

Sunday, September 11, 2011—Grace Life School of Theology—*Church History: A Tale of Two Churches*—Lesson 36 The English Reformation

The Early English Reformation

- “From the times of Wycliffe, the great English Reformer, the Lord preserved a remnant in England, who witnessed for the truth, and who testified against the doctrines and superstitions of Rome. We found many of the descendants of the Lollards, or followers of Wycliffe, in the western districts of Scotland, who were prepared to receive the new doctrines of the continental divines (Reformers). So it was in England. There were many, very many, among the humbler classes, who still held to the doctrines taught by their great chief; but they were compelled to hide themselves among the humbler ranks of the people, and to hold their meetings in secret.” (Miller, 1131)
- E.H. Broadbent, author of *The Pilgrim Church*, concurs with Miller’s assessment. Broadbent states, “The Lollard movement was outwardly suppressed, but there were always remains of it, and from time to time persons were punished for meeting together to read the Scriptures.” (Broadbent, 247)
- Miller offers as evidence for his claims the burning of six men and women at Coventry in 1519 for teaching their children the Lord’s Prayer, the Ten Commandments, and the Apostles Creed in the vernacular tongue. (Miller, 1131)
- Church historian Kenneth Scott Latourette reports, “Lollardy had never completely died out. It persisted, chiefly among the poor and often in outward conformity with the Church. Translations of the Bible existed in English and were read, although not by any means as widely as after the invention of printing.” (Latourette, 798)
- “Into this fallow ground the writings of Luther would certainly find fruitage. They were not long in reaching Oxford and Cambridge. In Cambridge, especially, they awakened interest. Here was a circle whose members, aided by the Greek New Testament of Erasmus . . . were earnestly studying the Scriptures.” (Latourette, 799) Thomas Bilney and Hugh Latimer were Cambridge men who embraced the writings of Luther and were later burned at the stake as heretics. (Latourette, 799)
- William Tyndale was born in 1494 to a prosperous yeoman family not far from Gloucester. He took a degree at Oxford and later studied at Cambridge. At some point Tyndale was ordained, although when and where we do not know. (Latourette, 799) While at Cambridge, Tyndale fell in love with Greek and the words of Renaissance Humanist Erasmus. After he completed his studies, Tyndale became the chaplain of a wealthy family. At a banquet, Tyndale and a priest debated the meaning of Scripture. Tradition reports the priest as having said, “It would be better to be without God’s law than the pope’s.” To which Tyndale retorted, “If God spares my life,

before many years pass I will make it possible for a boy behind the plow to know more Scripture than you do.” (Jones, 114-145; Shelley, 268)

- Unfortunately for Tyndale, the devoutly Catholic Henry VIII had occupied the throne of England since 1509. In 1520 or 1521 depending on the source, Henry (or someone from his court, probably Sir Thomas More) wrote a stinging tract attacking Luther’s ideas. In recognition of Henry’s support, the pope gave him the title “Defender of the Faith.” (Beck, 492; Jones, 115)
- Following the Catholic party line, Tyndale’s bishop refused to let him translate the Greek New Testament into simple English. In response, Tyndale fled to the German provinces where he could work on translation without interference. (Jones, 799)
- “Tyndale arrived in Hamburg, Germany, in the midst of Luther’s Reformation in May 1524 ... People were even reading the Bible in the German language followed by theological discussion of the current issues of the day. What a contrast to Tyndale’s England!” (Brake, 97)
- “Some zealous scholars, fearful that Tyndale may have leaned too heavily on Luther, deny that Tyndale ever met him. However, little question remains among most scholars that Tyndale did visit Luther in Wittenberg ... It was while living in Wittenberg, where the university provided all the necessary scholarly tools, that Tyndale translated all or most of the New Testament. Tyndale certainly consulted the New Testament Luther had translated into German. It does not follow, however, that Tyndale’s New Testament was an English translation of Luther’s German New Testament. Tyndale was probably more competent in Greek and Hebrew than Luther, and his German was limited.” (Brake, 97)
- In August of 1525, Tyndale settled in the German city of Cologne, with his new assistant William Roye. The translation of the New Testament into English was complete; the task was now to ensure its printing and distribution. They chose to produce the work at the printing house of Peter Quentell. (McGrath, 72)
- “However, Quentell’s presses were also producing the works of Johannes Cochlaeus, a noted opponent of Luther, who happened to learn of Tyndale’s project. It seems that some of Quentell’s printers became drunk in a public tavern one evening, and let slip that there were thousands of Lutheran New Testaments being produced in English right under the noses of the Catholic authorities. Word of this soon reached Cochlaeus, who was no fool, and could see his star rising in the German Catholic firmament if he were to expose and block this project. He arranged for a raid on Quentell’s presses. Tyndale and Roye, however, managed to escape and salvage at least some of their printing, along with the text of the translation. . . Undeterred, they moved their printing operation farther up the Rhine to the city of Worms, and began the tedious process all over again using the presses of Peter Schoeffer.” (McGrath, 72)

- It was long believed that all the original text printed in Cologne had been lost. However in 1834, eight of these original sheets were discovered bound into another work. These sheets help us to gauge the influence of Luther upon Tyndale’s work.
 - “The pages include a “prologue,” which is dependent at points upon Luther’s own prologue to his 1522 German New Testament. This was not included in the 1526 printing of Tyndale’s work, . . .
 - “The list of contents of the New Testament follows a convention that existed within Lutheran circles at this stage, which regarded four New Testament works—Hebrews, James, Jude, and Revelation—as being of dubious authenticity. These were placed at the end of the contents, and not numbered. Tyndale appears to have been obliged to follow this convention by Peter Quentell himself. The 1526 printing abandoned this convention.
 - The 1525 printing included marginal notes. The pages that have survived included ninety such notes, suggesting that Tyndale envisaged a high level of comment on the text throughout the New Testament. The general style and tone of these notes is Lutheran. Some are cribs of Luther’s own notes . . . There are no such notes in the 1526 edition.” (McGrath, 72-73)
- “The first printed New Testament in the English language was completed in Worms in 1526 in a small octavo edition.” (Brake, 100) The difficulties and dangers involved in getting such volumes into England were almost as great as those which lay in the way of their distribution. The clergy opposed the new translation with all their might. Sir Thomas More was one who wrote violently against it.” (Broadbent, 248) In October 1526, Bishop Tunstall, the champion defender of the *Constitutions*, began confiscating the New Testaments as they were smuggled into England. Public burnings of the copies and punishment of all offenders blackened the spirits of the masses.” (Brake, 100)
- “While on the continent Tyndale moved further over to the Protestant position. In 1528 he issued *the Parable of the Wicked Mammon* in which he came out flatly for justification by faith, and took over most of the text of a sermon by Luther on the unjust steward” (Latourette, 799)

Henry VIII Breaks from Rome

- “If the Lutheran reformation began in a monastic cell, the Anabaptist reformation in a prayer meeting, and the Calvinistic reformation at a scholar's desk, then the English reformation began in the affairs of state, specifically with the problem of success to the royal throne.” (Shelley, 264)
- “In a sense England had two reformations, a constitutional one under King Henry VIII (1509-1547) and a theological one under the Puritans almost a century later. Under Henry nothing changed doctrinally. England simply rejected the authority of Rome. . . Succession to the throne

was the primary constitutional factor in the transformation of the Church in England into the Church of England.” (Shelley, 264-265)

- “. . . the schism in the church came over a royal problem—not over theological conflicts. Putting it simply, Henry VIII, King of England, revolted against the pope because he passionately desired the dark-eyed Anne Boleyn, a lady-in-waiting of the court. But that is only the headline. The important facts surround the royal succession to the English throne, not the personal lust of the king. Henry knew how to satisfy his lusts. He shared the customary royal pastime with mistresses and had at least one illegitimate son. His problem was he had no son born of his queen, Catherine of Aragon.” (Shelley, 265)
- “Catherine, daughter of Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain, had delivered five children but the only survivor beyond infancy was the princess Mary. . . England was in no mood to accept a girl as heir to the throne because the nation's only previous queen had occasioned bloody wars of succession. Thus, as Catherine grew older Henry grew more troubled. In 1525 the queen was forty and Henry pondered more and more the ways of the Almighty: “Am I under some curse of God?” (Shelley, 265)
- “The question arose because prior to their marriage Catherine had been Henry's deceased brother Arthur's wife—at least for several months—and Henry believed that the curse of God fell on any marriage to a brother's wife. According to Leviticus: “If a man shall take his brother's wife, it is an unclean thing . . . they shall be childless.” (Shelley, 265-266)
- “Naturally, the Church of Rome had also recognized the curse and at the time of Henry's wedding Pope Julius II had found grounds for granting special permission for the wedding. But with the passing of the barren years, Henry wondered if Julius had not overstepped his sacred rights.” (Shelley, 266)
- “In 1527 Henry asked the Holy Father, Clement VII, to revoke the special dispensation and declare the marriage of eighteen years invalid from the outset. The pope might have been open to the idea had not Catherine been the aunt of Charles V, Holy Roman Emperor and King of Spain. At that moment the pope could ill afford to offend the emperor, so he stalled. Henry's personal reasons for desiring the annulment were matched by the pope's political reasons for refusing the request.” (Shelley, 266)
- “The pace of negotiations between King Henry VIII of England and Pope Clement VII accelerated dramatically toward the end of 1532. Anne Boleyn, whom Henry wanted as a new wife to replace Catherine of Aragon, was pregnant. If the child, whom Henry desperately hoped would be a boy, was to be legitimate and a recognized heir to his throne, Henry needed to marry Anne and do so in a hurry. But still the pope had not consented to an annulment of Henry's marriage with Catherine. . .” (Noll, 176)

- “At this impasse, Henry VIII took what seemed to be the only course open to him. If the Pope would not give him a divorce, he would find someone who would. If finding someone else to ratify the divorce meant that England's church must break from the “universal” Roman Catholic Church, then break away it would.” (Noll, 176)
- “Henry's new archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Cranmer, was willing to ratify the divorce and marry Henry and Anne Boleyn without waiting for the Pope's permission. Even more important, Henry's Parliament, which had been in session intermittently since 1529, was willing to enact the legal measures required to back up the archbishop's actions . . . Shortly after Henry's marriage to Anne Boleyn in January 1533, Parliament took the next step of flatly prohibiting appeals of English church decisions to Rome.” (Noll, 177)
- “In 1534 Parliament took the final steps in what had become an inevitability. It first decreed that church taxes formerly paid to Rome should go to the monarch. It then passed an Act of Supremacy, which forever altered the situation of the church in England.” (Noll, 177)
 - “Albeit the King's Majesty justly and rightfully is and oweth to be the Supreme Head of the Church of England, . . . be it enacted by authority of this present Parliament, that the King our Sovereign Lord, his heirs and successor kings of this realm, shall be taken, accepted, and reputed the only Supreme Head on earth of the church of England, called *Anglicans Ecclesia*; . . .” (English Act of Supremacy, 1534)
- “Involved as the prose was, no one, then or now, mistook the consequences: England's church had broken from the “catholic” church; England's church belonged to the English (or at least to the English king). For opposing this and similar moves, dedicated Catholics like Bishop John Fisher and Sir Thomas More would go to the block. For urging Henry on toward a more complete Reformation, dedicated Protestants like Robert Barnes and John Frith would join them.” (Noll, 178)
- “The sole religious issue, then, in England's initial “reformation” was papal supremacy. Henry intended no break with the old faith. He considered himself, in fact, a guardian of Catholic dogma. . . After the break with Rome, England's orthodoxy remained intact. Henry continued to insist upon Catholic doctrine within the realm. . . The Statute of Six Articles in 1539 upheld such Catholic articles as clerical celibacy, the private mass, and confessions to a priest. Only two serious changes marked the new way within the Church of England. The first was the suppression of the monasteries; the second was the publication of the English Bible for use in the churches.” (Shelley, 267)
- Despite eventually allowing an English translation, early pioneers such as William Tyndale did not fare well under Henry's reign. “In 1530 one of Tyndale's tracts denounced Henry's attempt to dispose of Catherine.” (Jones, 116) With the help of a spy sent from England, Tyndale was captured at Vilvoord in Belgium in 1536. (Broadbent, 249) After being held in prison for

seventeen months, Tyndale was strangled and his body was burned. (Jones, 116) Tyndale's dying prayer was, "Lord! Open the king of England's eyes."

Consequences of Henry's Changes

- "Henry did not immediately get the male heir he sought. After Anne Boleyn gave birth to a daughter, Elizabeth, she fell out of Henry's favor. Eventually, she was charged with treason. . . imprisoned in the tower of London . . . and beheaded in 1536." (Beck, 493)
- Almost at once, Henry took a third wife, Jane Seymour. In 1537, she gave him a son named Edward but she died two weeks after giving birth. Henry married three more times but none of these marriages produced any children. (Beck, 493)
- "After Henry's death in 1547, each of his three children ruled England in turn. This created religious turmoil. Henry's son, Edward, became king when he was just nine years old. Too young to rule alone, Edward VI was guided by adult advisers. These men were devout Protestants, and they introduced Protestant reforms to the English Church. Almost constantly in ill health, Edward reigned for just six years." (Beck, 493)
- "Mary, the daughter of Catherine of Aragon, took the throne in 1553. She was a Catholic who returned the English Church to the rule of the pope. Her efforts met with considerable resistance, and she had many Protestants executed. When Mary died in 1558, Elizabeth, Anne Boleyn's daughter, inherited the throne." (Beck, 493)
- "Elizabeth I was determined to return her kingdom to Protestantism. In 1559, Parliament followed Elizabeth's wishes and set up the Church of England, or Anglican Church, with Elizabeth as its head. This was to be the only legal church in England." (Beck, 494)
- "Elizabeth decided to establish a state church that moderate Catholics and moderate Protestants might both accept. To please Protestants, priests in the Church of England were allowed to marry. They could deliver sermons in English, not Latin. To please the Catholics, the Church of England kept some of the trappings of the Catholic service . . ." (Beck, 494)

English Bibles Produced During the Reigns of English Monarchs

- Henry VIII (1509-1547)
 - Coverdale Bible (1535)—Myles Coverdale and John Rogers had remained loyal disciples of William Tyndale the last six years of Tyndale's life and carried the English Bible project forward after his death. Coverdale finished translating the Old Testament, and in

1535 he printed the first complete Bible in the English language. The Bible was printed on October 4, 1535, and is known as the Coverdale Bible.

- Matthews Bible (1537)—John Rodgers went on to print a second complete English Bible in 1537. It was, however, the first English Bible translated totally from the original Biblical languages of Hebrew and Greek. He printed it under the pseudonym “Thomas Matthew,” as a considerable part of this Bible was the translation of Tyndale. It is a composite made up of Tyndale’s Pentateuch and New Testament and Coverdale’s Bible and some of Rodger’s own translation of the text. It went through a nearly identical second-printing in 1549
- The Great Bible (1539)—in 1539, Thomas Cranmer, the Archbishop of Canterbury, hired Myles Coverdale at the bequest of King Henry VIII to publish the Great Bible. It became the first English Bible authorized for public use, as it was distributed to every church, chained to the pulpit, and a reader was even provided so that the illiterate could hear the Word of God in plain English. Cranmer’s Bible, published by Coverdale, was known as the Great Bible due to its size: a large pulpit folio measuring over 14 inches tall. Seven editions of this version were printed between April 1539 and December 1541.
- Edward VI (1547-1553)
 - No new translations. Tyndale (17 eds.), Coverdale (3eds.), Matthews (3 eds.), Great Bible (8 eds.)
- Mary I (1553-1558)
 - Geneva New Testament (1557)—the New Testament was completed in 1557 in Geneva Switzerland by English Protestants seeking refuge from Bloody Mary’s reign of terror. Mary had reinstated Catholicism and persecuted the Protestants and their Bible.
- Elizabeth I (1558-1603)
 - Geneva Bible (1560)—the complete Bible was first published in 1560. Due to a passage in Genesis describing the clothing that God fashioned for Adam and Eve upon expulsion from the Garden of Eden as “breeches,” some people referred to the Geneva Bible as the “Britches Bible.” The Geneva Bible was the first Bible to add numbered verses to the chapters, so that referencing specific passages would be easier. Every chapter was also accompanied by extensive marginal notes and references so thorough and complete that the Geneva Bible is also considered the first English study Bible. William Shakespeare quotes hundreds of times in his plays from the Geneva translation of the Bible. The Geneva Bible became the Bible of choice for over 100 years of English speaking Christians. Between 1560 and 1644 at least 144 editions of this Bible were published. The Geneva Bible retains over 90% of Tyndale’s original English translation. In fact, the

Geneva Bible remained more popular than the King James Version until decades after its original release in 1611. The Geneva holds the honor of being the first Bible taken to America, and the Bible of the Puritans and Pilgrims.

- Bishops' Bible (1568)—the success of the Geneva Bible made it impossible to go on using the Great Bible for reading in church; its deficiencies became all too obvious in the light of the new version. The Geneva, however, was too Calvinistic for the English clergy and was so popular among the lower classes that it was politically incorrect for public use in the pulpit. The Bishops Bible thus came on the scene in 1568. It was a pulpit Bible based on the Great Bible but it was too wooden and pedestrian a translation. It could not compete with the Geneva Bible and even Queen Elizabeth never officially recognized the translation. It was called the Bishops' Bible because it was produced by bishops. (Brake, 12-13; 2011 Great Lakes Grace Bible Conference Program, XXIII-XXV)

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