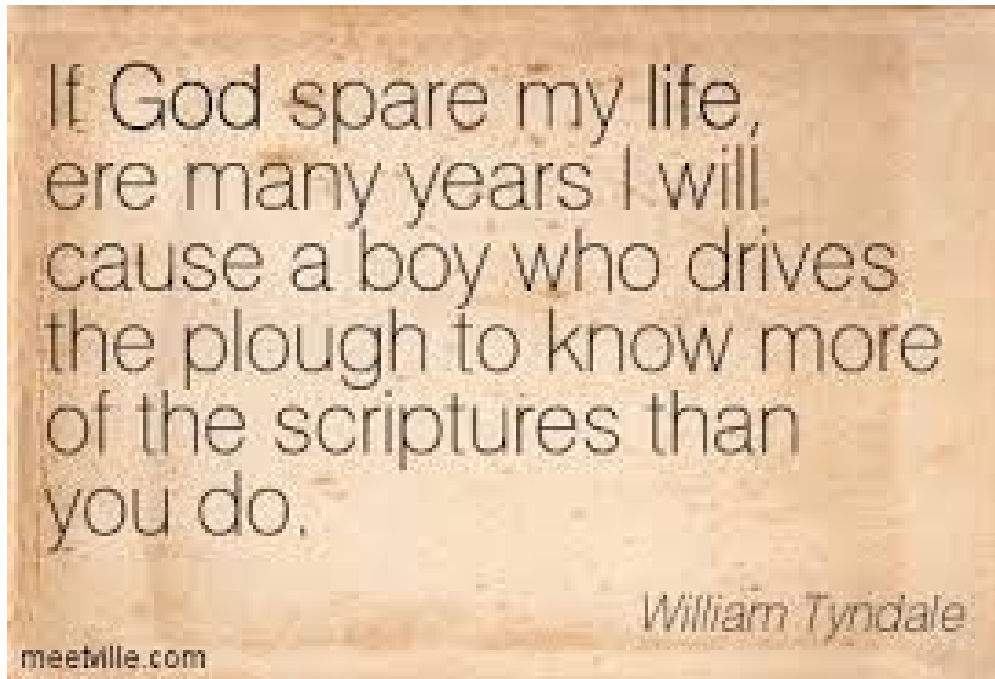
"Christ is with us until the world's end. Let his little flock be bold therefore...For if God be on our side, what matter maketh it who be against us, be they bishops, cardinals, popes, or whatsoever names they will?"

from Tyndale's "The Obedience of the Christian Man", 1528.

"This seest thou, that it is the bloody doctrine of the pope which causeth disobedience, rebellion and insurrection: for he teacheth to fight and to defend his traditions, and whatsoever he dreameth, with fire, water, and sword; and to disobey father, mother, master, lord, king, and emperor; yea, and to invade whatsoever land or nation, that will not recieve and admit his godhead: where the peaceable doctrine of Christ teacheth to obey, and to suffer for the word of God, and to remit the vengance and the defence of the word to God, which is mighty and able to defend it..."

From Prologue to "Obedience of the Christian man".





Tyndale is eventually arrested and jailed by the Catholic authorities, his crime sedition and violating Catholic decrees forbidding translations of the Bible....Tyndale was certain of his inevitable fate, and his fear of what would soon be his fate was coupled with his environment while jailed.....

“Tyndale knew his trial would be little more than a formality; but during that event he might have opportunity of speaking for 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 Faith Alone Justifies Before God, winter drew on and the light began to fail. He had only a few hours a daylight for writing. The remainder of the time he sat in darkness alone. But he must finish his work, for this was to be his end....”.

from “Facts From History About Our King James Bible”, by Ronald D. Lesley.

Tyndale's own words, written from within his jail cell....

"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."

"I call God to record against the day we shall appear before our Lord Jesus, that I never altered one syllable of God's Word against my conscience, nor would do this day, if all that is in earth, whether it be honor, pleasure, or riches, might be given me."

Tyndale's fate is astonishing, as is the rationale for his sentence. William Tyndale would be strangled AND burned at the stake by the Catholic Church.....for the crime of attempting to provide the Bible to as many people as possible, to ensure and spur the spread of the Gospel throughout the world, and especially defying the enemies of Christ, in this case, the Catholic Church. Tyndale would DIE for trying to ensure that each and every person could possess a Bible, and read and study the word of God, a blessing we give almost no thought of today.

“Tyndale obtained the full wrath of the Roman Catholic Church on October 6, 1536 when he was betrayed by friends, exposed to public humiliation in an elaborate ceremony, strangled by an executioner, and after dying, his corpse was burned at the stake. His last words are recorded to have been, “Lord, open the eyes of the king of England!” This request would be fulfilled two years later when the King announced the acceptance of “The Great Bible” as the standard version of the Church of England which was largely the work of Tyndale. Tyndale’s better translation later became the basis for the Geneva Bible and even the King James Version and his reformatory ideas inspired faith to continue in the struggle to return to the biblical standard”.....

From “The Blood-Stained Pages of the Bible-William Tyndale “, South Marion (Indiana) Church of Christ.

“William Tyndale is the true father of the English Bible. He was the first to translate the New Testament in English based on a Greek text. He himself suffered martyrdom, but his ambition to put the Bible in the hands of the people lived on, eventually resulting in the appearance of the illustrious King James Version”.

From “How we got the Bible” by Neil Lightfoot, page 207.

"William Tyndale was a special instrument appointed by the Lord as God's pick-axe to shake the inward roots and foundation of the pope's proud churchdom. The prince of darkness, with his impious imps, had a special malice against him, leaving no way unsought to craftily entrap him, falsely betray him, and maliciously spill his life..."

For so long the abominable doings and idolatries maintained by the pharisaical clergy could not be espied because they had achieved that either the Bible should not be read at all, or if it were, they would darken the right sense with the mist of their sophistry and so entangle those who rebuked or despised their abominations. Wrestling the Scripture unto their own purpose, contrary unto the meaning of the text, they would so delude the unlearned lay people that though those felt in their hearts that what they were hearing was false, they were unable to untangle their subtle riddles.”

From Foxe’s Book of Martyrs, page 191.

"It is easily established that he was involved with the churches of Christ in England, particularly those meeting at Bow Lane." (*Traces of the Kingdom*, Keith Sisman, p.284).





THE MARTYRDOM AND BURNING OF WILLIAM TYNDALE.

Tyndale was so detested, loathed, abhorred, and hated by the Papacy that even SEVEN YEARS AFTER HIS DEATH....

“In 1543, the Catholic decree "An act for the advancement of true religion, and for the abolishment of the contrary" stated that "All manner of books of the Old and New Testament in English, being of the crafty, false, and untrue translation of Tyndale, shall be clearly and utterly abolished, extinguished, and forbidden to be kept or used.”

From “Tyndale’s New Testament” from The Pilgrim Church by E. H. Broadbent, 1931.

Oh, but this was all 500 years ago.....the world is very different now, and Bibles and translations abound.....everyone around the globe has access to the Word of God, right?

Nothing could be further from the truth....72% of US citizens mistakenly believe that the Bible is readily available in ALL languages ³, when in reality, of the world's 6,101 languages, less than half 43%) have a Bible translation in their dialect ; there are some 7 billion people on this planet, and hundreds of millions have NO ACCESS to the word of God, and no access to the words of Jesus Christ, and tragically no access to salvation. And more directly, what are we doing about it??

There is nothing new under the sun, we are told in Ecclesiastes. Whether it be in first century Rome, or in England in the 16th century, or today in numerous countries (and increasingly in our own), Christianity is not only frowned upon but is CRIMINAL ⁴.....North Korea punishes ANY possession of religious literature by either imprisonment or execution.....China places great restrictions on Bible imports and distribution.....numerous Muslim nations and governments punish Christianity with impunity...governments throughout the world, and throughout history, have done all within their power to crush and eradicate Christianity....even within our own borders, Christianity is becoming systematically more restricted....what do you do to promote the name of Jesus Christ, even when the “world” would oppose you?

William Tyndale is merely one of hundreds of

examples of martyrs throughout the ages who have died as a result of ensuring that YOU, here today, centuries removed by time, thousands of miles removed by distance, can sit in a church today with a Bible in your hands. Merely holding a Bible is a luxury most of the world does not share, even today, and yet we take it for granted. Most of the world cannot meet for services as those of us in America can, and yet we take it for granted. And people were burned at the stake, literally, to help grant you these blessings.....and we barely give it a second thought.

“So the next time you open one of the several copies of the English Bible you possess, think upon the blood that has been spilt to ensure that God’s Word could reach and save you. First and foremost, consider Christ’s blood which was shed to prepare the Gospel. But don’t forget God’s providence in allowing the Gospel to reach us over two millennia later in our common tongue. Take time to also consider God’s use of people like John Wycliffe, Martin Luther, and William Tyndale; these people died to ensure that you have a copy of Scripture to study for yourself. Our Bibles are stained with blood. Let us never forget that fact”.....South Warsaw c of c.

“But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you

have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” (II Timothy 3:14-17).

William Tyndale risked his family for the word of God.....William Tyndale risked and lost his worldly possessions for the word of God..... William Tyndale ran for his life, and went into hiding, and smuggled Bibles into England, all for the word of God.....and William Tyndale would ultimately pay the ultimate price, his LIFE, as the “punishment” for his dedication and zeal and determination that the Bible should be in the hands of the common man.....he was willing to risk and even lose his own life in the name of Jesus Christ.

Today, what would YOU be willing to risk? What would you be willing to lose? What price would you be willing to pay? Examples abound throughout history of people burned at the stake, and tortured, and imprisoned, and yet many professed “Christians” today find it “inconvenient” to even invite someone to church.....or “too much trouble” to host a Bible study in their homes.....they are “too busy” to attend church services, and certainly “do not have any extra money to spend” on evangelism efforts of the church, or missionary support....many of us today cannot even

“evangelize” if doing so even “cramps” our “schedules”...

William Tyndale (and hundreds of others) were not “too busy”, or “inconvenienced”, or “troubled” to suffer for the name of Christ, and neither should we be today. Does Jesus become an afterthought in your daily routine, behind work, and mowing the yard, and paying the bills, and the other mundane demands of life....or is Jesus the reason for your being?

Matthew 28:16-20 (NIV)...”The Great Commission”...

16 Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. 17 When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. 18 Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Is spreading his word to every remote corner of the globe your overriding passion? And is it enough of a passion that you would be willing to do without, and suffer, and face loss for it? This very day, where is your focus? Where is your heart? Where is your allegiance? Is it on self.....or is it on others, others you

may well never even meet or know? Is your focus similar to that of William Tyndale, intent on taking the saving Gospel to a lost and dying world, or is your “faith” submerged in apathy, indifference, and the attitude of “Someone ELSE will do it”?

1-”Tyndale went to Germany and met with Martin Luther in 1525 and then moved on to live in Antwerp. He translated the scriptures into the English of that time and it was printed in 1525”, www.roylefamily.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/tyndale.htm

2-”Tyndale left England in 1524 and traveled to Hamburg, Germany. Already at work on his translation of the New Testament into English, Tyndale visited Martin Luther in Wittenberg, and by 1525 he had completed the translation and arranged for the printing of his English New Testament in Cologne”, “Tyndale New Testament” at www.fowlerbiblecollection.com.

3-<http://www.patheos.com/blogs/geneveith/2015/04/access-to-the-bible/>

4- <http://christianity.stackexchange.com/questions/9351/in-what-countries-is-it-illegal-to-own-a-bible-the-most-banned-book-in-the-world>