



Principle Approach® Education

GOD'S GIFT OF HIS WORD THROUGH THE LIFE & LABORS OF TRANSLATOR WILLIAM TYNDALE

by Rosalie June Slater

INTRODUCTION

We think of the Bible in English as in a language liberated from the scholarly tongues which kept it from the average individual. It is only after several hundred years that the recognition of the work of William Tyndale came to be recognized as the major contribution to the King James, or Authorized, version.

It is important to be aware of the fact that the keynote of William Tyndale's work was to render to the average Englishman or woman access to the Word of God, seen in his often quoted statement about his work of translating the Bible into English:

Tyndale, before he left England for his life's work, said to a learned man, "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." He succeeded.¹

As in all ministries it is the character of the individual which makes the difference—the unique contribution which represents the quality of the enterprise. As the introduction to the Revised Version of William Tyndale's New Testament which described his "noble monument" states, we get some idea of the "patience and conscientiousness and unwearied diligence with which he did his life-work."²

In his own words William Tyndale described his goal in his Preface to the Pentateuch, 1530:

I perceived by experience how that it was impossible to establish the lay people in any truth, except the Scripture were plainly laid before their eyes in their mother-tongue, that they might see the process, order, and meaning of the text.³

In a letter to Frith he declared:

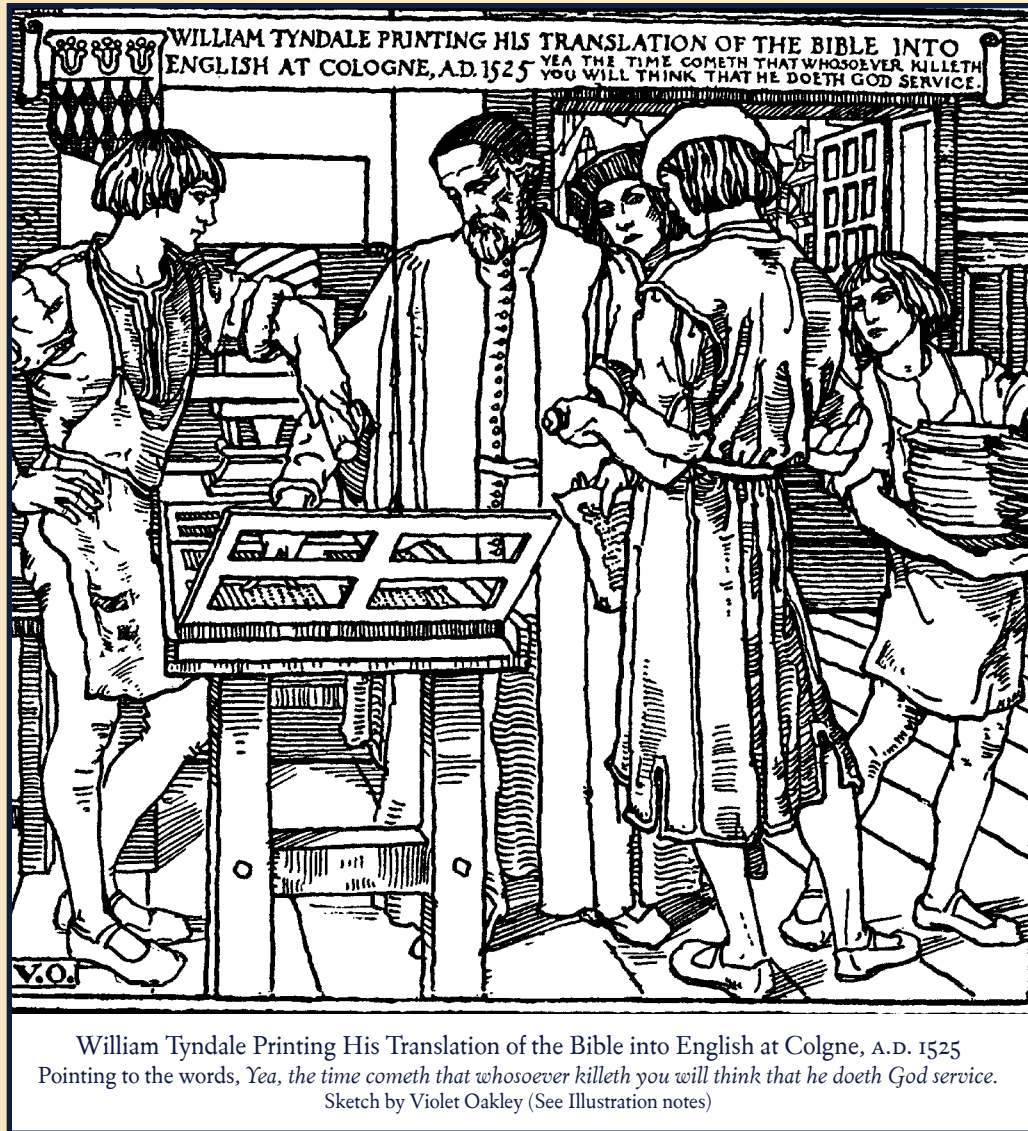
I call God to recorde agaynst the day we shall appeare before our Lord Jesus, to geue a rekenyng of our doynge, that I neuer altered one syllable of God's Word agaynst my conscience, nor would this day, if all that is in the earth, whether it be pleasure, honour, or riches, might be geuen me.⁴



WILLIAM TYNDALE

Anonymous, mid-sixteenth century?

With the permission of the Principal, Fellows and Scholars
of Herford College in the University of Oxford.



It is hard to realize that a Bible translator would be the object of such terrible persecution. Not only were Tyndale's painstaking translations burned, but he himself was threatened by death by fire—a reality finally achieved.

The character of William Tyndale was reflected in his lifestyle. More like a criminal than a translator of the sacred text, "He was in exile, a hunted man, with a price on his head, forced to hide from his enemies . . ." On one occasion, in a field in 1531, just outside Antwerp, he gave his testimony to Stephen Vaughan, one of the envoys to the Low Countries with whom he had an interview:

"Do you not know me? My name is Tyndale," and in . . . words which are almost his fullest autobiography: "If for my pains therein taken, if for my poverty, if for my exile



out of my natural country, and bitter absence from my friends, if for my hunger, my thirst, my cold, the great danger wherewith I am everywhere compassed, and finally, if for innumerable other hard and sharp fightings which I endure.”

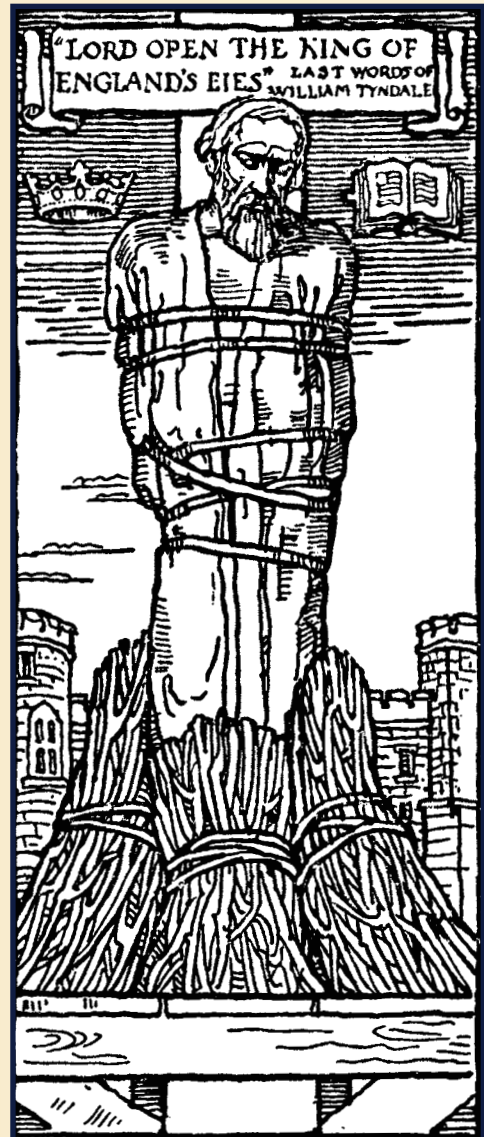
It was in conditions such as these that Tyndale revised his New Testament at the same time that he was taking part in fierce controversy, writing books that had the leading place in the polemical literature of the day and translating the larger part of the Old Testament direct from the Hebrew into his native tongue.⁵

A LANGUAGE FOR LEARNING GOD’S WORD

Persecution enabled the Master Bible Translator to grow in spiritual discernment of the messages from God’s Word and its relationship to the individual and the nation. Just as Magna Carta proclaimed the future governmental liberty of the individual, so did the Tyndale translations provide the avenue for individual study and spiritual growth.

In the Introduction, we begin to get some idea of the unique role which God called Tyndale to fulfill. The editor calls it,

the outstanding miracle in the history of English letters . . . *The Times Literary Supplement* spoke of him as “the man whose choice of words, has, for four hundred years, exercised supreme influence upon English prose.” His words are daily on our lips, his phrases have become part of our household speech, his cadences are treasured in every part of the world where the English language has gone. What other Englishman has touched so many lives?⁶



Strangled and burned at the stake in 1536, under King Henry VIII, William Tyndale’s last words were, “Lord, open the King of England’s Eyes!”

Sketch by Violet Oakley (See Illustration notes)

Even more passionately phrased are Tyndale’s own words unto the Reader. In Old English he stands before the tribunal of God and states:

Here thou hast (moost deare reader) the new Testament or covenaut made wyth vs of God in Christes bloude. . . .

Moreover, because the kyngedome of heaven, which is the scripture and worde of God,



maye be so locked vp, that he which readeth or heareth it, cannot vnderstonde it: as Christ testifieth how that the Scribes and Pharises had so shut it vp. Mat. xxiii. and had taken away the keye of knowledge. Luke. xi. that their Iewes which thought them selves within, were yet so locked out, and are to this daye that they can vnderstonde no sentence of the scripture vnto their salvacion . . .

This have I sayde (most deare reader) to warne the, least thou shuldest be deceaved, and shuldest not onely reade the scriptures in vayne and to no proffit, but also vnto thy greater damnacion. For the nature of Gods worde is, that whosoever reade it or heare it reasoned and disputed before him, it will begynne ymmediatlye to make him every daye better and better. . . ⁷

As concerninge all I have translated or other wise written, I besече all men to reade it for that purpose I wrote it: even to bringe them to the knowledge of the scripture. And as farre as the scripture approveth it, so farre to alowe it, and if in anye place the worde of god dysalow it, there to refuse it, as I do before oure savyour Christ and his congregacion. And where they fynde fautes, let them shew it me, if they be nye, or wryte to me, if they be farre of: or wryte openly agaynst it and improve it, and I promyse them, if I shall perceave that there reasons conclude I will confesse myne ignoraunce openly.⁸

THE GOSPEL

MATTHEW

Tyndale leads us into the kingdom of Jesus Christ when he sets forth the greatest sermon ever preached on the side of a mountain—Christ’s Sermon on the Mount.

The v. Chapter.

When he sawe the people, he went vp into a mountayne, and when he was set, his disciples came to hym, and he opened hys mouthe, and taught them sayinge: Blessed are the povre in sprete: for theirs is the kyngdome of heven. Blessed are they that morne: for they shalbe confortd. Blessed are the meke: for they shall inheret the erth. Blessed are they which hunger and thirst for rightewesnes: for they shalbe filled. Blessed are the mercifull: for they shall obteyne mercy. Blessed are the pure in herte: for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shalbe called the chyldren of God. Blessed are they which suffre persecucion for rightwesnes sake: for theirs ys the kyngdome of heuen. Blessed are ye when men reuyle you, and persecute you, and shall falsly say all manner of yvell saynges agaynst you for my sake. Reioyce, and be glad, for greate is youre rewarde in heven. For so persecuted they the Prophetes which were before youre dayes.



Ye are the salt of the erthe: but and yf the salt have lost hir saltnes, what can be salted therwith? It is thence forthe good for nothyng, but to be cast oute, and to be troden vnder fote of men. Ye are the light of the worlde. A cite that is set on an hill, cannot be hid, nether do men lyght a candell and put it vnder a busshell, but on a candelstick, and it lighteth all that are in the house. Let youre light so shyne before men, that they maye see your good workes, and glorify youre father which is in heven.

Thinke not that I am come to destroye the lawe, or the Prophets: no I am nott come to destroyethem, but to fulfyll them. For truely I saye vnto you, till heven and ereth perishe, one iott or one tyle of the lawe shall not scape, tyll all be fulfilled.⁹

Our greatest Bible teacher through the years has been the English scholar and pastor, Matthew Henry, whose six-volume *Commentary on the Whole Bible* has provided us with a complete Biblical study of Old and New Testaments. Matthew Henry (1662–1714), was well read by the Colonial and Constitutional generations in America. California history began in earnest when Jedediah Smith, “the Bible toter,” tumbled over the Sierras in winter with his Matthew Henry in his saddle bags.

To reveal the intimate and practical nature of Christ’s sermon, we quote a few excerpts from Matthew Henry’s *Commentary*:

This chapter, and the two that follow it, are a sermon; a famous sermon; the sermon upon the mount. It is the longest and fullest continued discourse of our Saviour that we have upon record in all the gospels. It is a practical discourse; there is not much of the *credenda* of Christianity in it—the things to be believed, but it is wholly taken up with the *agenda*—the things to be done; these Christ began with in his preaching; for if any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God . . .

Christ preached this sermon, which was an exposition of the law, upon a mountain, because upon a *mountain* the law was given; and this was also a solemn promulgation of the Christian law. But observe the difference: when *the law was given*, the Lord *came down* upon the *mountain*; now the Lord *went up*: then, he spoke *in thunder and lightning*; now, *in a still small voice*: then the people were ordered to keep their distance; now they are invited to draw near: a blessed change! . . .

The auditors were his disciples, who came unto him; . . . To them he directed his speech, because they followed him for love and learning, . . .

The solemnity of his sermon is intimated in that word, when he was set . . . He sat down as a Judge or Lawgiver. It intimates with what sedateness and composure of mind the things of God should be spoken and heard. He sat, that the scriptures might be fulfilled (Mal. iii. 3), . . . He shall sit as a refiner, to purge away the dross, the corrupt doctrines of the sons of Levi . . .



Christ begins his sermon with blessings, for *he came into the world to bless us* (Acts iii. 26), as *the great High Priest of our profession*; as *the blessed Melchizedec*; . . . as *He in whom all the families of the earth should be blessed*, Gen. xii. 3. He came not only to purchase blessings for us, but to pour out and pronounce blessings on us; and here he does it as *one having authority*, as one that can *command the blessing, even life for evermore*, and that is the blessing here again and again promised to the good; his pronouncing them happy makes them so; for those whom he blesses, are blessed indeed. The Old Testament ended with a curse (Mal. iv. 6), the gospel begins with a blessing; . . . *for hereunto are we called, that we should inherit the blessing*. Each of the blessings Christ here pronounces has a double intention: 1. To show who they are that are to be accounted truly happy, and what their characters are. 2. What that is wherein true happiness consists . . .

Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven . . . The poor in spirit are happy. There is a poor-spiritedness that is so far from making men blessed that it is a sin and a snare—cowardice and base fear, and a willing subjection to the lusts of men. But this poverty of spirit is a gracious disposition of soul, by which we are emptied of self, in order to our being filled with Jesus Christ . . . This poverty in spirit is put first among the Christian graces. The philosophers did not reckon humility among their moral virtues, but Christ puts it first. Self-denial is the first lesson to be learned in his school, and poverty of spirit entitled to the first beatitude . . . *Theirs is the kingdom of heaven*. The kingdom of *grace* is composed of such; they only are fit to be members of Christ's church, which is called *the congregation of the poor* (Ps. lxxiv. 19); the kingdom of *glory* is prepared for them. Those who thus humble themselves, and comply with God when he humbles them, shall be thus exalted . . .

Blessed are they that mourn; for they shall be comforted . . . They that mourn are happy . . . Those are God's mourners, who live a life of repentance, . . . The happiness of heaven consists in being perfectly and eternally comforted, and in the *wiping away of all tears from their eyes*. *It is the joy of our Lord; a fulness of joy and pleasures for evermore*; . . .

Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth. *The meek* are happy . . . The meek are those who quietly submit themselves to God, to his word and to his rod, who follow his directions, and comply with his designs, and are *gentle towards all men* . . .

Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness; for they shall be filled . . . They that hunger and thirst after righteousness are happy . . . Those who thus *hunger and thirst* after spiritual blessings, are *blessed* in those desires, and *shall be filled* with those blessings . . . The quickened soul calls for constant meals of righteousness, grace to do the work of every day . . . God will give them what they desire to their complete satisfaction . . .



Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy. The merciful are happy . . . we must by Christian sympathy, partake of the afflictions of our brethren; . . . We must have compassion on the souls of others, . . . The merciful shall find with God sparing mercy (ch. vi. 14.), supplying mercy (Prov. xix. 17), sustaining mercy (Ps. xli. 2) . . .

Blessed are the pure in heart; for they shall see God. The pure in heart are happy . . . This is the most comprehensive of all the beatitudes; here holiness and happiness are fully described and put together.

Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God . . . The peacemakers are happy . . . The wisdom that is from above is first pure, and then peaceable; . . . [Peacemakers] study to be quiet . . . [Peacemakers] are working together with Christ, who came into the world to slay all enmities, and to proclaim peace on earth . . .

Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you. Those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, are happy. This is the greatest paradox of all, and peculiar to Christianity; and therefore it is put last, and more largely insisted upon than any of the rest . . . This has been the effect of the enmity of the serpent's seed against the holy seed, ever since the time of righteous Abel.

Ye are the salt of the earth; but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men . . . Now Christ's disciples having themselves learned the doctrine of the gospel, and being employed to teach it to others, were as salt. Note, Christians, and especially ministers, are the salt of the earth . . .

Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven . . . The world sat in darkness, Christ raised up his disciples to shine in it; and, that they may do so, from him they borrow and derive their light.¹⁰

I CORINTHIANS 13

Perhaps the greatest message that Jesus brought to this world of darkness was the conception of love which the Apostle Paul recorded to the wicked city of Corinth. We have normally read this word *love* as *charity*, but Tyndale makes it more expansive than that. The love of the Lord generates greater love in us for each other.



The xiii. Chapter.

Though I spake with tonges of men and angels, and yet had no love, I were even as soundinge brasse: or as a tynklynge Cymball. And though I coulde prophesy, and vnderstode all secretes, and all knowledge: yee, yf I had all fayth so that I coulde move mountayns oute of ther places, and yet had no love, I were nothyng. And though I bestowed all my gooddes to fede the poore, and though I gave my body even that I burned, and yet had no love, it profeteth me nothyng.

Love suffreth longe, and is corteous. Love envieth not. Love doth not frowardly, swelleth not dealeth not dishonestly, seketh not her awne, is not provoked to anger, thynketh not evyll, reioyseth not in iniquite: but reioyseth in the trueth, suffreth all thyng, beleveth all thynges, hopeth all thynges, endureth in all thynges. Though that prophesyng fayle, other tonges shall cease, or knowledge vanysse away, yet love falleth never away.

For oure knowledge is vnperfect, and oure prophesyng is vnperfet. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is vyperfet shall bedone away. When I was a chylde, I spake as a chylde, I vnderstode as a childe, I ymagened as a chylde. But assone as I was a man, I put away childesshnes. Now we se in a glasse even in a darke speakeyng: but then shall we se face to face. Now I knowe vnperfectly: but then shall I knowe even as I am knowen. Now abideth fayth, hope, and love, even these thre: but the chefe of these is love. ¹¹

MARK

Finally, we are touched by the manner in which our Lord gathered his disciples unto him. He read their hearts and minds and lifted them from their earthly duties, i.e., such as fishermen to become evangelical fishers of men.

The fyrste Chapter.

As he walked by the see of Galile, he sawe Simon and Andrew his brother, castinge nettes in to the see, for they were fysshers. And Iesus sayde vnto them: folowe me, and I will make you fisshers of men. And strayght waye, they forsoke their nettes, and folowed him.

And when he had gone a lytell further thence, he sawe Iames the sonne of zebede, and Ihon his brother, even as they were in the shyppe mendinge their nettes. And annone he called them. And they lefft their father zebede in the shippe with his hyred servauntes, and went their waye after him. ¹²

We have been given the gift of the King James version of scripture. It is the dearest gift of the English language, the Word of God coming directly to our minds and hearts. Let us, too, open our hearts and minds to become disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ, fishers of men in all professions.



- ¹ William Tyndale, quoted in *William Tyndale: A Biography* by David Daniell. New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1994, Introduction, p.1.
- ² Isaac Foot, "Introduction," p. ix. *The New Testament translated by William Tyndale, 1534*, edited by N. Hardy Wallis, m.a. London: Cambridge at the University Press, 1938. (*Used by permission.*)
- ³ William Tyndale. *William Tindale: A Biography* by Robert Demaus, m.a., Revised Edition. The Religious Tract Society, 4 Bouverie Street, 65 St. Paul's Churchyard, E.C., 1904, p. 14.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*
- ⁵ Isaac Foot, p. x-xi.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*, p. xii.
- ⁷ William Tyndale, "W.T. unto the Reader," *The New Testament translated by William Tyndale, 1534*, edited by N. Hardy Wallis, m.a. London: Cambridge at the University Press, 1938, pp. 3,5.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, "Willyam Tindale, yet once more to the christen reader," p. 18.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, Matthew 5, p. 31.
- ¹⁰ Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, in 6 vols. Matthew 5, Vol. 5, pp. 46-53.
- ¹¹ William Tyndale, I Corinthians 13, pp. 363-4.
- ¹² *Ibid.*, Mark, pp. 85-6.

ILLUSTRATIONS: Sketches by Violet Oakley of her extensive mural paintings in the State Capitol, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania are from *The Holy Experiment: Our Heritage from William Penn, 1644-1944*, published in 1950. See "Art and Character on the Chain of Christianity: . . . Howard Pyle, Father of American Illustration," by Peggy Coven, *F.A.C.E. Journal*, Vol. v, where Violet Oakley is introduced as a student of Howard Pyle.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCE: *The Hawk That Dare Not Hunt by Day*, Historical fiction based on the life of William Tyndale, by Scott O'Dell. Bob Jones University Press, Greenville, South Carolina 29614; www.bjup.com or phone 1-800-845-5731; Item Code for ordering: 031062.