

# William Tyndale & His New Testament

& J. F. Mozley's Contribution to Reformation Studies

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It is 450 years since William Tyndale first tried to publish his manuscript, which was to become the earliest printed edition of the New Testament in English. From Wyclif on there had been odd fragments of Bible translations circulating in manuscript form, but just because they were in manuscript they never achieved any wide circulation and readership. It was Tyndale who pioneered English Bible translation, and though his contribution has tended to be forgotten in the general neglect of Reformation studies today and in the multiplicity of new versions and paraphrases which have appeared in the last few years, there are some signs that once again Tyndale's contribution is being appreciated and that Tyndale studies are reviving. Indeed it has been my privilege to work on a new edition of Tyndale's 1525 New Testament fragment. This is intended to be a definitive edition with full introduction, complete collation with Luther's New Testament (to get beyond the vague generalised statements that get repeated from one book to another) and with a large selection of contemporary documents about Tyndale and his New Testament. The intention is to make this volume the first of a complete and definitive edition of all Tyndale's works, something similar to what Yale are doing for More.

I said above that Tyndale *tried* to publish his New Testament in 1525, because events conspired to prevent full publication that year. He had conceived the idea of translating the New Testament back in England, possibly while he was a student (first at Cambridge and then later at Oxford) where he met the new Renaissance humanism with its interest in a return to the original sources, its concern for the original languages of Hebrew and Greek, and he must have entered into the heritage of Erasmus at Cambridge and of Colet at Oxford. Though we cannot be dogmatic, it is pretty certain that he would have encountered early Reformation books at the universities. Certainly by the time Tyndale had taken up his first job as tutor to the children of Sir John Walsh, a gentleman who lived in the West Country, he was clear about his intention to translate the New Testament.

Tyndale had got into trouble with the local clergy of the area, whom he met in the Walsh household. He could not help noticing their abysmal ignorance of theology and the Bible, but what was worse was their bigotry, and of course they soon came to resent the criticism of this young graduate, and so they conspired together to do him down. Foxe, the accuracy of whose documentation is more and more being borne out by research, tells us that the Walshes spoke to young Tyndale rather reprovingly and asked him in effect who he was to challenge all the local clergy, men of twice his age and experience. Tactful man that he was, Tyndale decided to bide his time, but meanwhile he used his leisure to translate Erasmus' *Enchiridion*, and when the translation was complete, he presented it to the Walshes. Their attitude changed towards the local clergy, who (as Foxe notes) came less frequently to the Walsh household, but who determined to get their revenge on Tyndale and plotted to trick him and haul him up before the diocesan chancellor.

The Erasmus book is interesting. Erasmus originally wrote it to help a lady draw her husband away from a debauched life. That was in 1503. It appeared to be a simple manual of the

Roman Catholic faith, but in fact Erasmus was protesting against the speculations of the medieval schoolmen, and urging a sort of plain man's guide to Christianity by reading the Bible. Erasmus thought a study of what the Bible actually said would cure Christians of an interest in the sort of speculative theology that the schoolmen so loved. Tyndale plainly saw this as a way of getting his case over to the Walshes, and they accepted his case. But Tyndale soon perceived that the local clergy were not going to give up their grievances against him. He did not want to embarrass his employer, so he agreed quite amicably with him (indeed with his good will) to leave. As Tyndale was thinking over his future, he conceived the idea of translating the New Testament himself and of going to the Bishop of London (Tunstall whom Erasmus had commended) to ask for patronage while he did the job.

The Walshes approved this and gave him his introductions through Sir Humphrey Guildford. Tyndale had already translated a speech of Isocrates to show what he could do, and that was forwarded off. He duly met the Bishop but got very much the cold shoulder. Tunstall may have been a moderately enlightened humanist himself, but he was not going to risk sponsoring a translation of the New Testament into English. He had heard what had happened in Germany with Luther's New Testament, and he knew how the Lollards had used scripture, and he also knew the authorities' fear of the Bible in the vernacular. So he said he had no vacancies and told Tyndale to get another job in London.

Tyndale went away and spent a few more months in London assessing the situation. During that period a few significant developments overtook him. First, he was clear that the authorities, contrary to what he had originally thought, were not interested in a vernacular Bible, and so he regarded Tunstall's rejection as providential and he determined to go abroad. Second, he got a very poor impression of the London clergy, and that made him even more determined to get God's truth out in the language of the ordinary people so that they could see for themselves and not be dependent on these incompetent clergy. Third, he met up with a prominent and godly merchant in Humphrey Monmouth. Not only did Monmouth (who was himself later in trouble with the authorities for his actions) help Tyndale with some money, but he established the all important contacts with the English merchants in Antwerp where Tyndale was to spend most of the rest of his tragically short life. Those merchants helped finance the English Protestant refugees, they protected them to some extent from persecution and arrest, and they helped smuggle in their books for Englishmen to read.

### **The Influences on Tyndale**

The influences on Tyndale were threefold. First, the Lollard background. The exact continuity or otherwise of Lollards with Reformers is still a subject of some uncertainty, but what is certain is that Tyndale did not use Lollard translations for his Bible translation work, for he states that he had 'no man to counterfeit', but where Lollard influence does come in is that at popular less educated level it created a desire, and indeed a demand, for scriptures in the vernacular, and also the Lollards and their friends helped with the distribution and sale of the printed New Testaments. But really the Lollard influence was indirect and very much in the background.

The second influence was the Renaissance humanism which had swept the universities. It encouraged a desire for good Greek and Hebrew, and a desire to get away from the aridities of medieval theology, medieval philosophy and the crabbed medieval Latin. One of the impressive things about Tyndale's translation is the freshness of its Anglo-Saxon idiom. It does not have, and was never intended to have, the sonorous cadences of the Authorised Version (that was really a more refined version of the classical influences, very much tailored

to literary prose and the spoken word). Tyndale avoided the Latinised English which the dwindling numbers of moderns who can read the classics soon recognise as accurate translation (indeed they are too accurate to the Latin phraseology to be readable) but certainly alien to English idiom. Such can only really be described as Latinised English. With Tyndale it is quite different. His is the fresh idiomatic Anglo-Saxon, popular but still accurate and theological, homely and colloquial but never cheap or trendy like some of the modern versions that demand 'the language of the shop floor'. Renaissance humanism also produced careful grammatical and linguistic studies, the works of Reuchlin and Sebastian Munster on the Old Testament, Budaeus in Greek and a host of other classical studies. But unlike Lollardy, Renaissance humanism was never a popular movement; it was a learned movement confined to the universities, the courts and other centres of learning.

The third influence was Reformation theology, and in particular Luther. Tyndale certainly had Erasmus' N.T. and the Vulgate with him as he translated but Luther is the dominant influence. Tyndale read Luther eagerly and my guess is that he appreciated not only the theology, for he himself had found the same in his own reading of the Bible, but also the language. Tyndale like Luther had discovered the message of good news in the Bible, and like most who discover (or more accurately in this case rediscover) good news, they wanted to share it with others. One can detect in Tyndale's prologue and in his marginal notes a passionate concern to get across what the Bible is saying. Yet Tyndale was no mere copier of Luther, and later he was to turn more and more to the Swiss Reformers' writings for additional help. Tyndale added his own contribution. He overlooked blemishes in Luther (e.g. he did not write down Revelation in the way Luther did in 1522), he added his own comments in marginal notes to help English readers, and he inserted his own sections in the Prologue.

### **The 1525 Publication**

By 1525 Tyndale, helped by his friends William Roye and John Frith, had the New Testament translated, and they had approached Peter Quentel, the Cologne printer, to handle the publication. He had set up much of the type and actually started to print off copies when disaster struck. Drink was the cause of it, for the German beer loosened the tongues of some of Quentel's workers who were boasting that Henry VIII would soon find a Lutheran England. That claim worried John Dobneck, the hard-line Roman Catholic cleric, better known as Cochleaus, and he hurried round to his friend the Town Councillor Herman von Rinck. Rinck arranged a police search, and Cochleaus, who himself had published books with Quentel, grew more alarmed.

Providentially, Tyndale got wind of what was about to happen, and hastening round to the printing works he gathered up all he could carry, his precious manuscripts and some printed sheets, and made off up the Rhine to the city of Worms where Lutheran ideas were more strongly established. In 1526 he was to publish the first complete New Testament in English, but he managed to salvage something of his 1525 edition. Only one fragment of it remains, and that is in the British Library. It is a quarto volume of signatures A to H, without a title-page, and containing only 22 chapters of Matthew, but there is some reason to think that some copies contained at least some of Mark as well, for there are a few subsequent references that speak of Tyndale's Matthew and Mark. Probably Tyndale published what he could of the sheets he had managed to save. Next year Peter Schoeffer reset and printed the whole New Testament for him, and copies were soon being smuggled into England. The authorities responded by trying to ban and burn the books. When they found that did not

work, they tried to buy up all the copies, but as Tyndale remarked, that only solved his debt problems and financed the next edition!

In a century when men indulged in furious and vehement literary conflict Tyndale was one of the very few people who not only moderated his language by the standards of his day till he was driven by the attitude of the authorities to protest more vigorously (and even then he was much more moderate than they), but he is the only major controversial figure I can think of in the sixteenth century about whom his worst foes could find no criticism of his person or his behaviour or life style. That is a considerable tribute though not often recognised today. Humphrey Monmouth tells us how frugally Tyndale dressed and ate. Foxe tells us that though he had little money, he gave most of it to the poor and the refugees in Antwerp, and that he set aside two days a week when he worked amongst the two groups. Tyndale says very little about himself and only one letter from him is extant today, but external evidence from friends and foes is most favourable. Tyndale the man and Tyndale's New Testament are alike impressive.

Prior to Tyndale the Bible had only been available to ordinary people in Latin, and as very few of them understood Latin, it was in fact a closed book to all but a few of the intelligensia. Tyndale's achievement was to work from the original languages (he proved a capable Hebrew scholar when he later moved onto the Old Testament), and to turn them into readable English for the ordinary man. An examination of his marginal glosses shows that most of them are to help the reader along, to explain a piece of theology or expound some biblical custom. He is not making party points, and so great was Tyndale's concern to get the Bible itself read that he actually offered never to write anything else again if the King would authorise the Bible in English.

The official attitude, dating back to anti-Lollard times, was that the Bible could only be translated with official permission and under official control. The bishops were afraid of the Bible getting free, and though they talked about a translation, they proved their indifference to that project by doing precious little about it. It was Tyndale's contribution to set the Bible free for the English people, and in so doing he made a first class translation from the Greek, using Luther's New Testament as his main aid, and his New Testament is recognised as a landmark in the development of English literature into the bargain. Tyndale's is a contribution that lasts. It is a contribution to English Christendom, to the British nation and its literary heritage, and to English-speaking lands across the world.

## **GERVASE DUFFIELD**

### **James Frederick Mozley (1887-1974)**

It is not the custom of *The Churchman* to carry obituaries, but I was grateful that the present editor allowed me to pay tribute to the late Reverend Dr. J. F. Mozley. That is not really such a break with *Churchman* tradition since this is not a normal obituary but rather a tribute to Mozley's pioneering work in Reformation scholarship, and it comes appropriately as part of an article on Tyndale, for J. F. Mozley was responsible for recommencing academic studies of Tyndale, and indeed his first book was devoted to that Reformer. Moreover, *The Churchman* has always had a special interest in the Reformation.

To understand Mozley's contribution it is necessary to look back a century or so and understand Reformation historiography. Nineteenth century Protestants tended to look at the Reformation Settlement as if it were God's perfect solution for England for all time, and they tended to view the Reformation somewhat through subsequent Protestant developments. It was no accident that Foxe's Book of Martyrs was widely read in English households, and no accident either that it was known as the Book of Martyrs and illustrated with heart-rending drawings. It was of course originally known as *Acts and Monuments*, not the Book of Martyrs. In reaction to this there was, first, a Tractarian dislike of the Reformation; witness the abuse of Froude, which was based on prejudice and ignorance, not knowledge. Second, there was a rather more refined type of sniping at the Reformers seen in men who were otherwise accepted as competent scholars. And third, there was what I can only describe as a certain type of Anglican bigotry which imagined that somehow England had a reformation totally other than that on the continent. It is bigotry because such an attitude is based on what some would like to think Anglicanism was and is, but anyone who has worked with sixteenth century sources knows that it has no foundation in history. Due to the confines of space the above are necessarily broad generalisations but I think they will stand even if in an academic treatise they would need occasional qualifications.

J. F. Mozley encountered this reaction to Victorian hagiography with his book on Foxe.<sup>1</sup> It may be irritating to scholars to find a subject marred by a certain hagiography (see for instance the current cult of Thomas More which is widely disseminated on film, radio, TV and in books, and against which expert historians such as Professor Elton have justly protested), but while simple souls can be forgiven for not being expert historians, professional academics are not so free from blame if they adopt an equally unhistorical debunking attitude. Now when he looked at Foxe, J. F. Mozley was a meticulous enough scholar to detect the campaign that S. R. Maitland launched against Foxe's reputation. Through the kindness of J. F. Mozley's three sisters I have in my possession their brother's notebooks. It will take a long time to work through them in detail, but they show a vast range of sixteenth century reading, detailed notes in his own form of shorthand, and immense care over collating and comparing texts. Mozley was an excellent classical scholar and painstaking in his work at the British Museum. To this his notebooks bear irrefutable evidence. I think it would be true to say that J. F. Mozley as a classical scholar (he taught classics at Brentwood and Loretto) was more interested in the texts and technical scholarship than in the theology, but he was plainly angered (and rightly so) by S. R. Maitland's smear campaign, and this can be seen throughout his book on Foxe. It is not only Maitland who comes under critical scrutiny but other scholars like Brewer and Gardiner. J. F. Mozley by his detailed researches has set the record straight, and exposed the anti-Foxe mythology stemming from Maitland for what it really is. Reviewers recognised the cogency of this case.

The significance of this is enormous, because Foxe is a primary, almost *the* primary, sixteenth century source for the English Reformation, and if as Maitland sought to show, Foxe was unreliable and not to be trusted, then where were scholars to turn for reliable material? It is interesting to note that a quite different line of research into local records, pioneered by Professor A. G. Dickens and his researchers, has by and large continued in the Mozley line of establishing the accuracy of Foxe's records. That is not a return to the Victorian Foxe hagiography. Like anyone else Foxe was capable of making mistakes, but Mozley was able to show that some at least of the so-called mistakes were in fact Foxe preserving his sources accurately even when he knew they contained mistakes.

Mozley's first Reformation study was of Tyndale,<sup>2</sup> and it is fair to say that this book pioneered modern Tyndale scholarship and he did it at a time when such interests were very unfashionable. My major regret is that he did not live long enough to produce a revised edition and incorporate the very considerable additional material he had discovered, but perhaps I may be able to incorporate some of it into future Tyndale and Coverdale volumes which the Sutton Courtenay Press plans to publish. His third Reformation study took his Tyndale biblical researches on into Coverdale.<sup>3</sup>

It is time now to say a little about J. F. Mozley himself. He came from a very distinguished church family. He was related to J. H. Newman, and to J. B. Mozley who had been Regius Professor at Oxford. His father was a country cleric in what was then very rural North Oxfordshire. J. F. won a scholarship to Winchester, and later an Exhibition to Exeter College, Oxford where he read Classics. He was ordained at York in 1912, and after serving curacies, he spent a fair proportion of his life as a clerical schoolmaster, but his interests were much wider than just Classics and Theology. He was an accomplished musician and had a fine voice so that at one stage he was urged to sing professionally. He had studied in Germany early on, so like few other English Reformation scholars he was fluent in German as well as classical languages.

It is my loss that I never met J. F. Mozley, but I should like to pay tribute to his three sisters who generously turned over all his notebooks and papers to me when they discovered my Reformation interests.<sup>4</sup> They had never heard of me before, but they were kindness itself, and if I may say so, I do not think I have ever visited a home where there was such a manifest but totally unobtrusive and unselfconscious blend of Christian hospitality, culture and scholarship. Somehow as I got to know them it seemed that I was experiencing the natural Mozley family tradition.

Endnotes:

- 1) *John Foxe and His Book*, SPCK, 1940.
- 2) *William Tyndale*, SPCK, 1937.
- 3) *Coverdale and His Bibles*, Lutterworth, 1953.
- 4) I have in my possession nearly a score of J. F. Mozley's commonplace books, which will take a long time to sort right through. Most of them concern Reformation matters, and some are written in his own version of shorthand. Among his articles of Reformation interest are: 'Tyndale's Knowledge of Hebrew' *JTS*, October 1935; 'Grindal and Foxe' *Notes and Queries*, July 23rd, 1949 (a refutation of J. C. Whitebrook's charges); 'Miles Coverdale' *Notes and Queries*, April 1953; 'The English Enchiridion of Erasmus, 1533' *Review of English Studies*, April 1944; 'The Marian Martyrs' *London Quarterly and Holborn Review*, July 1955.

I am certain this list is not exhaustive. Among other subjects he wrote on his distant ancestor J. H. Newman, on Freud, two small booklets one in favour of Prayer Book revision, and another entitled *The Rebuilding of the Church*. He also kept reviews of his own books and in one or two cases annotated them with replies to unfriendly critics (especially Margaret Deanesley who seems to have tried to revive the Maitland tradition about Foxe!).