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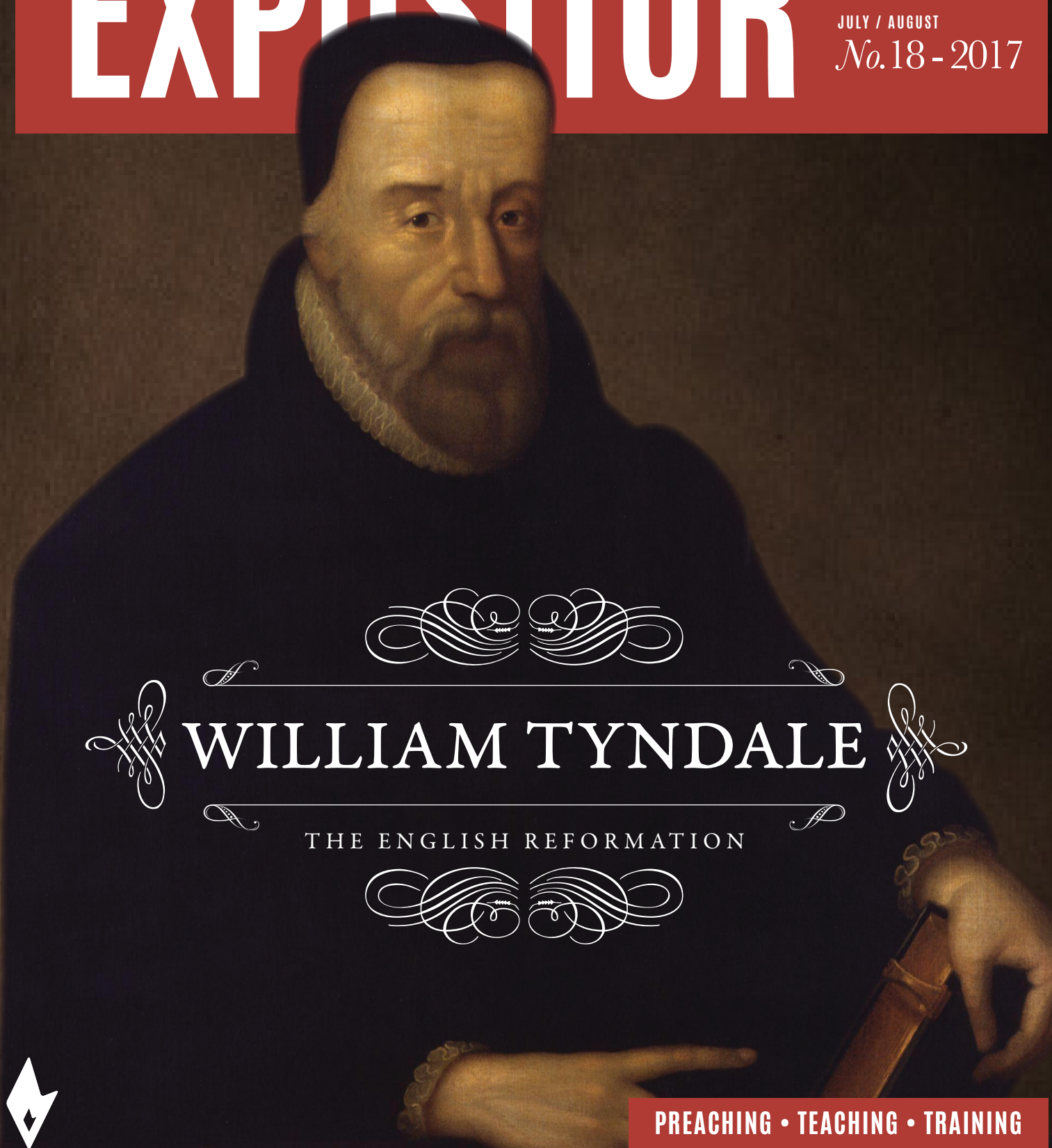
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A PUBLICATION OF
ONEPASSION MINISTRIES

JULY / AUGUST

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WILLIAM TYNDALE

THE ENGLISH REFORMATION

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DR. STEVEN J. LAWSON, PRESIDENT, ONEPASSION MINISTRIES

I recently had the privilege of preaching in Wittenberg, Germany, for a conference celebrating the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation, which was ignited in 1517. Addressing this great gathering of pastors, missionaries, and people from all over Europe in the very city where Martin Luther nailed his 95 Theses to the front door of the Castle Church was a memory of a lifetime, one that I will not soon forget.

During this special conference, I was asked to be a part of a question and answer session that included the other plenary speakers. The question was asked, “Who is your favorite Reformer and why?” Several of the other men answered first, and, as might be expected, Martin Luther was mentioned right away. After all, he was the first noted Reformer, and we were in the very city in which he had so notably ministered. Other speakers answered that their favorite Reformer was the great theologian of Geneva, John Calvin. Who could have argued that either Luther or Calvin were not deserving of being recognized as the most appreciated among all the Reformers?

When it came time for me to answer, though, I responded with an answer that I am sure surprised many. Though I have written books on both Luther and Calvin, as well as the Scottish Reformer John Knox, after careful thought I replied that my favorite Reformer is William Tyndale. I then explained that my reason for choosing Tyndale is that, compared to the other Reformers, Tyndale gave us the greatest gift and made the greatest sacrifice of them all. His extraordinary gift—the English Bible, translated from the original Hebrew and Greek languages—was made available to the people of his native tongue. Calvin never produced such a gift for the French-speaking world. Even better than a commentary is giving people a Bible in their own language to read and understand.

Moreover, Tyndale made the greatest sacrifice of the leading Reformers by exposing himself to the greatest danger, namely, a martyr’s death. Luther did not suffer such a painful death. Neither did Calvin, nor Knox. Tyndale, however, tasted a terribly painful death when he was strangled by a

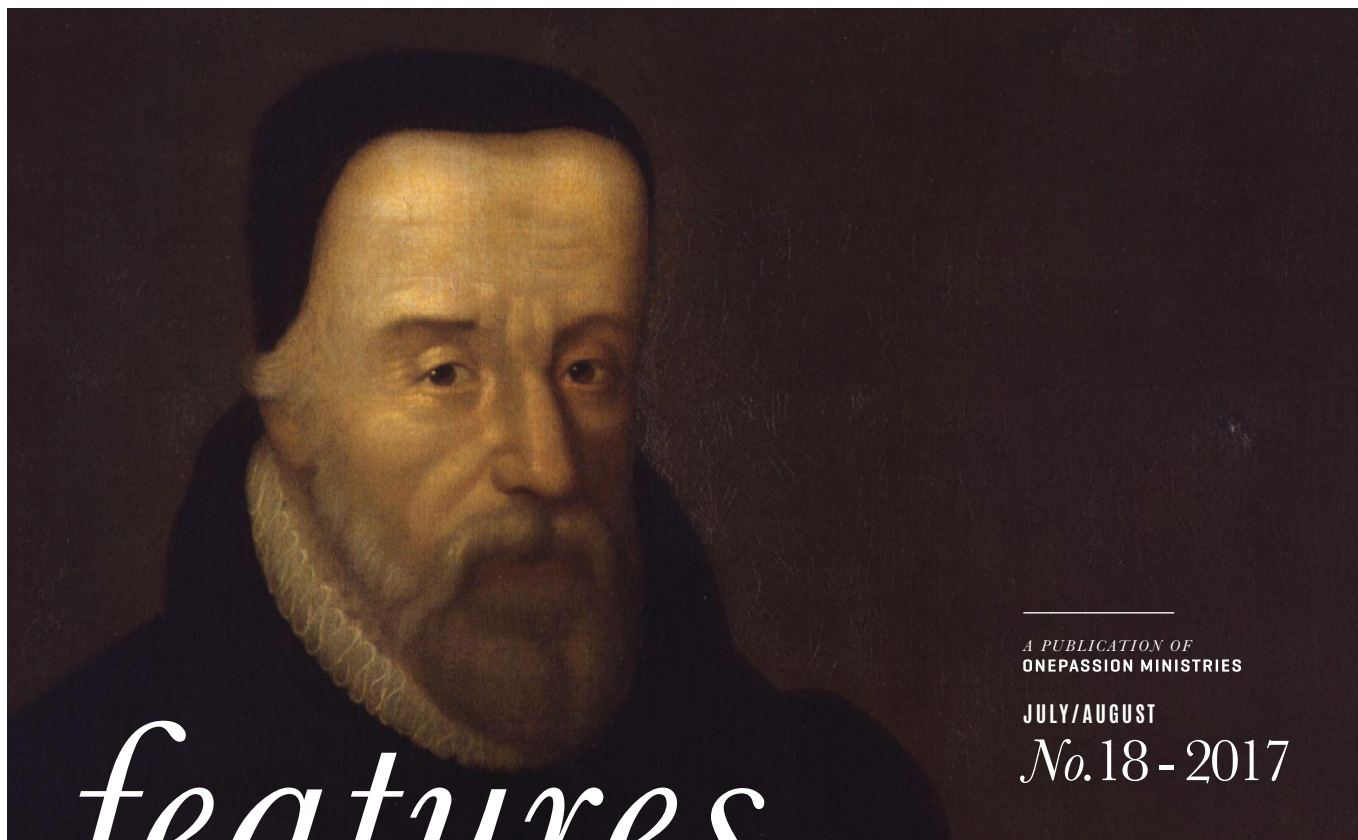
steel chain, set on fire, and then blown up by gunpowder. He truly sacrificed his own life to ensure a vast number of people could have and read the Bible for themselves. All of this happened after years of living in hiding and beyond the shores of his native England.

Other English Reformers would follow Tyndale and die a martyr’s death. Among them were John Rogers, Hugh



Latimer, Nicholas Ridley, and Thomas Cranmer, all of whom were executed during the reign of Mary I, otherwise known as Bloody Mary. However, Tyndale preceded them and paved the way for their arrival. He was the one responsible for placing a reliable and readable English Bible into their hands in order that they might preach it with precision and power.

This issue is devoted to William Tyndale, who uniquely stood out among the Reformers of the sixteenth century, a bright star, among many, in a dark night. We will also introduce several martyrs who suffered under the reign of terror instigated by Bloody Mary. May God use each of these articles to deepen your convictions in the truth and ignite your passion to preach it boldly. ♦



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features

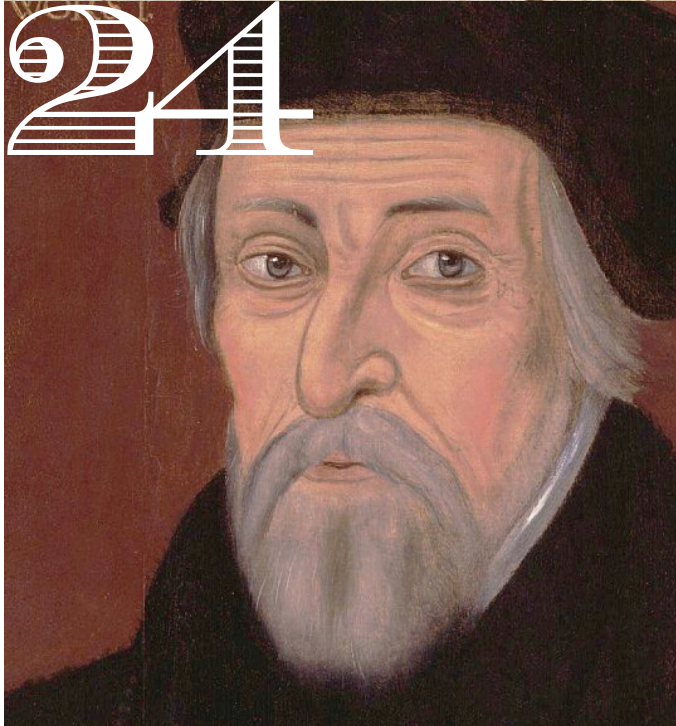
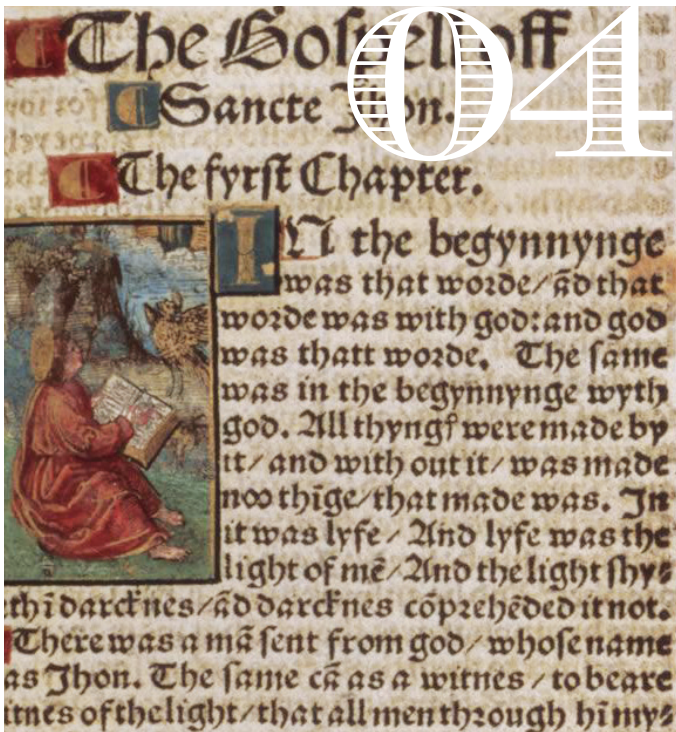
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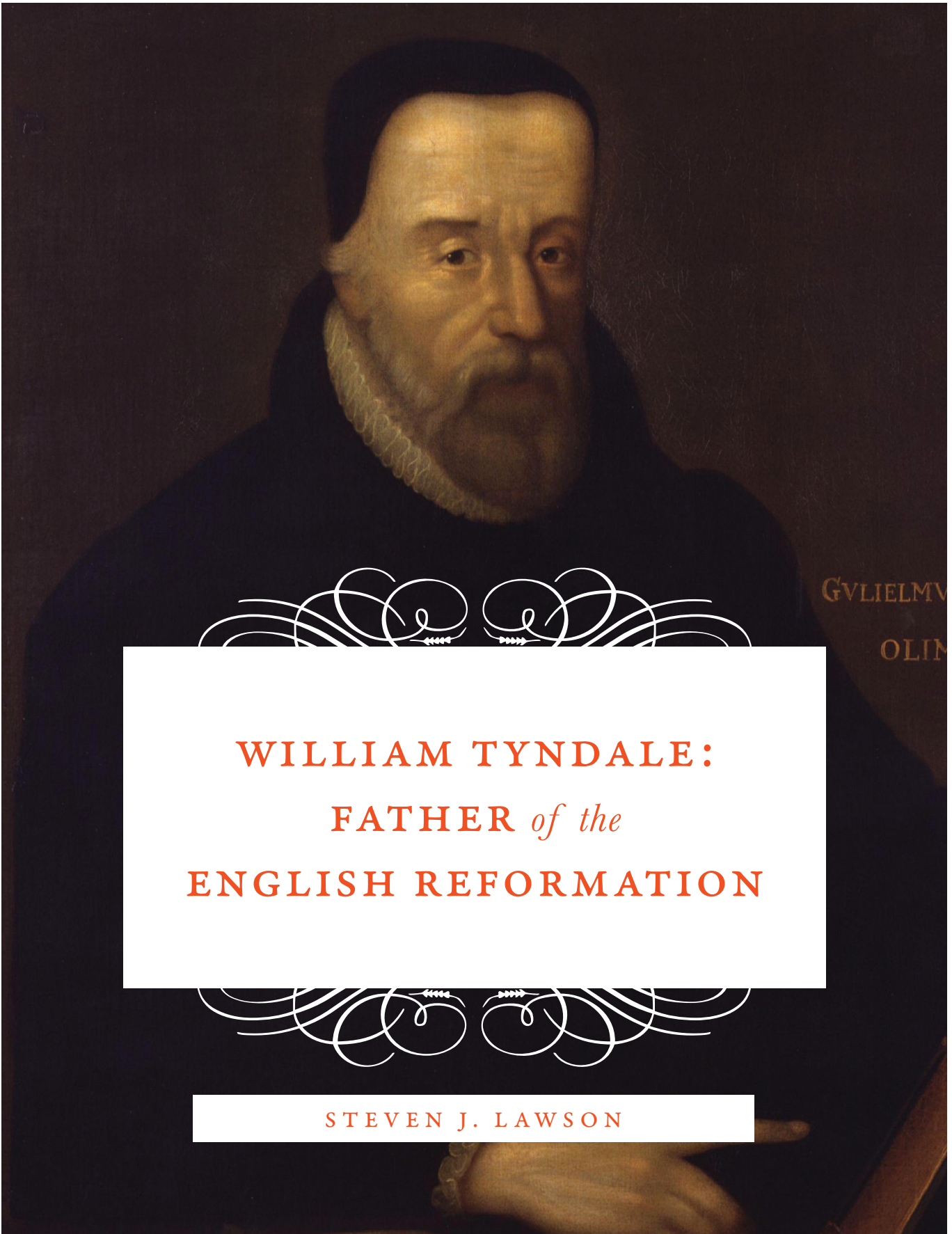


EXPOSITOR



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WILLIAM TYNDALE:
FATHER *of the*
ENGLISH REFORMATION

STEVEN J. LAWSON

During the history-altering days of the English Reformation, a relatively unknown Bible translator named William Tyndale changed the future course of his nation for centuries to come. His groundbreaking work gave the people of his land an accurate and accessible translation of the Scripture, drawn from the original languages and written in their native tongue. This daring mission enabled English-speaking people to read the Scripture with newfound precision and expound it with increasing zeal and power. In translating the entire New Testament from Greek and half of the Old Testament from Hebrew, Tyndale laid a permanent foundation upon which English preachers stand even to this present day. The powerful expositions that sounded from the pulpits of England during the Protestant Reformation were the direct result of the indefatigable efforts of this heroic figure.

With every verse that Tyndale translated, he standardized the mother tongue of his people. Word by word, he became the father of the modern English language. At that time, there was not even an English dictionary. Such would not appear until 1703, over a century and a half after Tyndale had accomplished his unprecedented work. Tyndale would also become the father of the English Bible, and the father of the English Reformation, standing as the most remarkable figure of its first generation of leaders. In many ways, through his translation and other work, he laid the foundation for Protestant faith among the English. Without Tyndale, the man who singlehandedly birthed its beginning, there would have been no Reformation.

That one man would become the father of all three—the modern English language, the English Bible, and the English Reformation—is nothing short of astonishing. In a certain sense, Tyndale *was* the English Reformation. This singular figure demands our most careful attention.

An Earlier English Translation

A century and a half before Tyndale stepped onto the world scene, a brilliant Oxford professor, John Wycliffe, had already rendered the Bible into the English language. Advanced as it was, Wycliffe's version was based on the less accurate Latin Vulgate, and thus was a translation of a translation. Wycliffe's work of translating the Bible into the common language of the people was completed in 1382 and revised in 1388. This renowned scholar sent out legions of itinerate evangelists, known as Lollards, into the cities and countryside of England. Though they were



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armed with this newly translated Bible, they still had only a rough version of Scripture that had to be copied by hand and was difficult to read.

Not until the work of Tyndale in the sixteenth century would a more reliable translation of the Scripture be produced. This superior English translation was based on the original languages, printed with more readable type, and easier to produce and distribute. It would be this version by Tyndale that would ignite and fan the flame of the Protestant movement in England.

The importance of Tyndale's translation cannot be overstated. At its heart, the Protestant movement was a return to the Bible itself. The objective principle of Protestantism was *sola Scriptura*, meaning the Scripture alone. This fundamental commitment maintained that the Bible is the Spirit-inspired record of divine revelation and is, therefore, the only infallible record of faith and practice. This commitment stood in stark opposition to the church in Rome, which had subordinated the Scripture under the higher authority of church tradition, ecclesiastical councils, and the pope. In contrast, the Reformers insisted that the Bible alone is the ruling authority in the church. This was the conviction that shook the world.

A Dark Hour in England

At this point in time, the Roman Catholic Church held that the common laity was incompetent to interpret the Bible for themselves. They believed that only the hierarchy of the church in Rome could undertake this practice. Consequently, translating Scripture into the vernacular of the people was forbidden. An ordinary person was not allowed to read the Bible in his or her own tongue. The

only authorized Bible in England was the Latin Vulgate, a version that the average person could neither read nor understand. Consequently, the Bible was a closed volume to most speakers of English. In addition, they did not have access to copies of the Latin Vulgate. In fact, most priests in England had never even seen a copy. A thick cloud of spiritual ignorance hung over the darkened island of England.

Compounding this desperate situation, strict legislation had been passed that forbade the English people from owning an unauthorized English Bible or translating it into their language. In 1401, Parliament passed legislation, known as “The Burning of Heretics,” that made it a crime to translate the Bible into English. More than just a petty crime, it was a capital offense punishable by the cruel death of being burned at the stake. This law was enacted to halt the perceived threat of the Lollard preachers, who proclaimed the gospel of grace from the Wycliffe Bible. In 1408, Thomas Arundell, the archbishop of Canterbury, wrote the “Constitutions of Oxford,” which forbade any translation of the Bible into English that was not authorized by the bishops. Furthermore, it was unlawful for anyone to teach the Bible in English, which was also a crime worthy of death. In 1519, seven Lollards were burned at the stake for teaching their children the Lord’s Prayer in English rather than in Latin. At the dawn of the sixteenth century, the knowledge of the Bible in England was almost completely veiled.

Enter William Tyndale, the heroic individual who would bring to light the gospel by translating the Bible into the English language. By his extraordinary sacrifice, businessmen, farmers, shopkeepers, and housewives could read the truth of the sacred text for themselves. Tyndale single-handedly undertook the monumental task and carried it out successfully until his martyrdom in 1536 at the age of 42. Every person who owns, reads, or preaches from an English Bible stands in this man’s debt.

My focus below will be on surveying the incredible life and ministry of Tyndale. This is the man who gave the English-speaking people an accurate and accessible Bible in their mother tongue.

For Such a Time

Born in rural western England, near Gloucestershire, close to the Welsh border, William Tyndale entered the world,

Enter William Tyndale, the heroic individual who would bring to light the gospel by translating the Bible into the English language.

most likely, in 1494. Though little is known about his early childhood, William, at age twelve, entered Magdalene Hall, a preparatory school inside Magdalene College, attached to Oxford University. Tyndale spent the next ten years studying at Oxford, receiving the best education available in his day. Here, he studied in grammar school, and, subsequently, he graduated with a Bachelor and Master’s degree from this prestigious institution. At this time, he was also ordained into the Catholic priesthood.

During these formative years of study, the Bible had remained a closed book to Tyndale. It was not until his last year of school at Oxford that the administration allowed him any classroom instruction in the Scripture. What little exposure he had to the Bible occurred after he had been thoroughly indoctrinated in Catholic dogma. For an entire decade, Tyndale was fed a steady diet of a system of works-righteousness theology, learning that he must earn salvation through his own religious and moral efforts. At the time that he graduated from Oxford with a Master’s degree, Tyndale remained unconverted and ensnared in a world of spiritual darkness.

In pursuing further studies, Tyndale made his way to Cambridge University, where he was brought into contact with a small group of students who met at a local tavern known as the White Horse Inn. This fellowship met to discuss the truths of the Bible concerning the way of salvation. In particular, they interacted with the theological writings of the great German Reformer, Martin Luther.

These gospel-centered books by Luther had traveled across the English Channel to Cambridge, where they found a ready reception with these brilliant minds and receptive hearts. In this gathering was found the backbone of the

future leadership of the English Reformation. Along with Tyndale were such future stalwarts as Nicholas Ridley, Hugh Latimer, Myles Cloverdale, and Thomas Cranmer. This band of bright young men contained many of the main influencers of what would be the Protestant Movement in England. Among them would be two archbishops, seven bishops, and eight Protestant martyrs. At this time, Tyndale most probably came to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ through the truth of justification by faith alone explained through the expository pen of Luther.

New Life in Christ

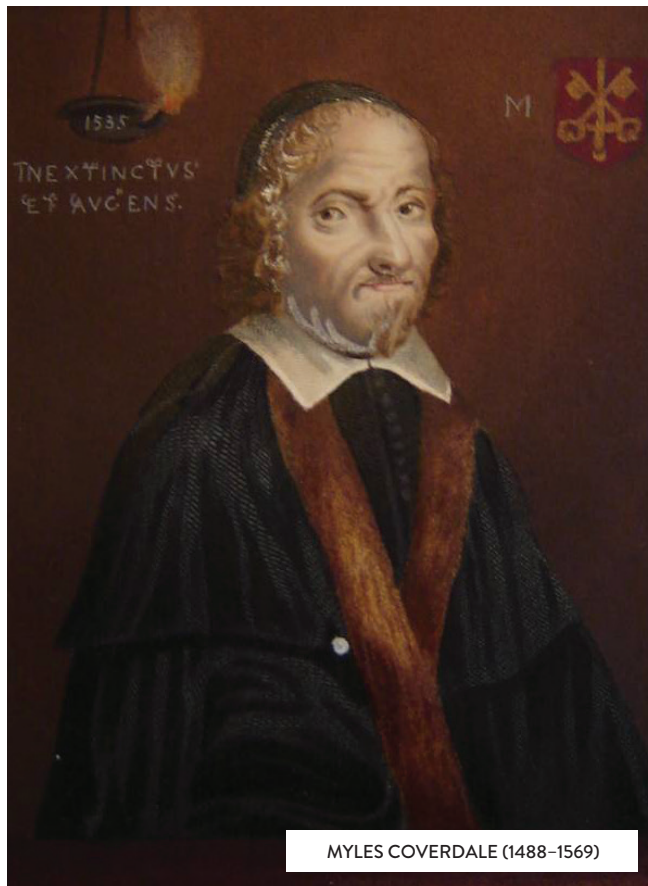
As Tyndale began his new life in Christ, he knew that he needed to grasp the message of the Bible more carefully. He especially needed to rethink the key doctrinal truths that were being expounded on the European Continent by Luther and others that centered in salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. To find the time he needed for personal study, he took a job on a large estate near his birthplace in Gloucestershire, owned by the wealthy family of Sir John Walsh. Tyndale served as a tutor for the children, chaplain for the family, and secretary to Sir John. There, he spent most of his time studying Erasmus's Greek New Testament, which had been printed six years earlier in 1516, one year before Luther nailed his 95 Theses in Wittenberg, Germany. In the quiet solitude of this setting, Tyndale was able to study the Bible and grow deeper in its truth.

With a deepening commitment to the Scripture, Tyndale began to preach regularly to a little congregation in the nearby town of Saint Adeline. He also accepted other preaching opportunities, traveling throughout the local region. Tyndale was becoming known as a biblical expositor who held distinctly Luther-like convictions. It would not be long before he found himself embroiled in doctrinal controversies with officials in the Roman Catholic Church over the nature of the true gospel. In 1522, Tyndale was called before an official of the Catholic Church and warned about his opposing views. However, no formal charges were made, and he continued his outspoken preaching of the grace of God.

As Tyndale interacted with the English people, he came to the sobering realization that the vast majority of his fellow countrymen must be unconverted. Even more soul-grIPPING, he concluded that virtually the whole of his native land was entrapped in spiritual darkness due to the severe lack of knowledge of the Bible. He perceived that one reason such spiritual ignorance prevailed because the Scripture was unavailable to the English people in their own native language.

A Plowboy in the Field

Adding to this growing conviction was the fact that local priests also lacked knowledge of biblical truth. These blind leaders of the blind often came to dine at the Walsh estate, where Tyndale witnessed firsthand the stunning ignorance of the leadership within the Roman Catholic Church. During one meal, he was drawn into a heated debate with a visiting Catholic clergyman, who maintained that the people were better off with the interpretations of the pope than with reading the Word of God for themselves. This was the



defining moment for Tyndale, who purposed that if God would allow it, he would give English-speaking people the Scripture in their own language. He famously said, "I defy the Pope and all his laws.... If God spare my life ere many years, I will cause a boy that drives the plow, shall know more of the Scripture than you do." He thus determined that he would undertake the unprecedented task of translating the Bible into English from the original languages. This defining decision set him on a previously uncharted course that he would pursue the rest of his days.

In 1523, Tyndale traveled to London to obtain the necessary authorization to translate and produce an English

Bible. Upon meeting with the Bishop of London, Cuthbert Tunstall, Tyndale anticipated he would receive the favorable approval he needed because Tunstall had earlier worked with Desiderius Erasmus, the Dutch humanist scholar, to compile his Greek New Testament. This landmark work had been completed in 1516. But the Bishop was well aware of the recent social upheaval that had been provoked in Germany due to Martin Luther's translation of the German New Testament, released in 1522. Such turmoil, Tunstall feared, would likewise erupt in England if a translation of the Bible appeared in its native tongue. Unexpectedly, Tyndale was refused his request.

But Tyndale would not be deterred. With a determination as firm as granite, he forged ahead and left England for the continent of Europe in order to carry out his bold plan of producing an English translation of the Bible. Every verse he would translate would be in defiance of the King of England, Henry VIII. Out of the sight and reach of the English monarchy and church officials, he would carry out this daring mission as an outlaw, never again to return to his homeland. With no church to commission him, nor any denomination to support him, Tyndale set out alone to accomplish his dangerous project. For the next twelve years, he broke the king's law by leaving England without the king's permission and would live in hiding as a rebel, evading the governing authorities in order to carry out this ambitious task. Every time he translated a verse or completed a book, he did so illegally.

At Large in Germany

Tyndale first arrived in Hamburg, Germany, in 1524 and traveled to Wittenberg to meet and learn from the renowned Reformer Luther. In the academic environment of the University of Wittenberg, where Luther lectured as a professor of Bible, Tyndale sharpened his skills in the Greek language and began the difficult task of mastering Hebrew. Proficiency in both biblical languages was necessary for accurately translating the Old and New Testament into English. In the company of Luther and the Greek scholar Philip Melancthon, Tyndale deepened his knowledge of the Scripture and began the immense work of translating the New Testament.

In 1525, ready to print his New Testament, Tyndale traveled to the most populous city in Germany, Cologne, where it would be easiest for him to remain undetected amid its dense population. Working in a hidden back room to conceal his identity, Tyndale put the finishing touches on his translation. He found a printer to produce the New Testament in English, knowing that if caught, both he and the printer would be condemned to death. When the first

print run commenced, news of this illegal operation leaked out through a worker in the print shop, and a raid ensued. Tyndale, however, had been warned, and had already gathered up his translation work and fled the city in the middle of the night.

In search of safe refuge, this Englishman sailed down the Rhine River in 1526 and arrived at the city of Worms, Germany. This was the very city where, five years earlier, in 1521, Luther had taken his famous stand for the Word of God at the Diet of Worms. In this Protestant-friendly city, Tyndale found a printer who was sympathetic to the cause of the Reformation and willing to become an accomplice to this illegal act. Here, the New Testament of Tyndale was finally published, and it was the first ever produced from the original Greek into English. The print run was at least three thousand copies, and the supply was quickly overrun by demand. In subsequent years, five pirated editions would also be printed and sold.

Well-acquainted with the international trade routes of the cotton business, Tyndale hid his newly printed Bibles in bales of cotton, boarded them onto ships, and smuggled them into the eastern coasts of England and Scotland. There, German cloth merchants received the shipment of Bibles and secretly distributed them to merchants, butchers, and farmers, who were eager to read God's Word. Many came to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ through this freshly printed edition. The forbidden Bibles sold for the reasonable price of three shillings and two pence, only a week's wages for a skilled laborer, which a remarkably affordable amount to exchange for such a priceless treasure.

The Smuggling Uncovered

When the church officials in England discovered the underground circulation of Tyndale's imported Bibles, they immediately sought to counter such criminal activity, which was in defiance of King Henry VIII. Wherever these illegal Bibles could be found, the officials confiscated and burned them. When necessary, they even bought the banned books in order to keep them out of the hands of Englishmen. But this strategy backfired, as the king's money funded Tyndale's future, edited translation that would be published in 1534.

Amid this firestorm, Tyndale wrote and published his first major theological work, entitled *The Parable of the Wicked Mammon*, in 1528. This significant treatise was an exposition of the purity of the gospel for the people of England. Specifically, this work expounded the doctrine of *sole fide*, that is, the truth of justification by faith alone in Christ alone. In this biblical teaching, Tyndale reiterated the writings he had read by Luther, often in the very words,

though translated, of the German Reformer.

At this time, the leadership in England launched aggressive attempts to locate Tyndale and apprehend him in order to bring him back to England and carry out his death sentence. A manhunt was begun in Europe as authorities were dispatched to find Tyndale. But the bloodhounds could not find the ever-elusive translator, and they returned to England empty-handed. Tyndale next moved to Marburg, Germany, where he wrote a second major theological work, *The Obedience of a Christian Man*. This important treatise called upon every Christian to submit to the higher authority of the king as they would unto the Lord. When King Henry VIII read this book, he approved of it and desired that all should read it.

However, further attempts by the English authorities to capture Tyndale continued. Under the veil of anonymity, Tyndale stealthily shifted his location in 1529 from Marburg to Antwerp, located in modern-day Belgium. In this new refuge, Tyndale found the solitude needed to complete his translation of the first five books of the Old Testament, Genesis through Deuteronomy. This was entirely groundbreaking work, as not even Wycliffe had undertaken the translation of the Old Testament into English.

A Hunted Prey

Back in England, a new search for Tyndale was initiated by the leading officials. Nevertheless, Tyndale was still able to evade them and boarded a ship in Antwerp to sail to the mouth of the Elbe River in Germany. An adverse providence struck Tyndale, though, when he suffered a shipwreck in the open sea. In the tragedy, he lost his books and the new translation of the Pentateuch. When Tyndale arrived in Hamburg, he was received into the house of a family with strong convictions in the cause of the Reformation. In this hiding place, Tyndale was reunited with a former friend, Miles Coverdale, a Cambridge classmate and member of the inner circle that met at the White Horse Inn. Undeterred by the previous setback, Tyndale re-translated the Pentateuch that had been lost in the shipwreck.

That same year, a prominent figure, the Lord Chancellor of England, Sir Thomas More, wrote a scathing attack against the personal integrity and false teaching of Tyndale, entitled *A Dialogue Concerning Heretics*. Sparing no words, More assaulted Tyndale as “the captain of English heretics,” “a hell-hound in the kennel of the devil,” “a new

The written Word of God is lucid and can be understood by the common person.

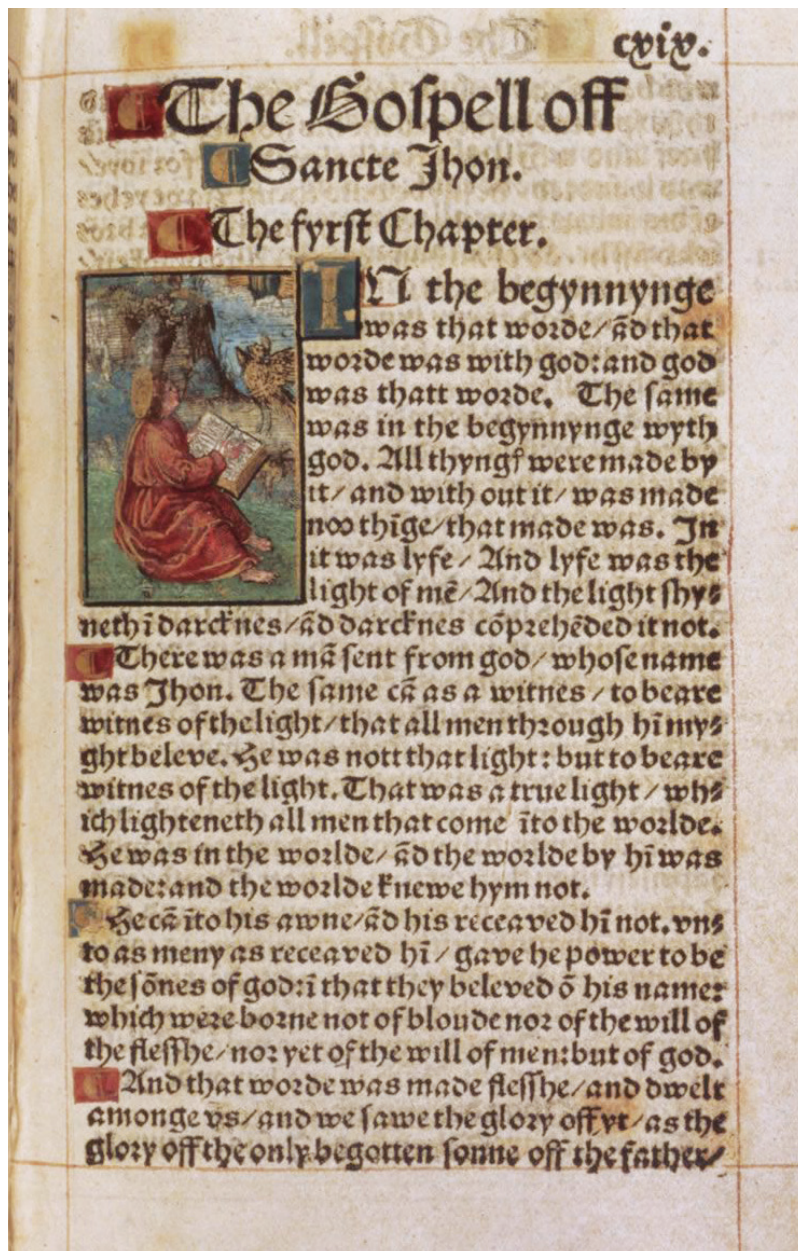
Judas,” “worse than Sodom and Gomorrah,” “an idolater and devil-worshipper,” and “a beast out of whose brutish beastly mouth comes a filthy foam.” More was an adamant enemy of the Reformers and maintained that the Roman Catholic Church was the only true church. All who oppose its teaching, he contended, are heretics and should be put to death.

Amid this character assassination, Tyndale remained steadfast in his mission. At the beginning of 1530, he published his newly translated work, the first five books of the Old Testament, originally authored by Moses. Tyndale then wrote a strong polemic against the corruption of the clergy in England titled *The Practice of Prelates*. This book aroused King Henry VIII into an avowed enemy of Tyndale.

A New Assault Against Tyndale

This controversial work by Tyndale provoked another attempt by the English authorities to apprehend him and bring him back to England to be made subject to capital punishment. An advisor to Henry VIII, Thomas Cromwell, conceived a sinister plot. He commissioned a man in England who was supportive of the Reformation, a merchant named Stephen Vaughan, to find Tyndale. In this conspiracy, Vaughan mailed three letters to Tyndale that were addressed to three European cities. The hope was that one would find its way to the fugitive translator.

At last, one of the letters reached Tyndale, who agreed to a secret meeting with him. With hidden motive, Vaughan offered him a full salary and safe passage back to England, under one condition—he must abandon his translation project. Tyndale actually agreed, but only under his own condition. Someone must be appointed by King Henry VIII, Tyndale contended, to complete his Bible translation work and have it published in England



with the king's authorization. Tyndale's request was denied and he, in turn, declined the offer made to him. He chose to remain entrenched in his work in Europe, more determined than ever before to complete his task.

In 1531, the advisor to King Henry VIII, Cromwell, instigated an even more aggressive strategy to capture their elusive enemy. He dispatched the highly competent Sir Thomas Elyot to the European Continent to find and capture Tyndale. Whatever it took, Elyot was charged not to return without the fugitive. Elyot traveled throughout Europe, searching for signs of Tyndale's whereabouts. But in whatever city he looked, he could not find the hidden exile. Elyot returned to England empty-handed, without Tyndale. The frustration

of not capturing this renegade Reformer was beginning to mount in the higher circles of England.

That same year (1531), Tyndale issued a rebuttal to More's *Dialogue*, which had been published two years earlier. More had strongly attacked Tyndale's translation, saying it would lead people away from Catholic theology. In Tyndale's work, entitled *Answer*, he gave a defense for his exegetical choices in his English translation of the Scripture. He contended that the Bible is clear enough to be read and understood without the need for the church in Rome or England to explain its obvious meaning to the common people. This conviction was built upon the underlying belief in the perspicuity of Scripture. Tyndale's stance was that the Bible is sufficiently clear in matters of salvation and Christian living. Simply put, the written Word of God is lucid and can be understood by the common person.

Countering with a blistering six-volume work, More wrote *Confutation of Tyndale's Answer* in lengthy tomes totaling nearly half a million words. Released in 1532 and 1533, these massive volumes could not stop the Reformed cause from spreading underground throughout England. The influence of Tyndale's Bible translation of 1526 had circulated far and wide, out of the public eye in England and Scotland, with remarkable success. The light of Scripture was expelling the darkness, and the plowboy was reading and understanding the Scripture as never before.

Back to Antwerp

In early 1534, Tyndale remained a moving target and returned to Antwerp, in modern-day Brussels, where he moved into the house of English merchants as the guest of Thomas Poyntz, a businessman sympathetic to Reformed doctrine. There, Tyndale met a former Catholic priest from England, John Rogers, who was serving as the chaplain to this house. Under Tyndale's witness, Rogers most probably came to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. This exposure to Tyndale introduced him to Reformed truth and the Bible translation project. In the end, it would be Rogers who would eventually compile an English Bible after Tyndale's death in 1536, called the *Matthew Bible*, completing this glorious task. Upon Rogers' eventual return to England, in 1555 he would become the first Protestant martyr burned

at the stake under Mary I, at Smithfield, London.

With steely purpose, Tyndale meticulously worked on a revision of his New Testament translation, which appeared in 1534. This second edition was completed eight and a half years after his first edition, which had been published in 1526. This latter edition contained some four thousand changes to his original work. The scholar B. F. Westcott called this follow-up version his “noblest monument.” David Daniell hailed it as “the glory of his life’s work.” Some historians set the number of edits in this second edition as high as five thousand. In addition, Tyndale wrote two general prologues to the entire Bible, plus short introductions to each New Testament book, with the exception of Acts and Revelation. Each introduction was placed before each individual book in the new translation to aid the reader with a general orientation to the book. Tyndale also added cross-references and explanatory notes to the biblical text in the outside margins. At the conclusion of the New Testament, Tyndale added an additional fifteen pages listing and translating forty of the most important Old Testament passages.

Shortly thereafter, a third edition of the New Testament by Tyndale followed in December 1534 and early 1535, with additional corrections. A scholar from Cambridge who had become proficient in Latin, a man named Jove, helped with editorial work on this last edition. Through continued study, Tyndale’s mastery of Hebrew had advanced. Tyndale had become so proficient in the original languages, as well as six other languages, that it was said he could speak in any of those languages and a native of that language would surmise that he was born to those lands. Tyndale now undertook and completed the translation of Joshua through 2 Chronicles.

Back in England, church officials would not give up their efforts to halt Tyndale’s work in translating the Bible. Another sinister plot was hatched that would eventually result in his capture and an ignominious martyr’s death. A man named Harry Phillips had lost his father’s estate in England through reckless gambling and had fallen into complete despair. When this tragedy was made known to the Catholic leaders in London, Phillips was commissioned to find Tyndale with the promise that if he found the fugitive, his father’s lost fortune would be replaced in full by the church. A desperate man, Phillips accepted this diabolical offer and arrived in Antwerp in 1535 in search of Tyndale. He shrewdly made acquaintances with English merchants, who, in turn, led him to Tyndale.

Though Tyndale was warned by other English businessmen to have nothing to do with Phillips, he, naively, was drawn into a relationship with him. Once in Tyndale’s

confidence, Phillips carried out his diabolical betrayal by leading him down a narrow passageway, where officials were waiting to capture him. At the most vulnerable moment, Phillips pointed at Tyndale, and the officials arrested him and took him to a prison in the castle of Vilvoorde, six miles from Brussels. This fortress was an impenetrable citadel with towering walls and drawbridges. In this inescapable prison, Tyndale was held for the next eighteen months in the most austere and awful conditions. Never one to waste time, he nevertheless wrote what would be his last treatise, *Faith Alone Justifies before God*, a defense of the biblical teaching of justification by faith alone.

On October 6, 1536, the day of Tyndale’s departure from this world had finally come. He was brought before a mock trial, stripped of his Catholic ordination, and sentenced for execution. Before his martyrdom, he uttered this now-famous prayer, “Lord, open the King of England’s eyes.” On that day, the revered Bible translator, age 42, was hung by the neck, packed in gunpowder, and burned in fire. His body was blown up into so many pieces that there were no remains left to bury.

Unknown to Tyndale, his dying prayer had already been answered shortly before his martyrdom. In England, the *Coverdale Bible* had been printed the year before, in 1535. One of his colleagues, Miles Coverdale, had produced this work, which included Tyndale’s translation plus his own contribution, which completed the parts of the Old Testament that had remained unfinished at the time of Tyndale’s imprisonment.

The Legacy of Tyndale

The lasting effect of Tyndale’s translation work cannot be overstated. He was a monumental figure of epic proportions. His translation work positioned him to be the true Father of the English Reformation. His translated Bible helped to produce the Protestant Reformation in his homeland. It has been estimated that ninety percent of the King James Version of the Bible in 1611 was, in actuality, the direct result of Tyndale’s work.


Those who followed Tyndale in preaching the English Bible were, in reality, proclaiming the very words that Tyndale had translated. The Puritans who followed—John Owen, John Bunyan, Samuel Rutherford, and Matthew Henry—actually preached the very words that God inspired and Tyndale translated. In the Great Awakening, George Whitefield preached the God-breathed words that Tyndale had rendered into English. The same can be said of the powerful and prolific words of Charles Spurgeon and Martyn Lloyd-Jones in their world-reaching pulpits. Through the translation efforts of Tyndale, the gospel has

spread around the globe throughout the English-speaking world.

No greater legacy could exist than that of Tyndale, who gave the English-speaking world its own Bible. Over the centuries, the English language has spread around the world, and so has the influence of the Bible that Tyndale rendered. The outreach of his translation work is unsurpassed. As the English language has encompassed the world, so has the work of Tyndale.

No greater figure stands out on the landscape of the English Reformation than William Tyndale. He is a Herculean figure of monumental proportions. It could even be

said that Tyndale *was* the English Reformation. Without Tyndale, there would have been no Protestant Movement on the isle of England. His influence was incalculable, his impact indefinable.

In this day, let us proclaim the Word of God that Tyndale has translated and put into our hands. Let us preach with precision and power the Scripture that he has put into our mouths. Whatever translation of the English Bible we use, we owe an enormous debt to this prolific figure who gave his very life to put the Word of God before our eyes and into our mouth. May we be found faithful to proclaim the Word that was sealed with his death. 



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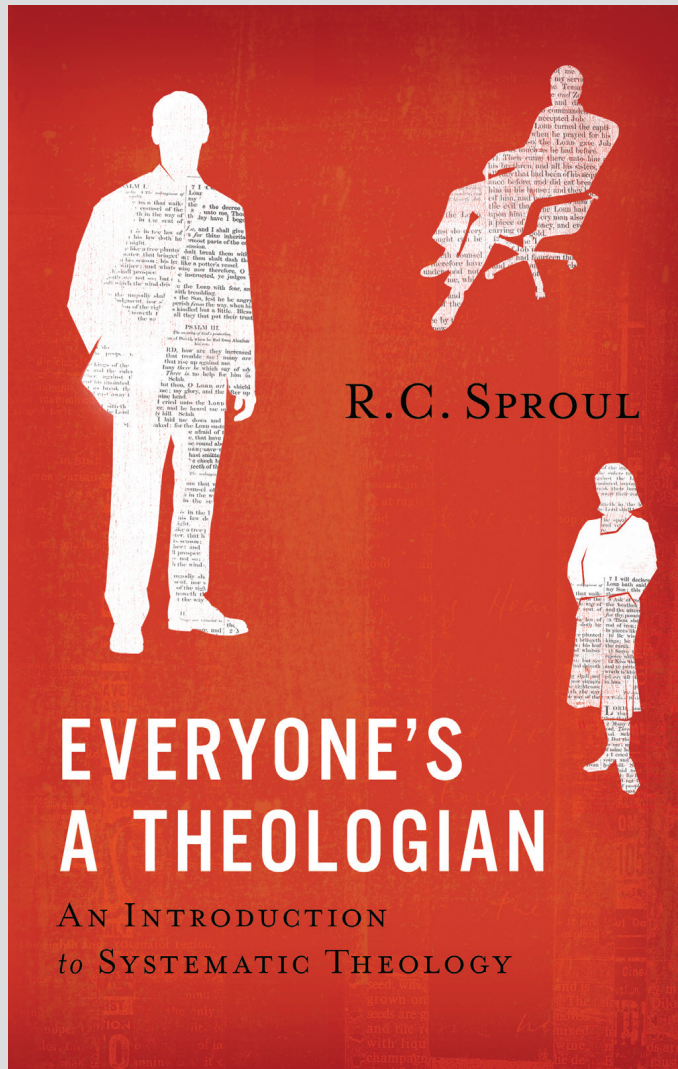
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BURNING PASSION:
the **REFORMATION**
IN BRITIAN

MICHAEL REEVES

A

s in Wittenberg with Luther, as in Glarus with Zwingli, it was Erasmus' New Testament that started it all in Britain. Before long, a young priest called Thomas Bilney had read it and come across the words "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." Previously he had despaired of his sins, but with these words, he said,

immediately I seemed unto myself inwardly to feel a marvellous comfort and quietness, insomuch that my bruised bones leaped for joy. After this, the Scripture began to be more pleasant unto me than the honey or the honey-comb; wherein I learned that all my travails, all my fasting and watching, all the redemption of masses and pardons, being done without truth in Christ, who alone saveth his people from their sins; these, I say, I learned to be nothing else but even (as St. Augustine saith) a hasty and swift running out of the right way; or else much like to the vesture made of fig leaves, wherewithal Adam and Eve went about in vain to cover themselves, and could never obtain quietness and rest, until they believed in the promise of God, that Christ, the seed of the woman, should tread upon the serpent's head.

Bilney was no Lutheran (he had come to his views quite independently), but until he was burned for his preaching in 1531, he was instrumental in drawing a number of others to the Reformation.

At the same time, Luther's books started pouring into the country, where they were welcomed by John Wycliffe's followers, the Lollards, who were as alive and active as ever. Of course, as soon as Luther had been condemned by the pope, his books were burned in Cambridge, Oxford, and London; yet burning and banning books only ever seems to increase their popularity. And so it was: Lutheran books were smuggled in through ports like Ipswich, fueling the spread of a network of underground Lutheran groups. In Cambridge, one group of dons was known to gather at the White Horse Inn, where all the Luther-talk and beer made it look so like Wittenberg that it was soon nicknamed "Little Germany."

Meanwhile, over in the rural west of England (Little Sodbury in Gloucestershire, to be precise), a brilliant young linguist named William Tyndale was beginning to cause ructions at the home of his employer, Sir John Walsh. He was only there to be tutor to Sir John's children, but he had



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spent so much time with Erasmus' New Testament that his dinner-table conversation could put even the strongest Catholic stomachs off their food. One scholar was so exasperated with Tyndale that he blurted out, "We were better be without God's law than the pope's." Tyndale replied, "I defy the pope, and all his laws," adding, "and if God spare my life, ere many years I will cause a boy that driveth the plough shall know more of the Scripture than thou dost."

It was no idle boast. Tyndale set about his life's work of translating the Bible from its original Greek and Hebrew into English. He sailed for Germany, making his way to Worms; and there, where just five years earlier Luther had made his "Here I stand" speech in front of the emperor, Tyndale published his complete New Testament in English. For over a hundred years, the followers of John Wycliffe had produced and read translations of the New Testament in English, but they were only hand-written, rather wooden renditions of the Latin Vulgate. They were impossible to mass produce, and still contained all the theological problems of the Latin ("do penance" instead of "repent," for example). Tyndale's New Testament, however, could and would be printed off by the thousands, then smuggled into England in bales of cloth, and soon accompanied by his *Parable of the Wicked Mammon*, an argument for justification by faith alone. Even more importantly, Tyndale's New Testament was a gem of a translation. Accurate and beautifully written, it was a page-turner.

None of this impressed the English bishops. To them, Tyndale's work was just plain dangerous, and all copies that could be found were burned, along with their owners. And,

bluntly, the bishops were right: Tyndale's translation was highly dangerous. "Do penance" in the Vulgate was now "repent" in Tyndale's version; "priest" was merely "senior," "church" just "congregation," "confess" now simply "acknowledge," "charity" now "love." It pulled the biblical carpet right out from under the claims of the church. How to be saved and what being a Christian meant looked completely different: in place of all formal, external sacramentalism was a call for a change of heart.

Eventually, the wrath of the church caught up with Tyndale, but not before he had managed to translate a good portion of the Old Testament and some 16,000 copies of his Bible had been smuggled into England. It was an incredible feat at a time when there was a largely illiterate population of, at most, 2.5 million. In 1535, he was caught, and the following October he was officially strangled and burned near Brussels, uttering the immortal last words, "Lord, open the King of England's eyes!"

Dynasty: A Soap Opera

That "King of England" was Henry VIII, and whether or not Tyndale's prayer was answered precisely, he would transform England from a devotedly Roman Catholic nation to one where the Bible was read, preached, and discussed in English.

Henry was an autocratic ruler with a fearsome, often lethal, temper and energy like a coiled spring (and not much more predictability). He was also deeply religious: he would serve the priest at Mass himself (attending at least three masses a day), and for his adamant support of the pope he was awarded the Golden Rose, just like Luther's prince, Frederick the Wise. It was unsurprising, then, that he opposed Luther when he heard of him. In 1521, with the help of a few willing ghost-writers, he even penned a polemic against Luther entitled *A Defence of the Seven Sacraments*, dedicating it to the pope. For this, the pope awarded him with what would become a most ironic title: "Defender of the Faith." We shouldn't be too impressed: all the major rulers of the day "bore titles indicating their devotion to the Prince of Peace. Francis was the *Most Christian King of France*, Charles *His Most Catholic Majesty of Spain*, Henry was called *The Defender of the Faith*, and Leo [the Pope], of course, the *Vicar of Christ*. Their conduct already belied too sanguine a hope. Henry, for his campaign against France in 1513, had cast twelve great guns, each named for one of the apostles, who were to belch fire against the Most Christian King." Nevertheless, the "Defender of the Faith" was hardly a bright hope for the Reformation.

Then he hit problems with his marriage. At age seventeen, Henry had been rather reluctantly married to his

elder brother's widow, Catherine of Aragon. After a few years of numerous miscarriages and babies dying soon after birth, it became clear to Henry that Catherine was incapable of providing him with an heir. She had borne him a daughter (Mary) in 1516, but that was not much good to Henry. England had just got through the Wars of the Roses, in which the succession had been disputed. Henry wanted a son to avoid any possibility of a re-run.

The obvious solution was to get another wife, one who could deliver. The usual form for men in Henry's situation was to find a fault that made the marriage illegal and then get it annulled. Henry didn't have to look hard: Leviticus 20:21 states, "If a man marries his brother's wife, it is an act of impurity; he has dishonored his brother. They will be childless." (And Henry considered himself childless: it was proof that his marriage was illicit.) The reason Henry knew the verse was because it was the very thing that had been a problem when he had married his brother's widow in the first place. However, back then, Pope Julius II had very obligingly removed the scriptural prohibition with a special dispensation.

Henry needed to get the new pope, Clement VII, to undo the dispensation. This raised a mighty question: while Julius clearly believed he could nullify scriptural commands, could a pope nullify the dispensations of a previous pope? Usually, the cogs of church law could be oiled to accommodate powerful kings like Henry. The problem was Catherine herself. She insisted that her first marriage had never been consummated, meaning that the papal dispensation had never been necessary in the first place, her marriage to Henry being straightforwardly legitimate. Other women could have been steamrolled into submission. However, Catherine's nephew was Emperor Charles V, who had already sacked Rome and imprisoned Clement VII once. Charles was not going to allow his aunt to be cast aside, and there was no way the pope was going to antagonize an emperor who could very well sack Rome again. And so, the pope could not clear the way to annulling Henry's awkward marriage.

Henry, however, was not so easily stopped. In fact, quite the opposite: when his eye fell on the fascinating and nubile young Anne Boleyn, he became relentless in his bid to switch Catherine for her. First, he tried diplomatic pressure on the pope, then squeezing the English clergy in the hope that the pope might crack. At the same time he set his army of scholars to work to prove: (1) that his case was right, and (2) that the pope had no right to stop him. It was this tactic that came up trumps, for his scholars surpassed themselves. They reminded Henry that Joseph of Arimathea (perhaps even with Jesus) had planted the first church in



England, at Glastonbury. This being the case, the church in England was older than that in Rome, founded by Peter. Thus (and here was the gravity), the church in England was independent of Rome; its headship belonging not to the pope, but the king.

And so, from 1532, a number of laws began to be passed to bring practices into line with this reality, with the church in England being made increasingly independent from the pope and increasingly dependent on the king. By 1533, these laws had made England independent enough for Henry to act. Coincidentally, at the same time, he was able to arrange the appointment of a new Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Cranmer, who was happy to validate Henry's marriage to Anne, which had taken place secretly earlier in the year. Henry had what he wanted, and the following year (1534), the independence of the English church was complete as the Act of Supremacy proclaimed Henry "supreme head of the church in England."

The speedy judgment meted out on those Catholics loyal to Rome who disputed this makes it easy to think that this was a Protestant Reformation in England, especially since the most famous victims (Thomas More, Henry's old Lord Chancellor, and John Fisher, Bishop of Rochester) were Luther's strongest opponents. However, while a break with Rome it was, a Protestant Reformation it was not. Ever since Henry had written his *Defence of the Seven Sacraments*, he and Luther had kept up a bitter war of open letters with each other; and, sealing Henry's hatred of the Reformer, Luther then opposed Henry's dream of annulling his marriage. The king was never going to have much time for Lutheranism. Instead, the king made it quite clear that he would not be departing from any Catholic doctrine; he was only refusing to acknowledge the pope's supremacy in England.

However, having once used the Bible to argue the case

for annulment against the pope, it was hard to resist the claim that the Bible was, after all, a higher authority than the pope. Also, those who had been prepared to help Henry break with Rome (and thus had now been rewarded with the highest offices) were often evangelical in their convictions, even if Henry was not. Thomas Cranmer, the new Archbishop of Canterbury, for instance, had had to be recalled from Germany to take up his post. It was a sign of his budding evangelicalism that when there, in Lutheran territory, he had got married, even though he was a priest. It was an even stronger sign that he kept his wife when recalled to England, where the marriage of priests was still illegal. (Of course, Mrs. Cranmer needed to be kept hidden, and it was said that he had a large chest with air-holes specially made for her, so that when he traveled she could come along in her box. Some have seen her as a minor martyr of the Reformation for all those times when the box was packed upside down during the Archbishop's travels.)

Another key evangelical figure was Henry's chief minister, Thomas Cromwell (not to be confused with Oliver Cromwell, the Lord Protector of England a century later). The king effectively gave him all the power over the church that the pope had previously enjoyed (under Henry, of course). And then there was Anne Boleyn, an active sponsor of evangelicalism, who imported and distributed large quantities of evangelical literature, even introducing her husband to some of it. When she was queen, a number of the old guard of bishops died, and her command of the king's ear helped a number of evangelicals to be appointed in their place. Thus, while Henry's changes did not amount to a Protestant Reformation, an increasing number of well-placed evangelicals such as these were very happy to use them to evangelical ends.

The trouble was, as both evangelicals and Catholics

found, the king's favor (and thus all influence) could be removed with terrifying suddenness. So it was for Anne Boleyn. Almost immediately she was pregnant, and thus enjoyed a unique honeymoon period in the king's goodwill. However, the child she bore was a girl (Elizabeth). The news could not have horrified Henry more. What had all his battles against pope and church been for? Upon hearing the news, he is said to have galloped away from Greenwich and Anne down to Wiltshire, there to drown his sorrows with an old courtier, Sir John Seymour, who had an attractive daughter called Jane. The Seymour family were happy to fuel rumors about Anne, who, after miscarrying a boy, was fast falling from Henry's favor. It was whispered that she was having numerous affairs, was dabbling in witchcraft, and even plotting to poison various members of the royal family. All absurd, but quite enough for Henry. Anne was arrested, found guilty of treason, and beheaded.


The next day, Henry was betrothed to Jane Seymour, and ten days later, they were married. Like Anne, she only enjoyed Henry's goodwill for a short spell, but in her case because she died from complications in giving birth. Yet Henry remembered Jane as the only wife he ever really loved, essentially because she was the one who, after everything, bore him the much longed-for son and heir (Edward).

It had all added up to being an expensive few years for Henry, and his empty coffers were showing the strain. And so the prospect of all those monasteries (who, after all, were probably more loyal to Rome than the king) began to look increasingly irresistible to Henry. There were hundreds of them, the combined rents of their lands totaling up to something really worth having. In any case, many were falling into ruins and only being sustained by gross irregularities. Thus, from 1536, egged on by his chief minister, Thomas Cromwell (who, of course, had his own Protestant motives), Henry began the process of dissolving the monasteries.

All in all, it was quite a popular move. There was widespread irritation at the privileges of the clergy, and the wealthy were happy to buy up all those monastic lands being sold off at knockdown prices. Many of the monks and nuns seemed relieved, some now marrying each other,

others content with their substantial pensions or becoming parish clergy. It may have been intended by Henry as little more than a royal smash-and-grab; the effect, however, was that, with church property now in their hands, the ruling classes were committed to Henry's reformation. There was no way back to old-style Roman Catholicism in England now. And (no doubt Cromwell's intention), closing down the monasteries effectively spread weed killer over the seedbed of much Catholicism.

At the same time, Henry was beginning to enjoy his role as the liberator of the English church as he rescued her from her captivity under the popes. "Romish abuses"—the pilgrimages, relics and images that made money for the church—were slated for destruction, or worse: laughter. For instance, when Boxley Abbey in Kent was shut down,



While weed killer was being poured out on the old Catholicism, fertilizer began to be poured out on the thirsty young evangelical movement.

the revered Rood of Boxley (a crucifix which would jiggle excitedly whenever anyone made a generous donation) was uncovered as a fake, its miraculous movements attributable, not to God, but to levers, wires, and a concealed monk. It was sent to London, where it was greeted with howls of laughter, sharp axes, and a large bonfire.

While weed killer was being poured out on the old Catholicism, fertilizer began to be poured out on the thirsty young evangelical movement. In 1538, the king ordered that "ye shall discourage no man from the reading or hearing of the Bible, but shall expressly provoke, stir and exhort every person to read the same as that which is the very lively word of God." To that end, just two years after Tyndale had died crying "Lord, open the King of England's eyes," it was decreed that an English Bible be placed in every church.

Traditionalist Catholics were, of course, shocked: what had been an offense to merit burning at the stake was suddenly commended behavior. The Duke of Norfolk snorted, "I never read the Scripture, nor never will read it. It was merry in England afore the new learning came up; yea, I would all things were as hath been in time past." Yet, on the whole, the law was received with red-hot enthusiasm. Six English Bibles were placed in St. Paul's Cathedral, crowds immediately thronging around those who could read loud enough to make themselves heard.

So great was the excitement that priests complained of how, even during the sermon, laypeople were reading the Bible aloud to each other. Private Bible reading became a much more widespread feature of ordinary life, as even the illiterate learned to read so as to gain immediate access to "the very lively word of God." And once that happened, it was very hard to go back: now butchers and bakers were discussing the Bible, coming to new convictions, and even daring to disagree with clergy over it. The church could no longer pontificate unchallenged. With Bible in hand, people were wanting to know where their priest got his ideas from.

However, Henry's reign was not a smooth and even shift from Catholicism to Protestantism. Henry could go through theological moods like he went through wives. After Jane Seymour's death, Cromwell tried to set Henry up with the Lutheran princess, Anne of Cleves. However, when Henry finally met her shortly before the marriage, he was so repulsed by "the Flanders Mare," as he called her, that while the marriage had to go ahead, he would never consummate it. Instead, it was immediately annulled, and Cromwell paid for that fiasco with his head. The strongly Catholic Howard family then saw their moment, and introduced their brightest star, Catherine, to Henry. Henry did marry her, but it was a disaster, for Catherine was not content with a husband nearly thirty years older than herself. She was discovered having an affair, and with lightning speed followed Anne Boleyn to the execution block in the Tower of London. From Lutheran Anne, through Catholic Catherine, Henry turned at last to the reform-minded Catherine Parr, who, when Henry died, must have been one of those wives relieved to outlive her husband.

In similar style, Henry legislated both for and against Catholicism, and both for and against Protestantism. A large anti-Protestant uprising in the North, though savagely put down by Henry, was an alarm call to him that antagonizing the old order could be dangerous. He responded by announcing harsh measures against those who denied such traditional beliefs as transubstantiation and celibacy for priests (no doubt making Mr. and Mrs. Cranmer nervous).

Disorderly popular Bible reading led him, in 1543, to ban all unauthorized public exposition of the Bible, as well as all private reading of the Bible among the uneducated. Three years later, all unauthorized translations of the Bible into English were also outlawed.

The events of July 30, 1540, make clear Henry's otherwise confusing religious views. On that day, six men were executed: three Catholics were hanged for the treason of denying Henry's supremacy over the church in England, and three evangelicals were burned for heresy. It was a brutal demonstration of what Henry wanted. He did not want England to become Protestant, but nor did he want England to be *Roman* Catholic. He wanted an *English* Catholicism, stripped of all Roman ties and Roman corruptions.

The difficulty was, how could one know what was Roman (and so to be binned), and what was Catholic (and so to be kept)? Henry experienced the tension personally: while he had begun closing down the chantries (where priests prayed for souls in purgatory), he also made provision in his will for prayers to be said for his own soul. Just in case. Henry's other problem was that, having once allowed the Bible to critique the pope and church practice, and having allowed it to be read by ordinary people, even for a few short years, it was almost impossible to stop where he had stopped. Completely unintentionally, Henry had unleashed a whirlwind, and it could be restrained for only so long.

England's King Josiah

A little unwisely, Henry had left the education of Prince Edward and Princess Elizabeth to Catherine Parr, and the finest tutors that could be found for them happened to be rather evangelical. Taught by the best, both grew up to be personally adamant evangelicals. Thus, when, in 1547, Henry died and his son became King Edward VI, England was poised for a true reformation. Cranmer was thrilled: at last he would be able to take his wife out of her box and set about promoting unadulterated evangelicalism.

Edward was only nine when he became king, and thus his uncle, Edward Seymour, Duke of Somerset, ruled in his name as Lord Protector. It was he who, with Cranmer, set about the work of Protestant reform. (Edward was no dupe in all this, however. Despite his youth, he had a loathing of what he contemptuously called "papisty," as well as remarkably thought-through evangelical convictions). For the first couple of years, Seymour and Cranmer worked gently, so as to acclimatize England to Protestantism slowly, rather than unnecessarily raise hackles.

Nevertheless, a lot changed: Henry's laws against evangelical beliefs and practices were overturned, allowing

clergy to marry and people to receive both bread and wine in communion. Chantries were dissolved because they were based on the notion of purgatory, a belief that leads people away from trust in their very true and perfect salvation through the death of Jesus Christ. Orders went out for images of saints to be removed from churches, and for altars (places for Christ to be re-sacrificed in the Mass) to be replaced with tables (places for a family meal). A prayer book in English (the *Book of Common Prayer*) was written to ensure that every church service was English in language and evangelical in content. Preaching was commanded in English, and many notable preachers, such as Hugh Latimer, started to become household names. For those clergy less capable of preparing their own sermons, a new book of homilies (off-the-rack sermons that could simply be read out) was produced, clearly explaining justification by faith alone. And for those getting ordained, there was a new expectation: now it was clear that becoming a minister was not about being a priest who offers sacrifices (in the Mass), but primarily about preaching. To that end, those being ordained, instead of being invested with priestly clothes, were given a Bible.

It was all too much for some, and in 1549 there was a popular uprising in the southwest, mainly against the fact that the prayer book was in English. Yet in that year John Dudley took over from Edward Seymour, and applied his foot more firmly to the accelerator of the Reformation. At the same time, England was becoming a refuge for continental Reformers fleeing from the all-victorious armies of the Holy Roman Emperor. Martin Bucer of Strasbourg became Regius Professor of Divinity at Cambridge in time to help Cranmer write his prayer book. Peter Martyr Vermigli became Regius Professor of Divinity at Oxford in time to help him rewrite it.

Cranmer's two prayer books (1549 and 1552) are a good window on the passage of the Reformation in England. The 1549 version may have been written deliberately as stop-gap,

digestible Reformation theology designed to prepare stomachs for the strong meat to come. In any case, while there was nothing about transubstantiation and the sacrifice of the Mass, other than its English, it was not too grating for Catholic ears. On receiving the bread, one would hear, "The Body of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was given for thee, preserve thy body and soul unto everlasting life." It was thoroughly Lutheran, but a Catholic could eat with a happy conscience.

However, there were no Lutherans among all the refugee-theologians who came to England (something still felt today in the almost total lack of Lutheran flavor to English evangelicalism, which has always been much more Zwinglian and Calvinist). And, when Vermigli and others arrived, they hated the Lutheranism of the 1549 prayer book, and longed to make it more Swiss in feel. It worked. Whether Cranmer had been planning it in any case, or whether his own theology had changed, the words uttered at the giving of the bread in the 1552 version were, "Take and eat this in remembrance that Christ died for thee [which sounds Zwinglian], and feed on him in thy heart by faith with thanksgiving [which sounds Calvinist]." No Catholic could be happy with that. The Reformation in England had moved on.

Then, the runaway train of evangelical reform came to a bone-crunching halt with Edward's death, at the age of 15, in 1553. Fearing what was coming, and knowing that it would be his arch-Catholic half-sister Mary who would come to the throne and undo all he had achieved, Edward had helped hatch a desperate plan. Dudley would make sure Lady Jane Grey, a resolutely evangelical cousin of Mary's and next in line to the throne after Henry's children, was installed as queen before Mary could be. And so, the moment Edward died, Jane was proclaimed Queen in London. All to no avail: Mary swiftly mustered support and entered London, sending Jane to the Tower. The plan had not accounted for the fact that most people cared



ELIZABETH I (1533-1603)

more for a legitimate monarch than a Protestant one. Even Protestants had supported Mary, blissfully unaware of how severe she would be in dealing with them.

Bloody Mary: A Repellent Cocktail

Mary, however, was the daughter of Catherine of Aragon. Brought up the unquestioned princess of Henry's Roman Catholic court, she had suddenly been declared illegitimate and pressed to abandon her religion when Henry got rid of Catherine and broke with Rome. For Mary, Protestantism was not just a heresy—it was the reason for all her woes.

As quickly as she could, Mary returned England to Rome. Evangelical bishops were removed from office, Thomas Cranmer was replaced as Archbishop of Canterbury by Cardinal Pole, Bibles were removed from churches, married clergy were separated from their wives: quite simply, the national clock was set back to the time before all her father's changes. It was to be as if the whole distasteful affair had never happened. And in many ways, England seemed quite willing. There were, of course, a few riots against the new order, but there were also many who seemed relieved. All sorts of Catholic church furniture (images, priestly vestments, etc.) now reappeared, having been hidden by Catholics from Edward's purges. Clearly, Edward's reforms had not been popular with all.

That said, it was impossible to wipe out twenty years of history. Things could not go back to being *quite* how they had been. For one thing, all those monasteries and monastic estates could not be reclaimed, for while the new landowners might be happy to go to Mass, they were not so willing to hand back their land. And, it was simply too late now to act as if nobody had ever read a Bible or heard a sermon in English. People had begun to have doubts about traditional teaching, so that even if they were not convinced evangelicals, they were not going to spend money on pilgrimages and practices that might not work. Even if the doubts had not come from Bible reading, it was hard to venerate images after seeing the great Rood of Boxley ridiculed.

Mary's great problem was that all would be in vain if she did not produce an heir. She needed a baby. She needed a husband. But who could it be? She picked the future Philip II of Spain. It was not really a wise choice: Philip was an implacable enemy of Protestantism, and while people were prepared to tolerate a measure of Mary's Catholic clamp-down, grisly stories of the Spanish Inquisition made them much more concerned.

As it happened, their worst fears were realized. Seeing where the wind was blowing, many Protestants had sought refuge abroad in places like Calvin's Geneva;

others decided to stay and operate quietly, secretly distributing their "naughty books" and meeting in (often quite large) underground congregations. Those who stayed and did not lie low were burned. In all, and in stark contrast to the tolerance of Edward's reign, Mary's reign saw some 300 evangelicals burned for their faith, not counting the many others who died in the horrendous conditions of sixteenth-century prisons. After Auschwitz, a few hundred may not sound like much, but for the day, it was a true and terrifying holocaust.

The unexpected, steadfast courage of so many martyrs, coupled with the brutality of Mary's regime, could not fail to move the populace. The burnings seared into the national conscience an association of tyranny with Rome, while Mary's relations with Spain made the martyrs look like English patriots. Realizing this, in 1558, the decision was made to burn heretics away from the public eye, but by then, it was too late.

Had Mary produced children, England would likely have remained officially Catholic. However, what Mary thought was the longed-for pregnancy turned out to be stomach cancer, and on November 17, 1558, she died, followed within hours by her Archbishop of Canterbury, Reginald Pole. In the end, "Bloody" Mary's cocktail of burnings, Spanish connections, and Rome had simply repelled the English from the Catholicism she sought to re-impose. And, watching it all from abroad, those in exile were more passionate than ever to return and purify England from such things. When Mary died, a tide of now white-hot anti-Catholic Protestantism would return to hit the English shore.

"This is the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes"

It was with this verse, Psalm 118:23, that the young Princess Elizabeth apparently greeted the news that Mary had died and that she was now queen. No wonder she was relieved: almost miraculously, she had survived the holocaust, and the country could be reclaimed for Protestantism.

Henry's younger daughter Elizabeth was very much a chip off the old block. Imperious and relentlessly energetic, she had a quicksilver mind capable of lightning-fast repartee, and enough political cunning to survive Mary's reign without slipping up. And, being who she was, everyone knew she would reintroduce Protestantism. Her mother was Anne Boleyn, the cause of Henry's split with Rome, and since Rome refused to recognize Henry's marriage to Anne, Rome saw Elizabeth as illegitimate, meaning she couldn't be queen. Elizabeth had no choice but to be Protestant. However, it so happened that she was, in fact, a Protestant by personal and deeply held conviction.

Within a year of becoming queen, Mary's religious reforms were undone, and a new Act of Supremacy proclaimed Elizabeth to be the "supreme governor" of the Church of England (Henry had been "supreme head," but this new title was intended to be less irritating both to Catholic ears and to those Protestants who did not believe a woman ever could be "head"). Once more, the monarch, and not the pope, was in control.

On top of this, a new prayer book was provided, and again, its distinctive theology showed the state of things. Basically, the 1559 prayer book was very much like Cranmer's second, 1552 version, only toned down a bit. There was now no prayer for deliverance from the pope, his "tyranny," and "all his detestable enormities," for example. Once again, it was the words uttered at the giving of the bread that said so much. In the 1559 version they became, "The Body of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was given for thee, preserve thy body and soul unto everlasting life [from the 1549 edition]. Take and eat this in remembrance that Christ died for thee, and feed on him in thy heart by faith with thanksgiving [from the 1552 edition]." In other words, the new prayer book was a compromise between Lutheranism and Swiss Protestantism.

This was to be exactly the sort of Protestantism Elizabeth would legislate. It was daringly and unmistakably Protestant (the word "compromise" does not imply that there was anything half-Catholic about it), but it was neither one brand of Protestantism nor the other. If Henry had established a very English (as opposed to Roman) Catholicism, Elizabeth established a very English (as opposed to especially Lutheran or Calvinist) Protestantism. Under Elizabeth, England was to be a united, Protestant nation. And that meant everyone had to go to church, where everyone would be presented with the same non-specific Protestantism. They didn't even have to agree with it. Catholics, for instance, did not have to take communion; they could privately believe whatever they wanted. They just had to conform and go along to church (or pay a very hefty fine each time they failed to show). As one of her contemporaries put it, she did not care to "make windows into men's souls," only to unite the nation under herself and her faith.

It would be a mistake, however, to think of Elizabeth merely as a shrewd politician with little interest in theology. She was, personally, a convinced Protestant, reading the New Testament in Greek every day, as well as reading regularly from an English Bible and praying in English. When she had only just become queen, a bishop made the mistake of raising the bread (in the Catholic style, so that it might be worshiped) in her private chapel. Elizabeth stormed out and forbade any repeat of such behavior at her

coronation. At the opening of her first parliament, she ordered a Protestant to preach, and, secretly (for fear of war), she provided aid to Protestants abroad.

Knowing her personal beliefs, the Reformers happily shared sly winks with each other as this moderate Protestantism was rolled out onto the statue books. Surely this was just the beginning, the old tactic of stepping out slowly along the road of Reformation. It came as an extraordinary shock when it became clear that Elizabeth saw this as her final word on the matter. As for those who came back from Geneva with advanced ideas of how the church could be further reformed, Elizabeth had little time for them. For while she was adamant that England be Protestant, she was equally adamant that this was no time for Protestant idealism. If England became too extreme, she feared, it would push anti-Protestant fervor on the Continent past boiling point, and thus threaten the safety of her realm. Spain or France might invade.

For a while, everyone watched and waited. Elizabeth, after all, was a woman: if she married, that might change things; if she didn't, her lack of an heir would also change things. But after a decade, it became clear that she was not going to marry, and she was not going to change. And so, in 1570, the pope tried to move things along by excommunicating her, officially depriving her of her throne, and calling on English Catholics to refuse to obey her.

It was a bad move. Before, Catholicism had been tolerated; now, it was treason. Since no Roman Catholic priests were being trained in England any more, the only spiritual supply-line for English Catholics was a trickle of priests, trained abroad, who came into the country to serve them privately. But now such priests, slipping across the border, were seen as dangerous agents of a hostile foreign power. After all, if they were loyal to the pope, they must be fomenting treason. And so Catholicism became a clandestine affair, with wealthy Catholic families hiding their priests in the priest-holes of their secluded country houses and pretending to conform.

Such secretive behavior always multiplies suspicions, and over the years a national fear of "the Catholic under the bed" grew. And it was not just paranoia. Not just the pope, but all the forces of the Catholic Counter-Reformation were set against the one united Protestant country in Europe. If Elizabeth's Protestant regime could be brought down, then Protestantism would be dealt a death blow.

The obvious move was to assassinate her, for if Elizabeth died, her loyally Catholic cousin, Mary Queen of Scots, was next in line and would take her place. Mary thus became the epicenter of Catholic plots against Elizabeth. They could hardly have had a figurehead less capable: where


Elizabeth was shrewdness personified, Mary was anything but. Mary had already so successfully alienated everyone in Scotland that she had been forced to take refuge in England. To her mind this would not be a problem: surely her cousin Elizabeth would look after her. But Elizabeth was not particularly thrilled at the idea of having the mascot for all the assassination plots actually staying with her. She had Mary discreetly tucked away in the country under house arrest.

And now the tables turned. Protestants on Elizabeth's council saw that, with Mary's son James being raised in safe Calvinist hands back in Scotland, Mary was a problem to be eliminated. If she died before Elizabeth, the crown would pass to Protestant James, and all would be well. Then one of Elizabeth's agents actually found hard evidence that Mary, embittered by her arrest, was part of a plot against Elizabeth. The game was up, and in 1587, Mary was executed.

The Protestant future of the crown was safe. However, the country was not, for the following year, "Bloody" Mary's old husband, Philip II of Spain, attempted a full-scale armed invasion of England that the pope happily blessed as a crusade. If the nation was not united already, Philip's massive naval armada sailing up the English Channel did it. With the help of some ferocious storms, the armada was defeated. It was clear to all in England: God had saved His true people (Protestant) and judged the wicked (Catholic).

A medal was struck to commemorate the victory, bearing an inscription that echoed Exodus 15:10 and Israel's salvation from the Egyptian army: *Afflavit Deus et dissipantur* ("God blew and they were scattered"). Clearly, God had smiled on Elizabeth's Protestantism. And, just as clearly to Elizabeth's mind, that meant God did *not* think she needed to go further down the road of reform, as some of her subjects thought.

By the end of her reign, in 1603, there was no doubt: to be English was to be Protestant. To be Catholic was to be a treacherous tool of foreign powers. The cult of the Virgin Mary had been replaced by the cult of the virgin queen, Elizabeth. How things had changed! Back in 1560, the Calvinist Geneva Bible had been produced, full of explanatory

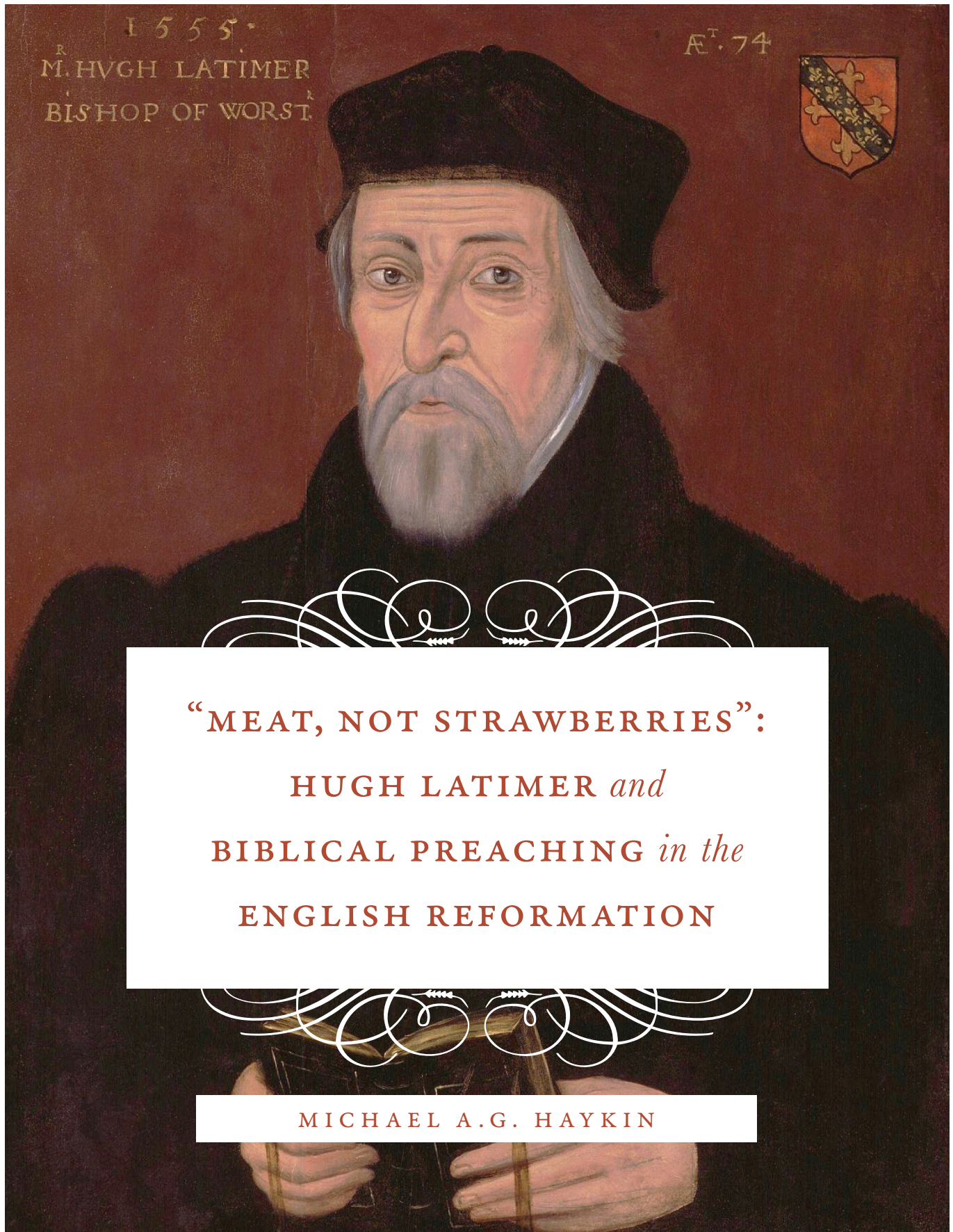


It was quite possible to use the Reformation for political ends (as Henry did), but the Reformation itself was a theological revolution (as Luther showed).

notes, so that when, for example, the reader came across a difficult word like "antichrist," a note would explain "that is, the Pope with the whole bodie of his filthie creatures." At the time, that was a view held only by the hard-core. But by the end of Elizabeth's reign, that the pope was the antichrist was obvious to everyone.

As much as anything, Elizabeth's long reign (1558–1603) turned out to be a war of attrition against Catholicism. When she first came to the throne, nobody expected it. But as the years passed, Catholic practices simply fell into disuse, and Catholic priests trained in the old ways died out. In their place, Cranmer's liturgy and homilies were heard by all, week after week; soon, the only theology pastors could access was Protestant; soon, the only Bible people knew was English, and ownership and knowledge of it slowly filtered into even the most rural areas. Elizabeth's long reign ensured that the nation was Protestant. What it could never do was ensure that the people were themselves evangelical.

The Reformation, at its heart, was about doctrine. It was not a quest for political, social, or moral reform dressed up in theological clothes; deeper down than anything else was a set of theological questions: "What is the gospel?" "How can we know?" "What is salvation, and how can I be saved?" "Who are God's people, and what is the church?" The very fact that it is so easy to spot the difference between Martin Luther and Henry VIII says it all. It was quite possible to use the Reformation for political ends (as Henry did), but the Reformation itself was a theological revolution (as Luther showed). ♦



“MEAT, NOT STRAWBERRIES”:
HUGH LATIMER *and*
BIBLICAL PREACHING *in the*
ENGLISH REFORMATION

MICHAEL A.G. HAYKIN

In the early days of the Reformation in Germany, Martin Luther (1483–1546) reflected on why the Reformation truths that he and his colleagues were preaching and publishing were making such a deep impact on various parts of German-speaking Europe. To the biblicist Luther, the answer was patent.

I simply taught, preached, and wrote God's Word; otherwise I did nothing. And while I slept or drank Wittenberg beer with my friends..., the Word so greatly weakened the papacy that no prince or emperor ever inflicted such losses upon it. I did nothing; the Word did everything.

In emphasizing that the “Word did everything,” Luther was not simply giving his own personal opinion, but making plain a vital theme in the history of the Christian faith. In times of spiritual advance, the church is borne along by the Word of God as that Word lays bare the secrets of human hearts and brings sinners to repentance and conversion. Speaking of this pattern in the history of the church, Iain Murray once put it this way: “The advance of the church is ever preceded by a recovery of preaching [the Word].” The Reformation, a time of great spiritual advance, was no exception.

In this essay, the spotlight is placed on one of the remarkable cadre of preachers raised up during the Reformation, the English preacher Hugh Latimer (c. 1485–1555), whom the twentieth-century historian Patrick Collinson once described as one of the greatest English-speaking preachers of the sixteenth century. In fact, in many ways Latimer was “the Preacher of England” during the Reformation era. J. C. Ryle gave some reasons why: “if a combination of sound Gospel doctrine, plain Saxon language, boldness, liveliness, directness, and simplicity can make a preacher, few... have ever equalled... Latimer.” Nor is this a recent perspective on Latimer. In the 1560s, it was apparently a common saying in the university town of Cambridge that when “Master [Hugh] Latimer preached, then was Cambridge blessed.” And according to Augustine Bernher (fl. 1550s–1570s), a Francophone pastor who was mentored by Latimer and later pastored during the reign of Elizabeth I (1533–1603), “if England ever had a prophet, he was one.”

“The child of everlasting joy”

Hugh Latimer's father, also called Hugh Latimer, was a yeoman-farmer in Thurcaston, a small village in Leicestershire. According to his son's witness in a sermon he preached before Edward VI, his father was a “yeoman, who had not



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lands of his own; only he had a farm of three or four pounds by year at the uttermost.” The younger Latimer was the only son among seven siblings, and having profited from his early education, he entered Clare Hall (now Clare College) at the University of Cambridge when he was 14—so, around 1507. He was at Clare for the next 23 years or so, till 1530. He received his B.A. in 1510 and his M.A. four years later, in 1514. Around the time that he received his M.A., he was ordained a priest at Lincoln. In 1524, he obtained his B.D., which proved to be a key turning point in his life.

Up until this time, Latimer had been a staunch Roman Catholic. As he stated later, “I was as obstinate a Papist as any was in England.” While gifted in Latin, he was typical of many scholars in the Roman Church who were deeply conversant with neither Greek nor the Scriptures. Before his conversion, he considered the study of Greek, which at that time was an innovation in the University, with deep suspicion. In fact, on one occasion he urged his hearers to “study the school divines, and not meddle with the Scripture itself.”

On receiving the B.D., though, Latimer was expected to deliver a public speech. He used the occasion to deliver a bitter attack on the teaching of Philip Melancthon (1497–1560), the German Reformer and co-worker with Martin Luther.

Now, among those listening to Latimer was Thomas Bilney (c. 1495–1531), who was at Trinity College and the earliest of the Cambridge Reformers. Bilney was concerned by what he heard, and, after the lecture, he went to speak with Latimer. Latimer would later say that he learned more in the space of that conversation than he had in all of the years of his studies at Cambridge. This, then, was his conversion, which can

be dated to around the spring of 1524. As he stated in a sermon years later: “All the Papists think themselves to be saved by the law, and I myself was of that dangerous, perilous, and damnable opinion till I was thirty years of age.”

More generally, he stated of this great change in his life:

It were too long to tell you what blindness I have been in, and how long it were ere I could forsake such folly...; but by continual prayer, continual study of Scripture, and oft communing with me of more right judgment, God hath delivered me.

And as he said on another occasion, “I am a Christian man,... the child of everlasting joy, though the merits of the bitter passion of Christ.”

Within a year of these events, he was accused of being a Lutheran, and that by his bishop, Nicholas West (1461–1533), the Bishop of Ely, who came to hear Latimer preach in Great St. Mary’s in Cambridge. With boldness, Latimer took the occasion to set forth Christ as a model for bishops. Afterward, West asked Latimer if he would refute the views of Martin Luther. When Latimer told him that he could not refute what he did not know (Latimer had not read any of Luther to this point), West said, “Well, Mr. Latimer, I perceive that you somewhat smell of the pan; you will repent this gear one day.” In other words, his sermons had the flavor of Lutheran doctrine. Years later, in 1552, when Latimer had had the time to read Luther, he described him as a “wonderful instrument of God, through whom God hath opened the light of his holy Word unto the world, which was a long time hid in corners and neglected.”

West forbade Latimer to preach in the entire diocese of Ely as well as in the University. A little later, however, Latimer was arraigned before Thomas Wolsey (1473–1530), the papal legate. Latimer made such a favorable impression upon Wolsey that the papal legate gave him freedom to preach throughout England and declared, “if the Bishop of Ely cannot abide such doctrine as you have repeated, you shall have my license and shall preach it unto his beard, let him say what he will.” And so, Latimer was able to continue preaching in Cambridge.

When the matter of King Henry VIII’s (1491–1547) marriage came to the fore in the late 1520s—he desired a divorce since it appeared that his wife, the Spanish princess Catherine of Aragon (1485–1536), could not bear him a living son—it was suggested by Thomas Cranmer that the matter be discussed by the university theologians at Oxford and Cambridge. At Cambridge, Latimer supported the king in his determination to divorce Catherine and marry Anne Boleyn (c. 1501–1536), which probably

led to his being invited to preach before the king at Windsor on March 13, 1530. Henry VIII continued to favor his preaching, so that even after Latimer had been appointed as the parish minister in the pocket village of West Kingston, Wiltshire, for instance, he would be commanded to preach before the king from time to time.

“True preachers should be persecuted and hated”

It may have been these opportunities to preach before the king in 1530 that emboldened Latimer to write a courageous letter to the king that year, pleading with him to allow William Tyndale’s (c. 1494–1536) translation of the New Testament to freely circulate in England. Latimer does not mention Tyndale by name, but simply refers to having “the Scripture in English.” Since Tyndale’s translation was the only one available at this time, the Reformer must have been defending his countryman’s famous translation.

Latimer began by emphasizing that it was utterly necessary for him to speak truthfully to the king:

The holy doctor St. Augustine, in an epistle which he wrote to Casulanus, saith, that he who for fear of any power hides the truth, provokes the wrath of God to come upon him, for he fears men more than God. And the holy man St. John Chrysostom saith, that he is not only a traitor to the truth who openly for truth teaches a lie, but he also who does not freely pronounce and show the truth that he knows. These sentences (most redoubted king) when I read now of late, and marked them earnestly in the inward parts of my heart, they made me sore afraid, troubled, and vexed me grievously in my conscience, and at the last drove me to this strait, that either I must show forth such things as I have read and learned in scripture, or else be of those who provoke the wrath of God upon them, and are traitors unto the truth; the which rather than it should happen, I had rather suffer extreme punishment.

Equally strong as this fear of being found a traitor to the cause of God was Latimer’s desire to glorify God. As he told Henry:

[My] purpose [in writing to you] is, for the love that I have to God principally, and the glory of his name, which is only known by his word, and for the true allegiance that I owe unto your grace, and not to hide in the ground of my heart the talent given me by God, but to chaffer [i.e. speak] it forth to others, that it may increase to the pleasure of God ...

Latimer then pled with the king not to give way to those who would prevent the free circulation of the Word of God in English. He urged Henry VIII to read various passages from the Scriptures, where he would plainly see that the truth always stirs up opposition and that suffering persecution was one of the marks of a true servant of God:

[I]n the tenth chapter of St. Matthew's gospel, saith our Savior Christ also, "Lo, I send you forth as sheep among wolves" [Matt 10:16]. So that the true preachers go like harmless sheep, and are persecuted, and yet they revenge not their wrong, but remit all to God: so far are they from persecuting any other but with the word of God only, which is their weapon. And so this is the most evident token that our Savior Jesus Christ would that his gospel and the preachers of it should be known by, that it should be despised among those worldly wise men, and that they should repute it but foolishness and deceivable doctrine, and the true preachers should be persecuted and hated, and driven from town to town, yea, and at the last lose both goods and life.

...Wherefore take this for a sure conclusion, that where the word of God is truly preached, there is persecution, as well of the hearers as of the teachers: and where is quietness and rest in worldly pleasure, there is not the truth.

The persecution of those preachers who wanted Tyndale's New Testament available for the common man in England was a mark of their being truly sent by Christ. Since Latimer himself had experienced opposition for preaching God's Word, he was also clearly revealing his conviction that he had been called to be a preacher of the gospel.

"Meat, not strawberries"

In September of 1535, Latimer's preaching gifts led to his being appointed Bishop of Worcester, which was probably the most neglected diocese in England. It had been occupied by Italian bishops for the forty years prior to Latimer becoming its bishop, and not one of them had ever set foot in England. Latimer's immediate predecessor was Girolamo

“ . . . Wherefore take this for a sure conclusion, that where the word of God is truly preached, there is persecution . . . ”

- HUGH LATIMER

Ghinucci (1480–1541), who had never been to England. Not surprisingly, there were ministers in the diocese who did not even own a copy of the Latin Bible. Latimer frequently encountered people who were completely ignorant of the Word of God, for these ministers rarely preached. In his famous *Sermon on the Plough* (1548), Latimer compared the rarity of such preaching to strawberries that came but in the summer:

[T]he preaching of the word of God unto the people is called meat. Scripture calleth it meat, not strawberries, that come but once a year, and tarry not long, but are soon gone. But it is meat, it is no dainties. The people must have meat that must be familiar and continual, and daily given unto them to feed upon. Many make a strawberry of it, ministering it but once a year; but such do not the office of good prelates.

Once, Latimer came to a town where he had made arrangements beforehand to preach on the Lord's Day, and found the church locked up. He waited for half an hour for someone to show up, but no one did. When he went into the village to find out the reason why no one was at the church, he was told by one of the town's inhabitants, "Sir, this is a busy day with us, we cannot hear you; it is Robin Hood's day." Later, when recounting this incident, Latimer said:

[This] is no laughing matter, my friends, it is a weeping matter, a heavy matter; a heavy matter, under the pretence of gathering for Robin Hood,... to put out a preacher, to have his office less esteemed; to prefer Robin Hood before the ministration of God's Word; and all this hath come of unpreaching prelates.... If the bishops had been preachers, there should never have been any such thing.

To Latimer's way of thinking, the great calling of the bishops of England was to be preachers of the Word. Without preaching, Latimer was assured that there was no hope for England. In his words that have been already cited: "take away preaching, and take away salvation." Again, when faced with the following argument, "What need we preachers then? God can save his elect without preachers," Latimer replied, "I must keep the way God hath ordained... This office of preaching is the only ordinary way that God hath appointed to save us all by."

Latimer was well aware that it was not merely the act of preaching that saved sinners, but God's opening hearts as the Word was preached. To quote from one of Latimer's later sermons, preachers

can do no more but call; God is he that must bring in; God must open the hearts, as it is in the Acts of the Apostles. When Paul preached to the women, there was a silk-woman,... "whose heart God opened." None could open it but God. Paul could but only preach, God must work; God must do the thing inwardly.

Latimer was Bishop of Worcester for only four years, however, as he retired in 1539 upon the promulgation of the Act of the Six Articles, which affirmed, among other things, transubstantiation, clerical celibacy, and the legitimacy of private masses. For the next six years, not much is known about Latimer's life. He was commanded not to visit either Oxford or Cambridge, or his old bishopric of Worcester. He was also placed in prison for a period of time.

Things radically changed again with the accession of Edward VI in 1547. Latimer was offered back his bishopric in Worcester, which he refused, choosing rather to stay in London with Thomas Cranmer, the Archbishop of Canterbury, and assist Cranmer in reforming the church. He also spent time at Grimsthorpe Castle in Lincolnshire, where, as the guest of Katherine Willoughby (1519–1580), the Duchess of Suffolk, one of the wealthiest women of her day and an ardent supporter of the Reformation, Latimer generally preached two sermons every Sunday and during

weekdays rose in the middle of the night so as to be at his studies by two in the morning.

Latimer's commitment to the Scriptures and their truth is well seen by a comment he made in 1552 in one of his Grimsthorpe sermons. He was speaking about the Roman Catholic concern for unity and the implicit critique that the Reformation was wrong since it had split the church. Latimer's response was simple: desiring unity was certainly biblical—he referred to the Apostle Paul's exhortation to "be of one mind" (1 Cor 1:10)—but, he stressed: "We ought never to regard unity so much that we would, or should, forsake God's word for her sake."

"To suffer for God's holy word's sake"

Latimer preached hundreds of sermons, but there are only forty-one extant, of which twenty-eight were preached at Grimsthorpe to the servants of Katherine Willoughby or country congregations near to her castle in 1552. These sermons, along with the others that are extant, were copied down as Latimer preached, which proved to be quite difficult, as the copyists struggled to keep up with what Allan G. Chester has called "the torrent of the preacher's eloquence" and fluency. The Grimsthorpe sermons especially reveal a preacher who was able to adapt himself to his audience: he explicates a biblical text in its context, explains points of doctrine, emphasizes moral lessons, warns against the errors of the Roman Catholic Church, and all the while suffuses his sermons with what Allan Chester has called a "heartfelt earnestness."

Here, for example, is Latimer speaking about the necessity of knowing Christ for salvation in a sermon he preached on December 27, 1552, the day assigned to St. John the Apostle in the liturgical calendar of the Western church:

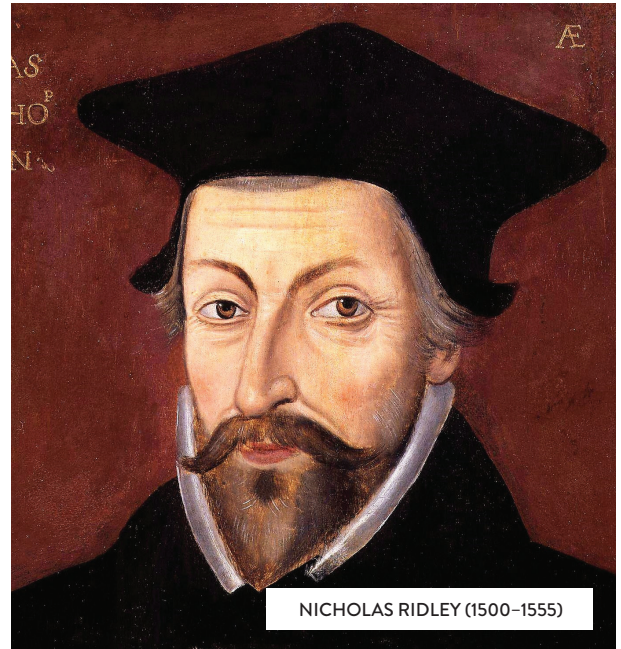
... by [Christ's] passion, which he hath suffered, he merited that as many as believe in him shall be as well justified by him, as though they themselves had never done any sin, and as though they themselves had fulfilled the law to the uttermost. For we, without him, are under the curse of the law; the law condemneth us; the law is not able to help us; and yet the imperfection is not in the law, but in us: for the law itself is holy and good, but we are not able to keep it, and so the law condemneth us; but Christ with his death hath delivered us from the curse of the law. He hath set us at liberty, and promiseth that when we believe in him, we shall not perish; the law shall not condemn us. Therefore let us study to believe in Christ. Let us put all our hope, trust, and confidence only in him; let us patch him with nothing: for, as I told you before, our merits are

not able to deserve everlasting life: it is too precious a thing to be merited by man. It is his doing only. God hath given him unto us to be our deliverer, and to give us everlasting life. O what a joyful thing was this!

Latimer was thus critical of Rome for arguing that salvation could be attained by our merits:

The papists, which are the very enemies of Christ, make him to be a Savior after their own fantasy, and not after the word of God; wherein he declareth himself, and set out and opened his mind unto us. They follow, I say, not the Scripture, which is the very leader to God, but regard more their own inventions; and therefore they make him a Savior after this fashion. They consider how there shall be, after the general resurrection, a general judgment, where all mankind shall be gathered together to receive their judgment: then shall Christ, say the papists, sit as a judge, having power over heaven and earth: and all those that have done well in this world, and have steadfastly prayed upon their beads, and have gone a pilgrimage, etc., and so with their good works have deserved heaven and everlasting life,—those, say they, that have merited with their own good works, shall be received of Christ, and admitted to everlasting salvation. As for the other, that have not merited everlasting life, [they] shall be cast into everlasting darkness: for Christ will not suffer wicked sinners to be taken into heaven, but rather receive those which deserve. And so it appeareth, that they esteem our Savior not to be a Redeemer, but only a judge; which shall give sentence over the wicked to go into everlasting fire, and the good he will call to everlasting felicity.

And this is the opinion of the papists, as concerning our Savior; which opinion is most detestable, abominable, and filthy in the sight of God. For it diminisheth the passion of Christ; it taketh away the power and strength of the same passion; it defileth the honor and glory of Christ; it forsaketh and denieth Christ, and all his benefits. For if we shall be judged after our own deservings, we shall be damned everlastingly. Therefore, learn here, every good Christian, to abhor this most detestable and dangerous poison of the papists, which go about to thrust Christ out of his seat: learn here, I say, to leave all papistry, and to stick only to the word of God, which teacheth thee that Christ is not only a judge, but a justifier; a giver of salvation, and a taker away of sin; for he purchased our salvation through his painful death, and we receive the same through believ-



ing in him; as St. Paul teacheth us, saying,... “Freely ye are justified through faith.” In these words of St. Paul, all merits and estimation of works are excluded and clean taken away. For if it were for our works’ sake, then it were not freely: but St. Paul saith, “freely.” Whether will you now believe St. Paul, or the papists?

Now, during one of the Grimsthorpe sermons that Latimer preached on the petition “Thy kingdom come” from the Lord’s Prayer (Matt 6:10), he made a statement that, from the perspective of later events, can be regarded as almost predictive. “Happy is he,” he said, “to whom it is given to suffer for God’s holy word’s sake.”

Three years later, during the bloody reign of Mary I (1516–1558), Latimer and his fellow bishop Nicholas Ridley (c. 1500–1555) were called to indeed suffer death for the sake of their commitment to God’s Word and its authority over all of life. Latimer had been committed to the Tower of London in September 1553, and then, in April 1554, he was taken with Ridley to the Bocardo prison in Oxford. There, Latimer and Ridley, along with Thomas Cranmer, underwent examination of their theological beliefs. All three were found guilty of heresy and condemned to death. While in the Bocardo, Latimer wrote the following in a lengthy letter dated May 15, 1555:

Soap, though it be black, soileth not the cloth, but maketh it clean: so doth the black cross of Christ help us to more whiteness, if God strike with the battle-door. Because you be God’s sheep, prepare yourselves to the slaughter, always knowing, that in the sight of

God our death is precious....

Die once we must; how and where, we know not. Happy are they whom God giveth to pay nature's debt (I mean to die) for his sake. Here is not our home; let us therefore accordingly consider things, having always before our eyes that heavenly Jerusalem, and the way thereto in persecution.

On October 16, 1555, Latimer and Ridley were taken out of Oxford through the Bocardo Gate, where they were tied to a stake in what is now Broad Street. Wood was piled around the two bishops, and before the fire was lit, Ridley asked if he could say two or three words. He was told that if he was prepared to deny his "erroneous opinions," then he would be allowed to speak. If not, he was told, "you must

suffer for your deserts." "Well," replied Ridley, "so long as the breath is in my body, I will never deny my Lord Christ, and his known truth!"

The wood piled around Ridley was freshly cut and thus only smoldered. Ridley was in conscious agony till the very end, and at one point was heard to pray: "I cannot burn! Lord, have mercy upon me!" Latimer, though, died fairly swiftly, but before he did so, he uttered the following words in response to this cry by Ridley. These words, recorded by the English martyrologist John Foxe (1516/1517–1587), form a fitting conclusion to this study of Latimer as a preacher, for in a sense they have a sermon quality: "Be of good comfort Master Ridley, and play the man! We shall this day light such a candle by God's grace in England, as I trust shall never be put out." ♦

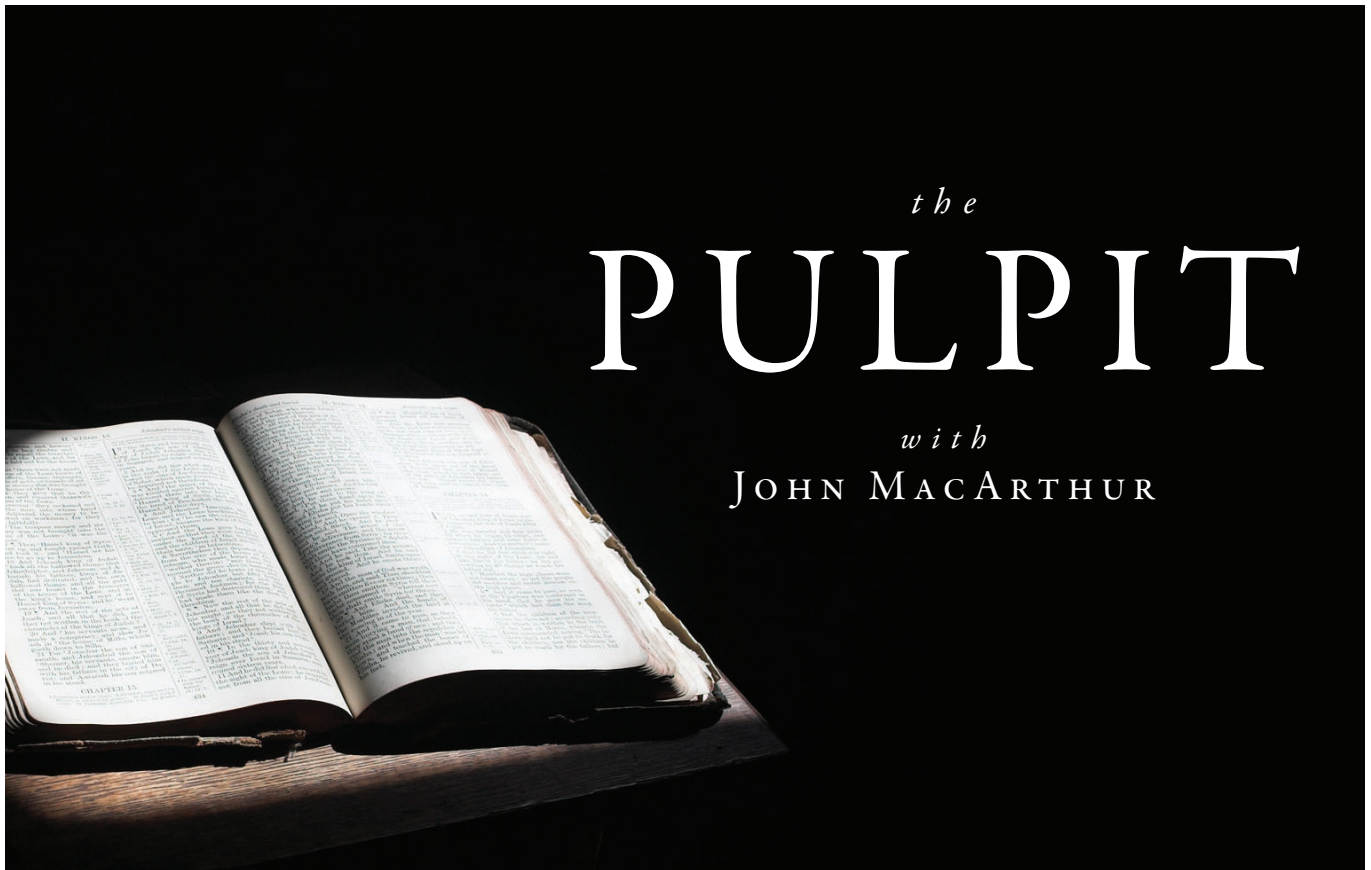


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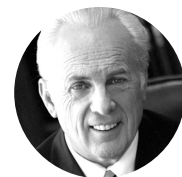


the
PULPIT

with
JOHN MACARTHUR

Throughout his gospel, John portrays the majesty and glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. The prologue declares Him to be God the Son (John 1:1), who enjoys intimate fellowship with the Father (1:2) and is self-existent (1:4), the Creator (1:3), and the Word who became flesh and manifested God's glory (1:14). John the Baptist, the greatest man who had lived up to his time, acknowledged that Jesus was superior to him. The apostle John also records Jesus' omniscience, sinlessness (8:46), eternity (1:1–2), union with the Father (10:30), and miraculous signs.

Even in his account of Jesus' betrayal and arrest, John portrays Jesus' dignity, courage, and complete mastery of the situation. The present passage finds the Lord in the custody of His enemies, on trial for His life. But even in such seemingly degrading circumstances, John still manages to exalt Him. The apostle does so by juxtaposing the accounts of the Lord's initial hearing before Annas and Peter's denials. Both scenes took place at the same time, and John, under the Spirit's inspiration, weaves them into one dramatic narrative.



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The interplay of the two dramas brings into sharp focus opposite truths that are foundational to all of Christian doctrine: the glory of Christ and the sinfulness of man. Those truths are evident from the contrast between Christ's faithfulness and Peter's faithlessness; His courage and Peter's

cowardice; His sacrificial love and Peter's self-preserving lies.

The drama unfolds in four acts: it opens with the first act of Jesus' trial, followed by act one of Peter's denial. The scene then shifts to the second act of Jesus' trial, and then concludes with the second and final act of Peter's denial.

Jesus' Trial: Act One

Having formally arrested Jesus, the soldiers and police bound Him. This probably was standard procedure when making an arrest, but it also suggests a deeper significance. Just as Isaac (Gen 22:9) and the Old Testament sacrifices (Ps 118:27) were bound to the altar, so also was the Lamb of God, the ultimate sacrifice.

After seizing Jesus, they led Him, first, to Annas. This preliminary hearing, recorded only by John, marked the first of the three phases of Jesus' religious trial before the Jewish authorities. The second phase was before Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin; the third was after sunrise the next morning as the authorities confirmed the decision reached at the earlier hearing. The Lord's civil trial also had three phases: before Pilate (Matt 27:2, 11–14); before Herod (Luke 23:6–12); and then before Pilate again (Matt 27:15–2).

Although he no longer held office at the time, Annas was the most powerful figure in the Jewish hierarchy. He had been the high priest from A.D. 6 to A.D. 15, when he was removed from office by Valerius Gratus, Pilate's predecessor as governor. He could still properly carry the title of high priest in much the same way that former presidents of the United States are still referred to as president after they leave office. Annas' title, however, was more than a mere courtesy. Many Jews, resentful of the Romans' meddling in their religious affairs, still considered Annas to be the true power (especially since, according to the Mosaic law, high priests served for life; cf. Num 35:25).

Further, after his removal from office, five of Annas' sons and one of his grandsons served as high priest. He was also the father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was high priest that year. The New Testament places the beginning of John the Baptist's ministry "in the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas" (Luke 3:2; cf. Acts 4:6), as though they jointly held the office.

Joseph Caiaphas had been appointed high priest in A.D. 18 by Valerius Gratus, the same Roman prefect who had deposed his father-in-law Annas three years earlier. He remained in office until A.D. 36, when the Romans removed him. Caiaphas' tenure as high priest was one of the longest in the first century, which reveals his cunning and opportunistic nature. That he proposed killing Jesus to preserve

his and the Sanhedrin's power (cf. 11:48) demonstrates his utter ruthlessness.

With Jesus in the custody of His enemies, the scene now shifts to Peter.

Peter's Denial: Act One

Despite his show of bravado in attacking and wounding Malchus, Peter had fled along with the rest of the disciples after Jesus' arrest (Matt 26:56). But he had managed to regain his composure and now was following Jesus and the arresting party—albeit at a distance. Peter was not alone; another disciple had also mastered his fear and turned back with him.

The other disciple with Peter was most likely John, who never names himself in his gospel but instead describes himself as the disciple whom Jesus loved.

John was sufficiently well known that he was allowed to enter with Jesus into the court of the high priest. Peter, however, was not, and was left standing at the door outside. Realizing what had happened, the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to the doorkeeper and brought Peter in. That John was able to vouch for Peter shows again that he was well known in the high priest's household. Peter's desire to be with Jesus overcame his fear, and he entered the courtyard.

But as he did, the slave-girl who kept the door said something to Peter that jolted him. "You are not also (in addition to John) one of this man's disciples, are you?" she demanded. The question in the Greek text expects a negative answer. Following her cue, Peter tersely blurted out, "I am not." Why he should deny being a disciple of Jesus is not immediately apparent.

No doubt desperate to avoid any further questions, Peter hurried across the courtyard toward the place where some of the high priest's slaves and officers of the temple guard (probably part of the arresting party) were standing. The detail that they had made a charcoal fire, for it was cold and they were warming themselves, again reflects eyewitness testimony. More significant, it shows that this initial hearing took place at night, since it would not likely have been cold enough at Passover to have a fire during the day.

Trying to blend in and be as inconspicuous as possible, Peter was standing with the officers and slaves, warming himself. He was taking a risk that someone else would recognize him in the firelight (which is exactly what did happen; Mark 14:66–67). But standing all alone in the courtyard would only have called further attention to himself—which was the last thing he wanted to do. In a bitter irony Peter, like Judas a little while earlier in Gethsemane (18:5), wound up standing with the enemies of Jesus.

Leaving Peter in that vulnerable position, the scene now shifts indoors to the dramatic confrontation between Annas and Jesus.

Jesus' Trial: Act Two

Jesus' trial before the Jewish authorities was a sham, since His fate had already been determined. Back in chapter 11, "the chief priests and the Pharisees convened a council, and were saying, 'What are we doing? For this man is performing many signs'" (vv. 47–48). The chilling conclusion they arrived at (proposed by Caiaphas; vv. 49–50) was that Jesus had to die, "so from that day on they planned together to kill Him" (v. 53). Thus, none of the three phases of the Lord's trial before the Jewish authorities was an impartial attempt to truly determine His guilt or innocence. Instead, their purpose was to put a veneer of legality on His murder.

This informal hearing before Annas was no exception. Rather than bringing charges against the Lord and producing evidence to substantiate them as in any legal proceeding, Annas questioned Jesus about His disciples, and about His teaching. This blatant attempt to get the Lord to incriminate Himself was illegal. Just as the Fifth Amendment to the United States Constitution does today, Jewish law protected the accused from being forced to testify against himself. It was Annas' responsibility to inform Jesus of the charges against Him. Instead, he asked vague, general questions, hoping to uncover a crime to justify the death sentence that had already been decided on.

Jesus, however, was well aware of the law. Therefore, He answered him, "I have spoken openly to the world; I always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all the Jews come together; and I spoke nothing in secret" (John 18:20). The Lord had no ulterior motive, no secret plan, no hidden agenda known only to an inner cadre of followers. He had openly preached the saving gospel of the kingdom and offered salvation to those who accepted it (Matt 11:28–30; John 10:9; 14:6).

Jesus' challenge—"Why do you question Me? Question those who have heard what I spoke to them; they know what I said"—was not an act of insolent defiance, but a demand that the requirements of the law for legitimate accusers and accusations be observed. The Lord unmasked Annas' hypocrisy, and challenged him to present his case and call his witnesses.

Embarrassed by his master's loss of face (and likely seeking to curry Annas' favor), one of the officers standing nearby struck Jesus, saying, "Is that the way You answer the high priest?" Jesus, however, maintained a majestic calm; "while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself

to Him who judges righteously" (1 Pet 2:23).

Realizing that he was getting nowhere with his questioning of Jesus, Annas sent Him bound to Caiaphas the high priest. Only Caiaphas, the reigning high priest, could bring legal charges against Jesus before Pilate.

As they led Jesus away, the focus shifted back to the courtyard, where the final act in the drama of Peter's denial was about to play out.

Peter's Denial: Act Two

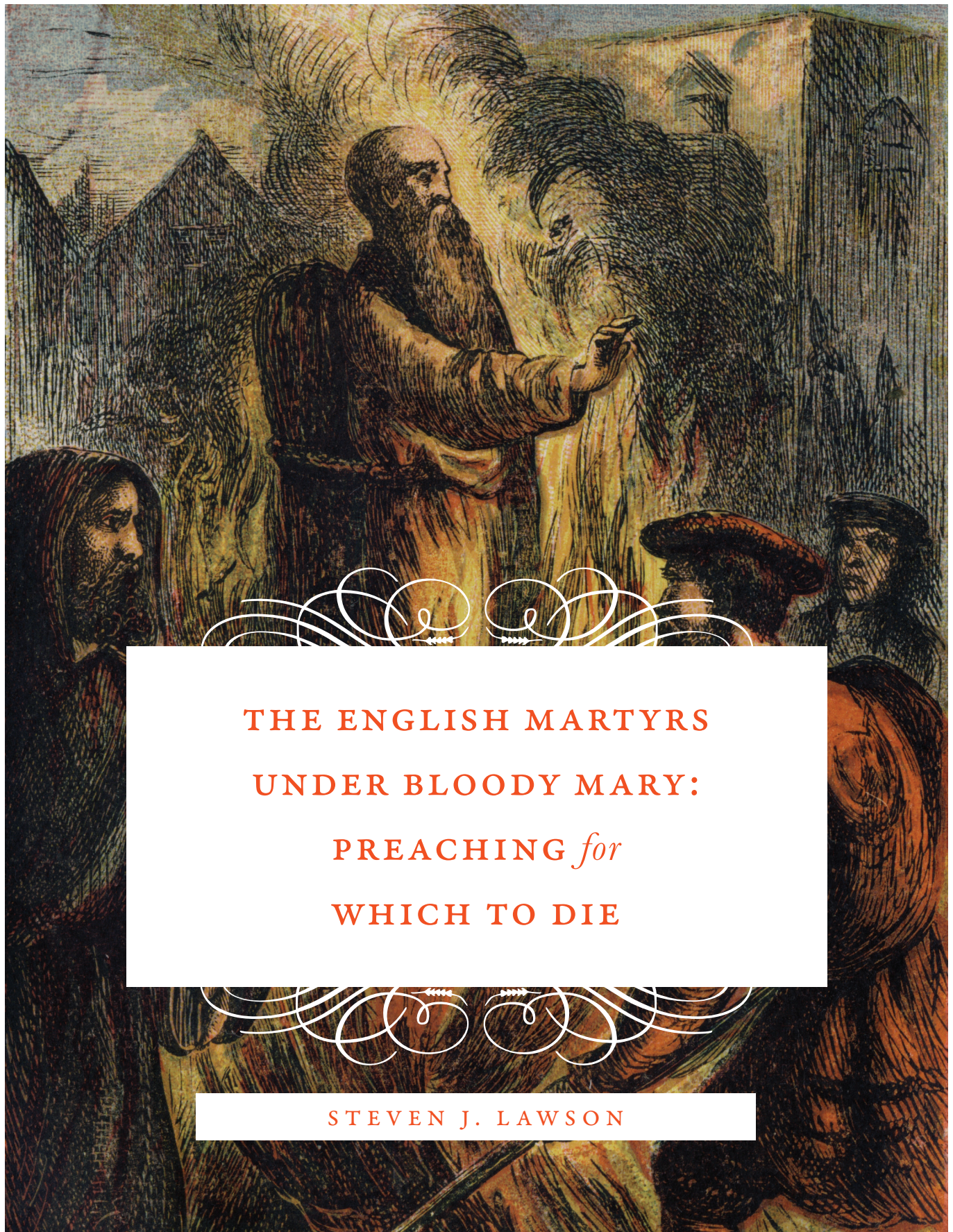
John 18:25–27 states:

"Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. So they said to him, 'You are not also one of His disciples, are you?' He denied it, and said, 'I am not.' One of the slaves of the high priest, being a relative of the one whose ear Peter cut off, said, 'Did I not see you in the garden with Him?' Peter then denied it again, and immediately a rooster crowed."

While Jesus was being questioned by Annas, Peter, still standing and warming himself next to the fire in the courtyard, was interrogated by Annas' subordinates. Becoming suspicious of this stranger, they said to him, "You are not also one of His disciples, are you?" Here was a chance for Peter to redeem himself and be courageously honest. Once again, however, he denied it, and said, "I am not."

But the repeated questioning of Peter by the others had aroused the suspicions of one of the slaves of the high priest. Making a bad situation for Peter far worse, this individual was a relative of the one whose ear Peter had cut off (Malchus) earlier that evening in Gethsemane. He challenged Peter with the most specific (and dangerous) accusation of all: "Did I not see you in the garden with Him?" Being a disciple of Jesus was not a crime as of yet, but assaulting a man with a sword was. Panic-stricken, Peter emphatically denied for the third time any knowledge of Jesus.

At that very moment, two things happened that drew the two dramas concerning Jesus and Peter together. Immediately after Peter's third denial, a rooster crowed. At the same time, "the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had told him, 'Before a rooster crows today, you will deny Me three times'" (Luke 22:61). Overwhelmed with shame, guilt, and grief at his sins of denial, Peter "went out and wept bitterly" (v. 62). ♦



THE ENGLISH MARTYRS
UNDER BLOODY MARY:
PREACHING *for*
WHICH TO DIE

STEVEN J. LAWSON

During the turbulent days of the sixteenth century, the English Reformation was carried forward by a brave band of men, known as the Marian Martyrs, who boldly gave their lives for the advancement of the gospel of Jesus Christ. They paid the ultimate price, one that other Reformers such as Martin Luther, John Calvin, and John Knox never did. They were brave and courageous preachers, as daring as any generation in the annals of church history. These valiant figures were cruelly burned at the stake by order of Queen Mary I of England, otherwise known as Bloody Mary. These English martyrs were spiritual giants who walked the land in the days of the Reformation.

These mighty men were valiant warriors who fought the good fight and kept the faith. In the Bible, the martyrs are singled out as a special group of believers who deserve special recognition in heaven due to their unwavering testimony during difficult days upon the earth. Surely, these Marian Martyrs are part of this select group. Therefore, they should also be recognized in this day by all who love the truth of the Word of God.

Mary I Assumes the Throne

The monarch known as Bloody Mary was Queen Mary I, the sovereign over England, who ruled for five hellish years, from 1553 to 1558, as the fourth Tudor monarch. She was immediately preceded by her father, Henry VIII, who reigned from 1509 to 1547, and her half-brother, Edward VI, who sat upon the throne from 1547 to 1553. Mary was the daughter of Henry VIII and his first wife, Catherine of Aragon. She followed her half-brother, Edward VI, who was crowned King of England at the age of nine and died at the young age of fifteen. Although his reign was short, he was strongly Protestant and was able to establish Protestantism for the first time in England. Many reforms were made, including the abolition of the Mass and priestly celibacy and the publication of the *Book of Common Prayer* (1549). His dying prayer was, “O Lord God, defend this realm from Papistry, and maintain Your true religion.”

Before King Edward VI died, he and his council drew up the “Devise for the Succession.” This was an attempt to prevent the royal crown from being put upon the head of his staunchly Catholic half-sister, Mary. In this attempt, Edward named his first cousin, Lady Jane Grey, as the heir to the throne. This strategy bypassed his two sisters, Mary and Elizabeth. However, after the death of Edward VI, Lady



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Jane’s claim to the throne was hotly disputed, and after only nine days on the throne, Jane was deposed by supporters of Mary, who was then crowned Queen.

By her ascension to the English throne, Queen Mary I undid the Protestant reforms accomplished under her half-brother, Edward VI, and restored a full-blooded Catholicism to England. Mary had been raised from infancy to be a rigid adherent of the Roman Catholic Church. She was, as J. C. Ryle remarked, “a Papist of Papists, conscientious, zealous, bigoted and narrow-minded in the extreme.” Nothing else needs to be said regarding her opposition to the Protestant faith.

Under the reign of Mary I, Protestant worship was entirely removed from the churches of England. The Reformers were denounced as enemies of the truth and were stripped of their offices in the churches of England. Many of these leaders were forced to escape to Europe as exiles in order to protect their own lives. Among those who fled were John Knox, John Foxe, and other significant figures. Other Protestant leaders who had come to England from Europe were now banished and forced to return to their homelands. Previously enacted statutes against Protestant heresies were reinstated, attaching the death penalty to certain theological beliefs. By early 1555, the stage was set for the extreme persecution of Protestant heretics who opposed the Catholicism of Mary I—they were to be burned at the stake.

A Reign of Terror Unleashed

The advisors of Mary I urged her to take drastic measures against the Protestant leaders in England. She agreed and issued royal decrees to put to death all heretics in the realm

who opposed Catholic dogma. Special commissions were appointed to examine the apprehended Protestants, and unilateral authority was given to prosecute and eventually execute Protestants. In this brewing storm, the leaders of the Reformed movement would be put to the most severe test. Either they would recant their Protestant beliefs, or they would be put to death by fire at the stake. There was no other option. By this drastic measure, Mary I came to be known as “Bloody Mary,” and she unleashed four years of horrific terror throughout England.

Those Protestant believers burned alive at the stake were known as Marian Martyrs. They were Protestants of strong conviction who gave their lives for the true gospel of Christ. During the last four years of Mary’s reign, at least three hundred persons were burned at the stake. Some historians set the numbers even higher. Those set on fire were strong believers, from all walks of life, both preachers and parishioners. These staunch believers held firmly to the truth that the saving gospel is by faith alone in Jesus Christ alone.

The carrying out of death sentences continued throughout Mary I’s reign. In 1555, 71 Protestants were burned in the flashing flames of martyrdom under her order. In 1556, 89 Bible-believing “heretics” were burned to death because they opposed Catholic doctrine. In 1557, another 88 believers were burned, followed by 40 more in 1558. The fiery brands never ceased to blaze while Mary was alive. Out of the many martyrs, one was an archbishop, four were bishops, twenty-one were clergy, more than two hundred were businessmen and common laborers, fifty-four were women, and four were children. Five were burned in Canterbury just one week before Mary’s death.

What is a Martyr?

A martyr is one who suffers a violent, painful death rather than denying his or her conviction in the truth of the Word of God. The Greek word for “witness” (*martus*) comes into the English language as “martyr,” and this etymology indicates how the word was used in the New Testament. Being an outspoken witness for the gospel of Jesus Christ in the first century often meant facing persecution and, in many cases, death. Some gave their lives in order to bear witness to Christ, and their faithfulness to the death became a mighty testimony to the truth of the gospel.

Such a painful death was the lot that fell to Stephen, who bore witness for Jesus Christ before the Sanhedrin in Acts 7. This was the same death that James suffered when he was imprisoned in Acts 12. This was also the ultimate price paid by the Apostle Paul in 2 Timothy 4:6–8. The more outspoken one was in preaching the Christian faith, the more

likely he was to experience martyrdom. This reality once again confronted the fearless witnesses to Christ who lived during the horrific reign of Mary I.

At this time, martyrdom meant being chained to a stake and burned to death. Sometimes, as a further measure of degradation, a sack of gunpowder was attached to the head of the victim, blowing the badly burned body into pieces. For a preacher, where the public execution was performed in front of the church where this faithful witness had pastored. The preacher would be marched through the streets of his parish before the eyes of his startled and concerned church members. This death march was intended to strike fear in the hearts of the congregation who had sat under his preaching.

Why Were They Martyred?

In reviewing this tragic chapter of church history, it is important to understand why these courageous men and women were put to death. It was not for any criminal offense they had committed. Nor was it for any violation of the Word of God. They had not led any civil unrest against Queen Mary I. Neither were they anarchists against the government. They were not thieves, murderers, or drunkards who threatened the public good of society. They were not instigators of rioting that disrupted the social order. To the contrary, these were the holiest believers in all of England, people who promoted the common good of all that was decent. Among these martyrs were the very best Bible preachers that England had to offer.

These men and women were put to death for no other reason than their commitment to the true gospel of Jesus Christ. Each was martyred because they refused to believe in the Roman Catholic superstition of transubstantiation that was pronounced by the priest in the Mass. The determinative issue was that these Reformed-minded believers denied the real presence of the body and blood of Christ in the Mass. They did not suffer a painful death for some vague generalities of secondary importance. They suffered because they refused to affirm that the body and blood of Christ were, literally, in the elements of the Lord’s Table after the words of consecration were pronounced.

At the time of their capture and prosecution, these valiant men and women were asked whether they did or did not believe the stated doctrine of Roman Catholicism. If they did not confess it, they were marched to the stake to be burned in the flames for their faith. To the stake they went, courageously, bravely, and valiantly, confessing Scripture and singing praises to God. For these believers, this matter was not an irrelevant or non-essential issue, but a core belief worthy of living and dying for. Their martyrdom was not over

a secondary issue, but one of supreme importance. These staunch stalwarts of the faith backed up their witness with their lives, even unto death.

Where Were They Martyred?

The Marian Martyrs were burned, not in a single region or city, but throughout the entire land of England that was under the jurisdiction of Mary I. The smoke of their execution covered the whole country. Many who were preachers were martyred at the very sites where they had ministered. Among these spiritual leaders, John Rogers, John Bradford, and John Philpot were martyred at Smithfield in London. Hugh Latimer, Nicholas Ridley, and Thomas Crammer were martyred in Oxford. John Hooper and Ronald Taylor were martyred in Gloucester. These were the very best of the chief spokesmen raised up by God in England.

The rest of the martyrs were put to death throughout England in the places where they lived and worshiped. These locations are as broad as England itself, including places such as Kent, Warwickshire, Suffolk, Glamougan, Essex, Oxfordshire, Carmarthenshire, Cheshire, Ease Sussex, West Sussex, Norfolk, Middlesex, Somerset, St. Albans, Barnet, Staffordshire, Islington, St. Edmunds, Hampshire, Yorkshire, Exeter, Cambridgeshire, Canterbury, Cornhill, Wilshire, Gloucestershire, Leicestershire, Stratford-Alte-Bow, Berkshire, Channel Islands, Derbyshire, Bristol, Northamptonshire, Huntingdonshire, and Pembrokeshire. In addition to the three hundred cited above, another hundred died in the ghastly conditions of their prison cells before they could be escorted to their execution stake. Others suffered economic, social, or personal persecution for their faith.

John Rogers: First Martyr

The first to be burned at the stake under Mary's new regime was the preacher and Bible translator John Rogers. Born about 1500 in the English hamlet of Deritend, near Birmingham, Rogers was well educated at Pembroke College, in Cambridge University. There, he displayed a

brilliant mind and showed himself to be a skilled scholar, earning a Bachelor's degree in 1525. Revered as a learned man, Rogers was selected to be Junior Canon at Christ's Church, Oxford, a new college established by Cardinal Wolsey, who was known to recruit only the best of men. Distinguishing himself, Rogers was ordained as a priest in the Catholic church, ready for a lifetime of ministry.

After a brief period of obscurity, Rogers next appeared in London in 1532 as a rector pastor at Trinity the Less. Two years later, he left England and traveled to Europe, to Antwerp, where he remained for the next thirteen years. Included in his responsibilities was serving as the chaplain for a house of English merchants, known as the Company of the Merchant Adventurers. It was there that Rogers

came into direct contact with William Tyndale, the Bible translator, and was most probably converted through his witness.

Rogers embraced the gospel of grace that was presented to him by Tyndale. He abandoned his Roman Catholicism and worked alongside Tyndale, assisting him in translating the Scripture into English. That same year, in 1534, Tyndale was arrested and imprisoned for eighteen months, and then ultimately martyred in 1536. It was Rogers who gathered up Tyndale's unfinished translation work before the officials could confiscate it. He escaped into the night with the prized possession and continued the work of translating the Old Testament in Tyndale's stead.



Producing the *Matthew Bible*

The following year, 1537, Rogers married an Antwerp lady, Adriana de Weyden, and moved to Wittenberg to be near Luther. That same year, Rogers published the *Matthew Bible*, which completed Tyndale's translation of the Old Testament. This translation of the Bible was produced by Rogers under the pseudonym Thomas Matthew to protect his identity. It contained all of Tyndale's 1534-1535 New Testament and Tyndale's Old Testament, which included the Pentateuch, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles, and Jonah. For his part in



the remainder of the Old Testament, Rogers was actually more of a compiler and editor than a translator. However, Rogers prepared thorough marginal notes for the *Matthew Bible*, making it the first comprehensive English commentary on the Bible.

To print his Bible in England, Rogers was, at last, granted the king's license in 1537, only a year after Tyndale's death. This effort by Rogers was not only important in its own right, but also laid the groundwork for the *Great Bible* (1539–1540), from which came the *Bishop's Bible* (1568), and eventually the *Authorized Version Bible* (1611). The *Great Bible* was the first officially authorized Bible in England and was, by law, chained to every pulpit in the land for the people to read. For this work, Rogers will be long remembered for his monumental contribution to the English Reformation.

Furthering his learning, Rogers enrolled at the University of Wittenberg in 1540, where he studied the Bible for an additional three years. He became the close friend of Philip Melancthon and came into association with several other leading Reformers. Rogers left Wittenberg in 1543 and went to northern Germany, to the city of Meldorf, to become the superintendent of a Reformed Lutheran Church. He remained there to escape the escalating persecution in parts of Europe, as it was not safe for Protestants to be in Belgium. Rogers was a marked man for his part in the *Matthew Bible*, for being a priest who married, and, most of all, for denying the superstition of transubstantiation in the Mass. He lived several quiet years in the seclusion of northern Germany, where he became further established

in his biblical knowledge of Reformed truth.

Edward VI Becomes King

In 1547, King Henry VIII died and his son, Edward VI, age nine, ascended to the throne of England. This seismic shift in political power ushered in a new era for the Protestant cause. Edward VI had been raised by Protestant tutors who were committed to Reformed doctrine. The boy king, in turn, brought those deeply embedded biblical convictions into the monarchy. With this new day dawning, Rogers felt it was safe to return to England, and he did so the following year. The leaders of the English Reformation were eager to place Rogers in strategic positions of ministry. In 1550, he became the vicar of St. Margaret's, London, and then he held the same position at St. Sepulchre in London. The following year, he was appointed by the Bishop of London, Nicholas Ridley, to be one of his chaplains. This placed him in the inner circle of the Reformed cause in England.

At this same time, Rogers was also appointed to be one of the main preachers at St. Paul's Cathedral, the most important church in London. In 1553, Rogers was appointed to the important position of Divinity Lecturer at St. Paul's Cathedral. In these highly visible positions, he preached and taught with much power against the abuses that remained in the Catholic holdovers of the churches of England. He confronted its externalized religion, worldliness, and dead ritualism.

Mary I Ascends the Throne

That same year, a severe tragedy struck a deathblow to the Reformation cause. After a brief period of illness, King Edward VI died at age fifteen. In his place, Lady Jane Grey, a cousin, was acknowledged as the new Queen of England. This was Edward's attempt to keep the crown in the hands of a Reformed monarch. The reign of Lady Jane Grey was short-lived though, lasting only nine days. During this time, her council requested that Rogers preach at St. Paul's Cross, an open-air pulpit on the grounds of Old St. Paul's Cathedral, which he did, powerfully expounding the Scriptures. However, a groundswell of popular and political support arose for Mary, a staunch Catholic, and she overcame Lady Jane Grey's appointment and assumed the crown. This would mean a new reign of Catholicism restored to England, including the massive shift in worship that would come with it.

Despite these pro-Catholic changes, Rogers nevertheless continued to preach boldly at St. Paul's Cross, commending the "true doctrine taught in King Edward's days." He warned against the "popery, idolatry, and superstition" of the new administration. This staunchly delivered polemic

sermon would be his last public discourse.

On August 16, 1553, Rogers was arrested and summoned before the Council, where he was interrogated regarding his Protestant beliefs. Rogers testified that he spoke openly at this trial:

I was asked whether I believed in the sacrament to be the very body and blood of our Savior Christ that was born of the Virgin Mary, and hanged on the cross, really and substantially? I answered, "I think it to be false. I cannot understand really and substantially to signify otherwise than corporally. But corporally Christ is only in heaven, and so Christ cannot be corporally in your sacrament."

By order of the court, Rogers was charged with heresy and confined to his house. His public ministry positions at St. Paul's Cathedral were immediately taken away. In January 1554, the new Bishop of London, Bishop Bonner, sentenced Rogers to Newgate Prison, where he was confined with other Protestant preachers for a year. The petitions made by Rogers to restate his case before the court were disregarded. In December 1554, Parliament reenacted penal statutes against the Lollards, who preached without a government license. On January 22, 1555, only two days after the statutes were reinstated, Rogers was brought back before the Council and unsuccessfully tried to defend himself once again.

The next week, on January 28 and 29, 1555, Rogers was brought before a special commission appointed by Cardinal Pole. Formal charges of heresy were made against Rogers, and he was sentenced to death for denying the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church. Specifically, he was found guilty of denying the doctrine of the transubstantiation of the bread and wine into the real presence of Jesus Christ. But Rogers could affirm only that this teaching was blasphemous of the person and work of Christ. He was then taken back to Newgate Castle to await his execution.

Taken to Smithfield

On Sunday, February 4, 1555, the time came for Rogers to be taken to Smithfield to be burned at the stake. Sheriff Woodroffe asked Rogers if he would revoke his evil opinion of the Mass. Rogers answered, "That which I have preached I will seal with my blood." Woodroffe responded, "Then you are a heretic." To which Rogers replied, "That shall be known at the day of judgment." The sheriff chided, "Well, I will never pray for you." And Rogers answered, "But I will pray for you."

Rogers was barely given time to dress himself. He was

hastily brought out of his cell and led on foot through the streets of Smithfield, within view of the Church of St. Sepulchre where Rogers had preached. As he was paraded through his former parish, his wife and ten children stood along the wayside. One of his children was a baby he had never seen. He had earlier been denied a visit to see his child. When he saw them, he was forbidden to stop to express farewell to them. As he marched to the stake, Rogers repeated Psalm 51, drawing strength from the very Scripture he had helped compile.

An immense crowd lined the area near the execution site. To this point, no one knew how an English Reformer would respond in the face of such martyrdom. The general public could hardly believe that the Reformers would actually give their bodies to be burned for their Protestant beliefs. Would they recant their convictions before the flames of the stake? Or would they remain true to their profession? They were soon to find out. At the execution site, the enthusiasm of the crowd grew strong, and they raised thunders of applause. The French ambassador, Noailles, was present and wrote these words of what he saw:

This day was performed the confirmation of the alliance between the Pope and this kingdom, by a public and solemn sacrifice of a preaching Doctor, named Rogers, who has been burned alive for being a Lutheran; but he died persisting in his opinion. At this conduct, the greatest part of the people were not afraid to make him many exclamations to strengthen his courage. Even his children assisted at it, comforting him in such a manner that it seemed as if he had been led to a wedding.

Burned at the Stake

Writing in *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*, John Foxe records the account as following:

The fire was put unto him; and when it had taken hold both upon his legs and shoulders, he, as one feeling no smart, washed his hands in the flame, as though it had been in cold water. And, after lifting up his hands unto heaven, not removing them until the devouring fire had consumed them, most mildly this happy martyr yielded up his spirit into the hands of his heavenly Father. A little before his burning at the stake, his pardon was brought, if he would have recanted, but he utterly refused. He was the first martyr of all the blessed company that suffered in Queen Mary's times, that gave the first adventure upon the fire. His wife and children being eleven in number, and ten able to go,

and one sucking on her breast, met him by the way as he went towards Smithfield. This sorrowful sight of his own flesh and blood could nothing move him; but that he constantly and cheerfully took his death, with wonderful patience, in the defense and quarrel of Christ's gospel.

Rather than striking the desired defeat as expected by the Catholics, this first martyrdom was a triumph for the gospel. This death showed that the Reformers were men of deep, unwavering convictions in the truth of Scripture. They believed what they preached and preached what they believed. They lived for the truth and were willing to seal their testimony with their own blood.

Lawrence Saunders: Coventry Martyr

Four days after Rogers' death, on Thursday, February 8, 1555, another Protestant preacher, Lawrence Saunders, was martyred in Coventry, England. Saunders was the highly respected Rector of All Hallows Church on Bread Street in London. He was educated at Eton University and King's College, Cambridge, where he earned a Bachelor's (1541) and Master's degree (1544), followed by a doctorate in theology. A preacher of great ability and high popularity, Saunders was appointed to his London pastorate in 1553. This was the same year that Mary I assumed the throne of England. The new Catholic queen's coronation took place on October 1, 1553, and two weeks later, on October 15, Saunders preached a powerful sermon, warning that "the errors of popish religion" would be restored to the English church by the newly crowned monarch.

With strong words of rebuke from the pulpit, Saunders declared that the enthronement of Queen Mary I was a visitation of God's severe judgment on England. Her "luke-warm indifference in the cause of Christ," he announced, was the hand of God raised up against the nation. From that moment, Saunders was a man targeted for the stake. In October 1554, he preached another sermon condemning Mary I at All Hallows Church in London and was immediately arrested by order of the Bishop of London. He suffered imprisonment for three months, and on January 29, 1555, he was arraigned, convicted of heresy, and sentenced to death. His request for an appeal was denied, and he was taken to the city of Coventry to be executed.

Rather than denying the gospel, Saunders was led to the

The first martyrdom was a triumph for the gospel.

stake on February 8, 1555, to be burned to death. Before being chained to the stake, Saunders kissed it and said, "Welcome the cross of Christ, welcome everlasting life." The martyrdom of Saunders was said to be the means of the conversion of at least one woman, Joyce Lewis, who later became a martyr under Mary I.

John Hopper: Gloucester Martyr

On the next day, Friday, February 9, 1555, John Hooper was martyred in Gloucester, England. Hooper was a Protestant bishop appointed by Edward VI as the Bishop in Gloucester and Worcester. He was a diligent preacher, Reformed in doctrine, with a high reputation for personal holiness. He was unbending no matter what pressures were brought against him to subscribe to Catholic dogma. He was also unsparing in his denunciation of the false gospel espoused by Rome. Consequently, he was also one of the first preachers marked for the stake when Mary I assumed the throne and restored her pope-centered religion to England.

Early in the Marian persecution, Hooper was summoned from Gloucester to appear in London, where he was examined, found guilty of heresy, and imprisoned in London Tower for eighteen months. He was removed from his ministerial office and sentenced to be burned as a heretic. So highly respected was Hooper as a preacher that he had to be smuggled out of London Tower at night in a disguise in order to be transferred to Newgate Prison, lest he be discovered and an attempt to free him occur. He was then transported to Gloucester to be put to death in his own parish before the watching eyes of his former parishioners.

Upon his arrival in Gloucester, a vast multitude of his former congregants gathered together and met him on the road leading into the city. One man who had been converted under Hooper's ministry, Sir Anthony Kingston, urged him to spare himself, saying, "Life is sweet, death is bitter." Without hesitation, Hooper replied, "Eternal life is sweeter, eternal death is more bitter." On February 9, 1555, Hooper was led to the

place of his execution, where a massive crowd awaited him. It was a market day, which drew large numbers into the city, and it is estimated that seven thousand people were gathered at the execution site at the time of his execution.

The stake was planted in front of Cathedral Close, where Catholic friars stood watching the solemn execution. This site was within one hundred yards of the church where he had preached. When Hooper arrived at the spot, he was allowed to pray to God, though he was forbidden to speak to the people. A box was put before him, containing a full pardon from the new church hierarchy. If he would recant his confession of Protestant convictions, the pardon was his. But, resolute in his beliefs, he said, "Away with it if you love my soul, away with it." He was fastened to the stake by iron chains around his waist, and the fire was lit. Due to the mismanagement of the fire, the sticks had to be lit three times over the course of three-quarters of an hour. This ineptitude greatly prolonged his agony in the flames. At the end, Hooper cried out from the stake, "Lord Jesus, have mercy on me. Rescue my spirit." He died strong in the very faith he had so boldly proclaimed.

Rowland Taylor: Hadleigh Martyr

On that same day, February 9, 1555, another Protestant, Rowland Taylor, was martyred in Hadleigh. Taylor had earned a

Doctor of Divinity and a law degree before becoming the Rector of Hadleigh Church in Suffolk. This brilliant man was a Reformer of high standing and revered as a strong preacher of the Word. For his bold convictions, Taylor was summoned to appear in London and be examined by the church officials. His friends urged him to flee, but Taylor responded:

What will you have me to do? I am old, and have already lived too long to see these terrible and most wicked days. Fly you, and do as your conscience leads you. I am fully determined, with God's grace, to go to this bishop, and tell him to his beard that he does not [know]. I believe before God that I shall never be able to do for my God such good service as I may do now.

When Taylor was taken away by the officials, his departing words to his wife, family, and parishioners were these:

For God's sake beware of Popery: for though it appears to have in it unity, yet the same is vanity and Antichristianity, and not in Christ's faith and verity.

Upon his arrival in London, Taylor was tried by an unjust council, condemned as a heretic, and sentenced to death by



THE BURNING OF JOHN HOPPER

burning. He was sent back to Suffolk to be burned before the members of the family that he loved and the church he had pastored. When Taylor was within two miles of Hadleigh, the sheriff of Suffolk, hoping to discourage him, asked him how he felt with such a horrifying death before him. But to the sheriff's dismay, Taylor vibrantly responded, "God be praised, Master Sheriff, never better. For now I am almost home. I lack but just two stiles to go over, and I am even at my Father's house."

Taylor was then paraded through the streets of Hadleigh, lined with tear-filled throngs of his parishioners. While in route to the execution site, he boldly declared to them, "I have preached to you God's word and truth, and am come this day to seal it with my blood." Such a bold profession of faith, at the cost of his life, left a lasting impression upon his troubled flock.

Taylor was led to Aldam Common, where the burning was to take place. Without any cowering, he said, "Thank God, I am even at home." Taylor then stripped off his shirt and said with a loud voice, "Good people, I have taught you nothing but God's holy word, and those lessons that I have taken out of the Bible; and I am come here to seal it with my blood." After pronouncing these words, he was struck hard on the head by one of his executioners. He knelt down to pray, and a poor woman, despite efforts to prevent her, knelt down next to him to pray. He was chained to the stake and quoted Psalm 51 out loud for all to hear. He then cried out to God, "Merciful Father, for Jesus Christ's sake, receive my soul into Thy hands." At that, one of the guards struck his head with a spike mounted on an ax head, killing him immediately.

John Bradford: Smithfield Martyr

The next notable figure to pay the price for being a doctrinally sound preacher of Reformed truth in England was John Bradford. His extreme giftedness was recognized early in his ministry and attracted the notice of many. He was part of the ministerial staff of the renowned St. Paul's Cathedral in London, where he served as a canon priest and frequently preached. He also served with distinction as the highly regarded personal chaplain to the Bishop of London, Nicholas Ridley.

Like John Knox and John Hooper, Bradford was named one of the six royal chaplains by King Edward VI. In this highly visible role, Bradford was commissioned to travel throughout England to preach the doctrines of the Reformed faith. As such, he had a powerful itinerate ministry as he traveled to many places, including Manchester, Liverpool, Bolton, Bury, Wigan, Ashton, Stockport, Prestwich, Middleton, and Chester. Because of this widespread preaching ministry, Bradford's strongly doctrinal expositions were highly influential

among the people. Few English martyrs were better known than this gifted powerhouse of a preacher. His immense ability in the pulpit served to enhance his sterling reputation.

However, the high visibility of Bradford in many pulpits throughout England meant he was a marked man when the gathering storm was finally unleashed. After Mary Tudor assumed the throne, within one month she had had Bradford imprisoned. He was arrested and would never leave his prison cell until his execution. While being held in prison, great efforts were made to cause him to recant his Reformed convictions. But all such attempts were futile. On July 1, 1555, at nine o'clock in the morning, Bradford, age 35, was led out of Newgate Prison in London and marched to Smithfield, where an enormous crowd had gathered. As Bradford was brought to the stake, the surging press of the swelling multitude became dangerous as the people pushed closer to observe the execution. The sheriffs of London were so alarmed by the large numbers that they did not allow Bradford to pray for very long. Another man, John Leaf, was also being martyred alongside Bradford.

After kneeling together in prayer, Bradford and Leaf stood up to meet the flames that awaited them. Bradford took a stick from around the stake and kissed it. He then kissed the stake itself, as though embracing the moment. He then held up his hands, looked up into the heavens, and cried out, "O England, England, repent of your sins! Beware of idolatry; beware of false Antichrists! Take heed they do not deceive you!" Bradford turned to the young man, Leaf, and said, "Be of good comfort, brother; for we shall have a merry supper with the Lord this night." Bradford then embraced the burning reeds and said, "Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, that leads to eternal life, and few there be that find it." In full assurance of faith, this powerful preacher breathed his last and entered into the presence of the Lord.

Hugh Latimer: Oxford Martyr

Over three months later, Nicholas Ridley (c. 1500–1555) and Hugh Latimer (c. 1485–1555) were burned back-to-back at the same stake in Oxford. The date of this famous dual martyrdom was October 16, 1555. Next to Tyndale and Cranmer, it has been concluded that these two men did more to bring the Reformation to England than anyone else.

Latimer was an extraordinarily popular preacher in England. He graduated from Cambridge and became a Fellow of Clare College, Cambridge. After earning a Master's degree in 1514, he was ordained a Catholic priest in 1515. His giftedness to preach was soon recognized, and he was

made a university preacher at Cambridge in 1522, where he earned a Bachelor's of Divinity degree in 1524.

A staunch Catholic, Latimer wrote his bachelor's disputation for his divinity degree on the refutation of the new ideas that were emerging in the Protestant Reformation in Europe, specifically those of Philip Melanchthon. At this time, Latimer was, as he described himself, as "obstinate a papist as any in England." Thomas Bilney, a new convert to Reformed truth, heard Latimer's publicly delivered disputation and afterward approached him to confront what he had heard. Bilney gave his own testimony of coming to faith in Jesus Christ through the Protestant gospel of grace. His words were irrefutable and had such a stunning effect upon Latimer that they won him to salvation by faith in Christ alone.

Latimer joined a group of other students at Cambridge who had also been won to the same truths through a more careful study of the Scripture in tandem with the writings of Luther. This small gathering of newly converted men met regularly at the White Horse Inn to discuss the teachings of the Reformation. Latimer immediately began to be a zealous believer of these biblical doctrines, so much so that he began preaching in university pulpits in a more authoritative manner than had previously been common. Latimer became a powerhouse in the pulpit, one of the most striking preachers of his day. In his expositions, he challenged his listeners to search the Scriptures and make careful inquiry into the way of salvation. Many students, some of them future preachers, would trace their conversion to these gospel-saturated sermons.

Not surprisingly, this strong preaching by Latimer provoked a gathering storm of persecution from the Catholic friars and doctors of divinity at Cambridge. So strong was the resistance that the Bishop of Ely forbade him to preach anymore in the university pulpits of Cambridge. The outrage against Latimer continued to escalate, and he was summoned to London to appear before the Bishop of London, Cuthbert Tunstall, to face charges of heresy. This was the same bishop who had earlier refused the request of William Tyndale to translate the Bible into the English language. But before Tunstall could issue a condemning verdict, an unforeseen turn of events occurred. Latimer publically decided in favor of King Henry VIII's divorce to Catherine of Aragon, which secured him the favor of the sitting monarch. With such backing, Latimer escaped the heresy trial before Tunstall. However, this conflict would prove to be a harbinger of what lay ahead.

In recognition of his unusual preaching abilities, Latimer was made a Royal Chaplain of Henry VIII in 1530. The appointment gave him access to the king and permitted

him to preach before the king several times. The next year, he was appointed by the English crown to be the Vicar of the West Kington Church. Leaders in the Catholic Church near West Kington tried to stop his preaching, but their attempts were to no avail due to the support of the king.

For the next four years, Latimer faced many efforts to prevent him from preaching. At last, he was summoned to London for an examination of his Protestant doctrine. He appeared before Archbishop Warham, where he was detained for several months. After being tried for heresy, Latimer was found guilty of teaching false doctrine that was contrary to Catholic beliefs. For this offense, he was excommunicated from the church and imprisoned. However, Henry VIII put a stop to his persecution in 1535 and instead appointed him Bishop of Worcester, where he preached for four more years, until 1539.

In 1536, the new Archbishop, Thomas Cranmer, appointed Latimer to preach before the Convocation of the Clergy, which was a large gathering of the priests and those who served in the church in England. Latimer delivered two stirring discourses to the ordained clergy in which he vehemently condemned the extra-biblical practice of religious ceremonies, holidays, image-worship, visits to relics, selling of masses, and lying about supposed miracles. These had no basis in Scripture, Latimer maintained, and should be abandoned. The following year, 1537, Latimer confronted the monastic house prior of Worcester Convent, and ordered every member to have an English Bible. He also required a lecture on the Scripture to be read every day and the Scripture itself to be read at every lunch and supper. He ordered everyone in the convent to read and study one chapter of Scripture daily. He likewise forbade replacing preaching with the observance of ceremonies and processions. Latimer pled with the authorities of the church "to maintain teaching, preaching, study, and prayer" as the essential spiritual disciplines found in the Bible.

Act of Six Articles Enacted

In 1539, the English Reformers were dealt a severe blow. Henry VIII enacted his Act of Six Articles, which opposed the preaching and teaching of Reformed doctrine. This decree was motivated by the king's desire to have better political relationships with the Catholic-entrenched powers of Spain and France. The king reinforced heresy laws, formally titled An Act Abolishing Diversity in Opinions. This reasserted in England the Catholic doctrine that affirmed transubstantiation, withheld the communion cup from laity, mandated the celibacy of clergy, required observance of chastity vows, permitted private masses, and necessitated auricular confession. The Protestants called these Six Articles "the bloody


whip with six strings.” Latimer could not remain silent and instead boldly preached against these popish doctrines.

For his outspokenness in opposing Catholic dogma, Latimer was charged as a heretic and forced to resign his bishop’s position. For the next eight years (1539–1547), Latimer was held in prison for denying the faith of Rome. He spent the last year of Henry VIII’s reign imprisoned in the Tower of London (1546–1547). But Henry VIII died in 1547, and Edward VI, the Protestant king, assumed the throne. The new king restored Latimer to his position of Royal Chaplain and commissioned him to travel about England, preaching the doctrines of the Reformation. For the next six years, he was dispatched to preach the gospel of grace in Jesus Christ from city to city. In this new role, he assisted Archbishop Cranmer in carrying forward the Protestant movement. He preached twice every Sunday, often before the king, spreading the Reformation truths throughout England.

John Broadus, writing in *Lessons on the History of Preaching*, describes the preaching of Latimer by stating, “Everybody knows that the most notable preacher of the English Reformation was Latimer.” Broadus adds that he possessed “a powerful mind and an elevated character,” having been “well educated at Oxford,” where he became “a student of books.” A man of humble background, he “never lost sympathy with common life and the common mind.” Broadus states that Latimer was “a keen observer of men and things” who “grasp[ed] truth with vigor, handle[d] it with ease.” He maintains, “Read several sermons of Latimer [and you will]...feel the power of his...vigor and intense vitality,” for he “preached without written preparation.”

Sermon of the Plough

Latimer’s most famous sermon was entitled “Sermon of the Plough,” a blistering message that rebuked the priests in England for failing to perform their chief duty in preaching the Word. In this provocative sermon, Latimer sharply contrasted the difference between the priests of his day and the apostles of the first century:



“I go as willingly to London at this present, being called by my prince to render a reckoning of my doctrine, as ever I went to any place in the world.”

-HUGH LATIMER

But this much I dare say, that since lording and loitering has come up, preaching has come down, contrary to the Apostles’ time, for they [apostles] preached and lorded not, and now they [priests] lord and preach not. For they that are lords will never go to plough; it is no meet [desirable] office for them. It is not seeming [preferable] for their estate. Thus came up lording loiterers; thus crept in unpreaching prelates, and so have they long continued.

With strong rebuke, Latimer charged the priests of England that while their “lording over the people is increased, preaching to the people is decreased.” The priests were busy dominating the people, yet lazy in the pulpit. Latimer rebuked the priests for being sluggards who neglected their highest calling—to bring the Word to the people. They were a contradiction in terms, being unpreaching prelates, that is, non-preaching preachers. Latimer argued:

And now I would ask a strange question: Who is the most diligent bishop and prelate in all England, that passes all the rest in doing his office? I can tell, for I know who it is; I know him well. But now I think I see you listening and hearkening that I should name him. There is one that passes all the others, and is the most diligent prelate and preacher in all England. And will you know who it is? I will tell you, it is the Devil. He

is the most diligent preacher of all others; he is never out of his diocese; he is never from his cure; you shall never find him unoccupied; he is ever in his parish; he keeps residence at all times; you shall never find him out of the way; call for him when you will, he is ever at home. He is the most diligent preacher in all the realm; he is ever at his plough; no lording or loitering can hinder him; he is ever applying his business; you shall never find him idle, I warrant you.

In this famous exposition from “Sermon of the Plough,” Latimer pictured the devil as the hardest worker in all England. The evil one, Latimer asserted, is ever in the field, ever at the plough, ever hard at work. He is never resting, never loitering, never on holiday. This strenuous labor was to the shame of the English priests, who were the very opposite, never in the Word, never preaching. Instead, they were ever resting, ever loitering, ever on holiday.

Devastating to the Reformed cause, Edward VI died in 1553, and Mary I ascended the throne of England. This queen of terror immediately reversed the religious climate, which put an end to the gospel ministry of Latimer. She secured his arrest while he was preaching in a church in Warwickshire. He was told a few hours in advance that the officials were coming for his arrest, which meant he had time to attempt an escape. But Latimer refused to flee and continued preaching, knowing it meant his certain capture and eventual death.

When Latimer was apprehended, he said to all:

I go as willingly to London at this present, being called by my prince to render a reckoning of my doctrine, as ever I went to any place in the world. And I do not doubt but that God, as He has made me worthy to preach His word to two excellent princes [Henry VIII and Edward VI], so He will enable me to witness the same unto the third [Mary I].

Far from trembling at what lay ahead, Foxe writes that Latimer rode “cheerfully” to London. As he passed through Smithfield, the place where John Rogers had been martyred months earlier, Latimer said, “Smithfield has long groaned for me.” Latimer was imprisoned in the Tower of London with Cranmer, Ridley, and Bradford, with all four Reformers sharing one prison chamber. In this same cell, they read the New Testament together and studied it carefully, finding great strength as they awaited their death. They likewise could not find any scriptural warrant for the Catholic teaching of transubstantiation.

The four Reformers were transferred from the Tower of

London to imprisonment in Oxford in 1554. For two long years, Latimer never lost his confidence in God. He spent so much time in prayer that he often had to be helped up from his knees by the others. He prayed for three things: that he would hold fast to his doctrine, that God would restore the gospel to England, and that God would preserve Elizabeth and make her queen in order to bring comfort to England. In due time, all three prayers were answered.

The following year, 1555, Latimer was subjected to examinations in his heresy trials. In his defense, he refused to give lengthy comments on the church fathers as his prosecuting accusers wanted him to do. Instead, he referred his every answer to a profession of faith based upon the Scripture. Latimer nevertheless was condemned a heretic and sentenced to die at the stake. On October 16, 1555, he was martyred with Nicholas Ridley, back to back, fastened to the same stake in Oxford. John Foxe writes in *Foxe’s Book of Martyrs*, “[Thus was] the end of this old blessed servant of God, Bishop Latimer, for whose laborious services, fruitful life, and constant death the whole realm has cause to give great thanks to Almighty God.” Rather than break the Protestant cause, this dual martyrdom helped embolden it.

Nicholas Ridley: Oxford Martyr

The importance of Nicholas Ridley to the English Reformation can hardly be overstated. J. C. Ryle notes, “In the noble army of English Reformers, no one deserves a higher place than Ridley. Together with Cranmer, Latimer, and Hooper, he occupies the first rank among the worthies.” Ridley (c. 1500–1555) came from a prominent family in Tynedale, Northumberland, and was educated at the Royal Grammar School and Newcastle. In 1518, Ridley enrolled in Pembroke College, Cambridge University, where he studied and graduated with a Master of Arts degree in 1525. A year before graduating, Ridley became a Fellow at Pembroke, and upon his graduation, he was ordained as a priest.

After graduation, Ridley went to Sorbonne, in Paris, for further education. He returned to England around 1529 and subsequently became a Senior Proctor at Cambridge in 1534. The following year, he was made Chaplain to the University and Public Orator. In 1537, he graduated with a Bachelor of Divinity degree and was appointed one of the chaplains to the Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Cranmer. The next year, 1538, he became the Vicar of Hearn in East Kent. At this time, Ridley first began to give careful thought to Rome’s doctrine about the Mass. He consulted with Cranmer about the Lord’s Supper and became convinced that transubstantiation was contrary to the teaching of Scripture.

Ridley's reputation continued to grow, and he was appointed one of six Royal Chaplains to King Henry VIII in 1540. That same year, he was made Master of Pembroke College. The following year, 1541, he was awarded a Doctor of Divinity degree and became the Prebendary Canon of the famous Canterbury Cathedral. Ridley was presented a Prebendary stall in Westminster Abbey in 1545. Two years later, King Henry VIII and Archbishop Cranmer appointed Ridley Vicar of Soham and Bishop of Rochester. Each of these appointments was intended for the specific purpose of further reforming the English church in accordance with Scripture. Consequently, Ridley ordered that the altars in his diocese upon which Mass had been served be removed. In their place, he required that communion tables be installed for the Lord's Supper. Later that same year, 1547, Henry VIII died, and Edward VI ascended to the throne of England.

In 1548, under the regime of the new monarch, Ridley helped Cranmer compile the *Book of Common Prayer*, which regulated the worship of the Church of England along a more reformed line. King Edward VI appointed Ridley the Bishop of London and Westminster in 1550. He was nominated to be the prestigious Bishop of Durham in 1553, but never assumed this office due to the early death of Edward VI that same year. Mary Tudor became the monarch of England and, as a strict Catholic, she had an intense dislike of Ridley due to his strongly Reformed stance. Mary I quickly had him arrested and imprisoned in London Tower in order to bring an end to the influence of his public ministry. In 1554, he was sent to Oxford, where he suffered multiple examinations for charges of heresy during a two-year imprisonment.

On October 16, 1555, the day had finally come for Ridley to be taken to the stake, the same stake as Latimer, in Oxford and burned to death. Ridley proceeded to the stake first, dressed in a furred black gown. Next came Latimer, in worn-out clothing with a buttoned cap on his head. Ridley arrived at the stake first and held up both hands as he looked up into heaven. Seeing Latimer approach, he ran to his fellow Reformer, embraced and kissed him, saying, "Be of good cheer, brother, for God will either stop the fury of the flames, or else strengthen us to abide it."

Ridley approached the stake first, kneeled down, kissed it, and then prayed. Latimer did the same as they prepared for what was to come. They both rose to their feet and were forced to listen to a Catholic sermon by a priest on the text, "Though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, I am nothing." The two Reformers tried to refute this false teaching, but were silenced. Ridley said, "I commit our cause to Almighty God, who shall impartially judge all."

Latimer added, "There is nothing hid but it shall be made manifest." They continued to entrust themselves to God and quote Scripture to the very end.

Ridley disrobed and gave his clothes to the attendant. Latimer needed for his attendant to pull off his stockings. The blacksmith then fastened a chain of iron around the stomachs of both Latimer and Ridley. As he was driving in a nail to secure the chain, Ridley took the chain in his hands and said to the blacksmith, "Good fellow, knock it in hard, for flesh will have its course." Around the neck of each was fastened a bag of gunpowder. Fiery brands were piled around them, ready to be ignited.

An enflamed stick was laid at Ridley's feet, prompting him to say to Latimer these now famous words of exhortation: "Be of good cheer, Master Ridley, and play the man. We shall this day light such a candle, by God's grace, in England, as I trust never shall be put out." The sticks around the two Reformers caught fire and began to grow in intensity. As the flames spread, Ridley cried out, "Lord, into Thy hands I commend my spirit. Lord, receive my spirit." These were the very words that Jesus Christ and Stephen cried out in their own martyrdoms.

With God-given strength, Latimer received the flame as if embracing it. He cried out from the other side of the stake, "Father of heaven, receive my soul!" He rubbed his face with his burning hands as if washing his face with cold water. As onlookers watched, he seemed to die with very little pain. Latimer, an older man, over eighty years old and unmarried, died first. Ridley died second, suffering a long and painful death due to the poor management of the fire. He eventually collapsed at the feet of Latimer.

Thomas Cranmer: Oxford Martyr

Five months later, on March 21, 1556, another central leader of the English Reformation, Thomas Cranmer (c. 1489–1556), was also burned at the stake in Oxford. Cranmer had been elevated to the position of Archbishop of Canterbury during the reigns of three monarchs, Henry VIII, Edward VI, and Mary I. Because of his highly visible stature, Cranmer was the most well known of all the Marian Martyrs. Cranmer was born in Aslockton in Nottinghamshire, England. He enrolled in the newly created Jesus College at Cambridge University, where he studied for eight long years. He first received his Bachelor's degree and then pursued his Master's, graduating in 1515. In recognition of his excellent study, he was elected a Fellow of Jesus College.

Cranmer next became a reader at Buckingham Hall, and Jesus College reinstated his fellowship. He began studying theology and was ordained a priest in 1520. Cambridge



named him one of their preachers, and he received his Doctor of Divinity there in 1526.

In January 1532, Cranmer drew the attention of King Henry VIII and was appointed a resident ambassador at the court of the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V. Cranmer accompanied the Emperor as he traveled throughout Europe. In this capacity, Cranmer saw the positive effects of Martin Luther and the Reformation on the Continent. As a result, he began to identify with certain Lutheran doctrines and move toward a Reformed position. During this time, Cranmer married a European woman, Margarete, despite the fact that, as a priest, he had vowed not to marry.

Later in 1532, Cranmer was ordered to return to England because King Henry VIII had him appointed Archbishop of Canterbury. This appointment came as a surprise because, until this time, he had held only minor positions in the church. The following year, 1533, Cranmer was consecrated as archbishop, which threw him into the spotlight as Henry VIII sought to secure a divorce from his wife, Catherine of Aragon, due to her inability to produce a male heir. When Rome refused to grant the divorce, Cranmer was called upon to build the case for the annulment of Henry VIII's marriage. This led to the separation of the English church from the Roman Catholic Church, thus establishing the Church of England. Under Henry VIII's rule, Cranmer initially did not make many changes in the church, though reforms would come later.

But Henry VIII died in 1547 and Edward VI, the Prot-

estant king, came to the throne. This Reformed-minded monarch promoted major changes in the Church of England as it moved away from Rome and toward Scripture. Under the direction of King Edward VI, Cranmer wrote and compiled the *Book of Common Prayer*, which aligned the worship of the Church of England with Reformed practice. However, the time of peace for the Reformers was short-lived. In 1553, the Protestant king, Edward VI, died, and the Catholic queen, Mary Tudor, assumed the throne. From that moment, Cranmer was marked for destruction due to his strong Protestant convictions.

Queen Mary I sought revenge for the divorce of her mother, Catherine of Aragon, by Henry

VIII, an event facilitated by Cranmer's advice. She would never rest until Cranmer was burned. The queen had him arrested and put on trial for treason against England in 1553. When examined, he held his ground firmly before the commissioners. Nevertheless, Cranmer was found guilty of heresy, condemned, and sentenced to be burned. Mary I had her retaliation.

Cranmer was imprisoned in Oxford, and, during the last month of his life, Cranmer's courage failed him. Fearing his martyrdom, he caved in under the pressure of the moment. In an hour of weakness, Cranmer signed a piece of paper that repudiated his heretical views of Reformation truth. When made known, this tragic recanting inflicted a devastating blow to the Reformed cause. However, his conscience began accusing him and caused him to repent of his original repudiation. Mary I was now even more fiercely determined to see Cranmer burned.

On March 21, 1556, Cranmer was first brought to the University Church of St. Mary, Oxford, to read a repudiation of his heretical views, those held by the Reformers, before he was to be burned to death at the stake. Before the painful ordeal, he was forced to listen to a sermon on Catholic theology by the Provost of Eton, Dr. Henry Cole, on transubstantiation. At the conclusion of the message, Cranmer was invited to declare his faith in this popish doctrine. He had been forced to write a manuscript of his repudiation, which was previously reviewed and approved. Cranmer was expected to publicly acknowledge his pro-

fession of the religion of Rome.

Cranmer opened with prayer and an exhortation to obey the king and queen. But as he was speaking, he suddenly departed from his script and, unexpectedly, pivoted in a new direction. To the astonishment of all, he renounced his written repudiation. He shocked everyone by declaring the Pope to be an Antichrist, saying, “As for the Pope, I refuse him, as Christ’s enemy and the Antichrist with all his false doctrine.” Cranmer then forthrightly rejected the popish doctrine of the real presence of Jesus in the supposed transfiguration of the elements.

The officials reacted in horror. Cranmer was pulled from the pulpit and hurried to the stake, while those in attendance raised an outcry, vehemently shouting at him. The execution site was the exact same location where Latimer and Ridley had been burned to death six months earlier. Cranmer was securely fastened to the stake, and the fire was lit. As the flames curled around him, he first held out his right hand into the fire. It was this same right hand that had signed his repudiation of Reformed truths in the gospel of Jesus Christ. He confessed that “this unworthy [right] hand” must be put into the fire first. With his left hand extended upward to heaven, his dying words were, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” Cranmer courageously died firm in the faith he had preached.

A Hill Worth Dying On

Wise is the man who knows which hill to die upon. Was this matter of repudiating the mass a hill worth the cost? Herein lies the answer. This was a gospel issue, not a secondary matter. If one is asked to believe that the Mass is a sacrifice, and that the bread and wine actually become the body and blood of Christ, then this is a hill worth dying on. This false teaching asserts that the death of Christ two millenia ago was imperfect and needs to be continued throughout the centuries. Because this teaching attacks the priestly office of Jesus Christ by assuming another mediating priest is still needed, this is a hill upon which to die. Because the elements are elevated to a position of adoration, an act forbidden by Scripture as idolatry, this is a hill upon which to die. Because the human nature of Jesus Christ is assaulted, as though it can be in multiple locations at once, this is a hill upon which to die.

What can we say in lasting tribute to these Marian Martyrs?

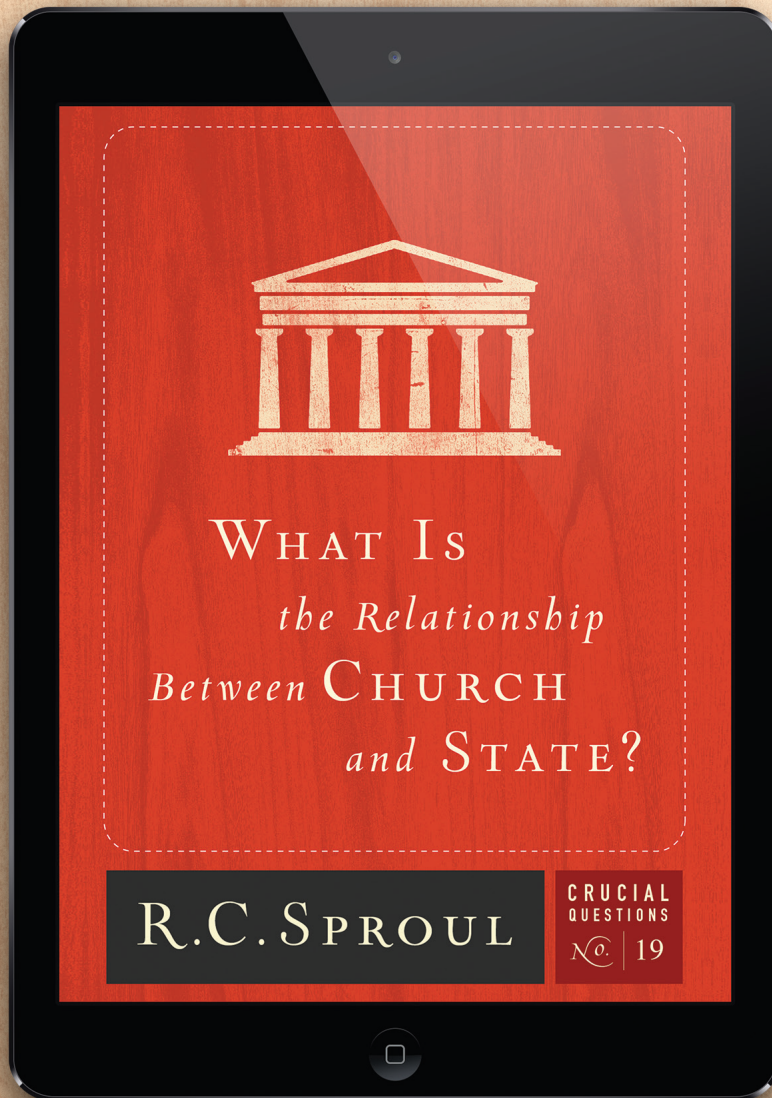
Wise is the man who knows which hill to die upon.

What distinguishes them as men worthy of our consideration?

First, they were *Bible men*. These English Reformers believed and taught the sufficiency and supremacy of Holy Scripture. *Sola Scriptura*—the Scripture alone—was their sole rule of faith and practice. They accepted all its truths without question or dispute. They held fast, even unto death at the stake, to the assertion that every part of Scripture is divinely inspired. In all their preaching, they were men of one Book, and to that Book they anchored their lives and ministries. The one grand characteristic of their preaching was their biblical preaching.

Second, they were *gospel men*. They believed and preached *sola gratia*, *sola fide*, and *solus Christus*, namely, that the true gospel of salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. They were martyred due to their strong stance for the gospel of grace in Jesus Christ. They asserted the finality and sufficiency of His vicarious death. They preached the cross as the atonement offered once for sin. They went to the stake for this gospel, not for a lesser truth or a peripheral issue. They understood that the Mass and the real presence of Christ is a corruption of the purity of the gospel of God. They stood fast for the very heart and soul of true Christianity, which is grounded in the sinless person and substitutionary work of Jesus Christ. They understood that the only way of salvation was, literally, at stake.

Third, they were *courageous men*. To the very end, these martyrs under the cruel reign of Bloody Mary were fearless in the face of the most severe persecution, even unto their own death in the flames. When their convictions were put to the test, they did not flinch. They refused to compromise the truth and chose death over life because they chose truth over heresy. These English Reformers were bold like Daniel in the lions’ den. But unlike Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the fiery furnace, though they would not bow, they did burn. May they be long remembered for their witness for the true gospel. ♦



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