

## Preface

*Let me therefore beg of thee not to trust to the opinion of any man concerning these things, for so it is great odds but thou shalt be deceived. Much less oughtest thou to rely upon the judgement of the multitude, for so thou shalt certainly be deceived. But search the scriptures thy self & that by frequent reading & constant meditation upon what thou readest, & earnest prayer to God to enlighten thine understanding if thou desirest to find the truth. Which if thou shalt at length obtain thou wilt value above all other treasures in the world by reason of the assurance and vigour it will add to thy faith, and steady satisfaction to thy mind which he onely can know how to estimate who shall experience it.*

Sir Isaac Newton, in his untitled Treatise on Revelation,  
Yahuda ms. 1.1

Isaac Newton's comment on the Scriptures can be applied equally to the study I have undertaken into William Tyndale's theology, and possible roots from which his theology grew.

My methodology for research goes back to my first day at Grammar School. Before we knew which class we were in, the Headmaster gave us a talk about how we would be taught and be expected to work. He said, 'There are only two things to learn that apply to every subject.' The first was to teach us how to think; the second, how to question what we are being taught. During my Grammar School years we did not just sit in a classroom and learn from a teacher standing in front of us; and even where this had to take up a major part of a lesson, it was our thinking and questioning which was more important. The teacher was necessary for our learning, but much more important was using, as Poirot<sup>1</sup> would have said, 'Our little grey cells.' Questioning what we were being taught enabled us to really understand the particular subject.

Thus my methodology started when I was eleven, and that methodology is still relevant today. It means questioning, before accepting what other

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1 A detective in Agatha Christie's stories

people have written. But above all it brings me to the humanist principle, *ad fontes*. Returning to the source is integral to discovering the truth. It is not important what academics write about someone or something; for it does not automatically make it true, and however often a false statement is recycled, it should not gain credibility unless it can be proved to be true.

This does not mean ignoring academic research, but rather questioning it. Does the writer demonstrate a knowledge of the original source, or is he/she reliant on other academic research? Are quotations taken out of context and used to prove the writer's thesis, disregarding anything that contradicts it in the source material? Do pre-existing assumptions shape evidence; forcing it to support the premise?

For example, the claims that Tyndale was a Lutheran up to about 1530, and that his translation of Luther's *Preface to Romans* proves this assertion, is unsubstantiated by the very evidence cited. I questioned why Tyndale, in making a good translation of Luther's 'Preface to Romans' (1526), kept breaking off from Luther's writing in order to replace Luther's text with his own words? In places Tyndale deleted Luther's words and replaced them with his own; or else Tyndale inserted passages, of differing lengths (on one occasion just over 300 words), within Luther's writings. The result, I concluded was that where Tyndale had altered Luther's work, it was because he had disagreed with Luther's original text.<sup>1</sup> These changes can be seen where Tyndale altered the wording, changed the order of the words to modify or alter the meaning, or adding to Luther's work. For example, where Luther wrote, 'they must be justified without merit [of their own] through faith in Christ, who has merited this for us by his blood.'<sup>2</sup> Tyndale's translation is, 'without their own deserving, be made righteous through faith in Christ; who has deserved such righteousness for us.'<sup>3</sup> Luther: 'Faith . . . brings with it the Holy Spirit.'<sup>4</sup> Tyndale: 'But right faith is a thing wrought by the Holy Ghost in us.'<sup>5</sup> There are also many places where Tyndale adds the work of the Holy Spirit, in writing about Abraham's circumcision, Luther: 'so all good works are only external signs which follow out of faith.'<sup>6</sup> Tyndale: 'even so are all other good works outward signs and outward fruits of faith and of the Spirit.'<sup>7</sup>

1 Werrell, 'Tyndale's disagreement . . .' (Reformation and Renaissance Review, vol 7, No. 1)

2 Luther, Martin, *Works*, 35, p. 373

3 Tyndale, William, *Prologue Romans, PS-I*, p. 496 (f. b i)

4 Luther, Martin, *Works*, 35, p. 379

5 Tyndale, William, *Prologue Romans, PS-I*, p. 493 (f. a vi)

6 Luther, Martin, *Works*, 35, p. 374

7 Tyndale, William, *Prologue Romans, PS-I*, p. 497 (f. b ii)

When I was thinking about what I should do for my research doctorate – I knew it had to do with some aspect of William Tyndale’s theology – I had a sabbatical – and it was not until I had read Tyndale’s writings for the seventh time that I realised that Tyndale had a clearly thought out and argued, single-minded, and comprehensive theology running through every one of his writings. This theology depended on the blood of Christ – or why did Tyndale mention ‘the blood of Christ’ so frequently in his writings? The blood of Christ was important for every doctrine related to man’s salvation. It would not, therefore, be possible to write about any of his doctrines until they could be considered in relation to the whole of his theology. All the different conflicting ideas of academics vanished when Tyndale’s theology is built on the base Tyndale gives us. The hardest thing I found in my research into Tyndale’s theology was that I was entering into a totally new theological world – but it was a world that relied entirely upon the Word of God.

An article, that I downloaded from the internet, ‘William Tyndale and the Course of the English Reformation’, by Patrick Collinson is the most thorough survey of academic research on William Tyndale. Although I had examined all the books and articles Collinson considered in his article, I had not realised the absolute confusion research into Tyndale’s faith, theology, and background presents us with; and I am grateful to Collinson for bringing together so many conflicting claims in a short article.

And so we arrive at the third and the most intransigent and contested of our three dimensions of Tyndale and the course of the English Reformation: the future constituency to which he communicated from beyond the stake and the ashes of Vilvorde. Abel being dead yet speaketh. But what did the dead Tyndale have to say? And (*for this may not have been the same thing*) **what was he heard to say**, (italics and emphasis mine) as the Reformation process moved on from resistance to repressive ascendancy, from protest to establishment, throwing along the way those secondary cross-currents of protest which we call Puritanism? For when the majority become at least formally Protestant, the Protestant minority turn Puritan.<sup>1</sup>

*The Roots of Tyndale’s Theology* had to start with my doctoral research which sought to discover what his theology was.<sup>2</sup> This opened up all kinds of leads in my search for the background of Tyndale’s theology. Although this research provides links with Augustine and other Church Fathers, the Wycliffite movement and with Erasmus – the real root is the Scriptures, of both the Old and New Testaments. Although this book has pointed to

1 Collinson, Patrick, ‘William Tyndale and the Course of the English Reformation’, p. 13

2 Werrell, Ralph S., *The Theology of William Tyndale*

a Wycliffite root, it opens up further areas where Tyndalian research is needed,<sup>1</sup> and there is a desperate need for scholars – especially theologians – to carry out this research on a much narrower basis. Tyndale often mentions the name of a patristic source, but his reference tends to be too vague to identify with precision; but the patristic Father Tyndale mentions will be one commonly used by Wyclif and the Wycliffites, but also by every Reformer and by scholars of the unreformed Church.

Throughout this book Tyndale quotations are generally from the Parker Society. Where there are quotations from original sources, I have either modernised the text; or I followed the original spelling where it can be easily understood, although, where needed, lower case letters are replaced by capitals. To make the book more readable, some quotations in the text have been modernised, although where necessary,<sup>2</sup> the original spelling is given in a footnote. It may seem that some of these quotations could be abbreviated, but I have avoided the same criticism Tyndale made about the doctors of his day: to prove their point they quoted something, but it was taken out of context with what went before and followed after. 'And when I allege any scripture, look thou on the text whether I interpret it right: which thou shalt easily perceive by the circumstance and process of them, . . . and findeth also that the exposition agreeth unto the common articles of the faith and open scriptures.'<sup>3</sup> Quotations from Continental Reformers have also been kept to a minimum – for if Tyndale could have got a doctrine from either the Wycliffites or later Reformers, I have considered Tyndale owed it to the English source rather than the Continental, because Tyndale's links with the Wycliffite writings covered many more doctrines and was closer theologically.

Following the quotation from Isaac Newton at the beginning of this Preface, I have sought to rely on the evidence from people whose writings might have had an influence on William Tyndale. Writings of modern academics have been accepted where they do not contradict the evidence found in the primary source material. However, I can see no value in quoting from an academic's writing a statement about his/her belief about Tyndale's theology, and then quoting a statement from Tyndale's writings that contradicts that statement.

At school I learnt how to question what I was taught (or read) – it has never been an easy route, especially when it goes against the majority opinion, as sometimes it means 'thinking the unthinkable':<sup>4</sup>

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1 e.g. 'The source of Tyndale's knowledge of the Fathers': A more thorough look at Tyndale's debt to the Wycliffite movement

2 Footnotes only occur where grammatical changes have been made to the original quotation

3 Tyndale, William, *Obedience, PS I*, p. 167. (f. xxiiij)

4 Asking questions of a subject that appear to be contrary to received academic

but it is the humanist route of discovering the truth, by returning to the original source. *Ad fontes* was important, and it led the humanists in the Renaissance to lead the world forward in knowledge and truth – even though the academic world and the Church at first condemned these advances to our knowledge. My book, *The Theology of William Tyndale*, has been criticised because I relied on Tyndale’s actual words rather than the writings of academics. One publisher in turning down my book *The Theology of William Tyndale*, told me that I should not have quoted Tyndale, but rather put Tyndale’s writings into my own words; I believe this was simply because Tyndale’s words disagreed with the findings of modern scholarship. In this book I have relied much more on modern scholarship, although I have not rejected my principle of *ad fontes*, for that alone can tell us what Tyndale, was thinking; with or without the approval of modern academic research.

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knowledge/experience, for example, those who said, the world was round, and that it had an orbit round the sun – who were declared heretics