

July 2nd

William Tyndale, author of the English New Testament Translation used almost completely in the King James Bible was once on the Ten Most Wanted List of Henry VIII?

Tyndale was born in 1494, 11 years younger than Luther and educated at Oxford, the seminary for priests. He then went to Cambridge where he joined the Reformation. Tyndale seems to have come out of the Lollard tradition, which was strong in Gloucestershire of his birth. Tyndale denounced the practice of prayer to the saints. He also rejected the then-orthodox view that the scriptures could be interpreted only by approved clergy. He was a brilliant linguist learning at least 8 languages. After graduation, he decided to take a year to study, pray, think and get away from the academic world before taking the next step in life. He began to read the Greek New Testament of Erasmus and worked as tutor for a wealthy family as he did this meditation. It was during this time that he became convinced that England would never be evangelized using the Latin Bible. That's because few could read Latin and the church had many pat answers that erred in explaining the Latin in an authoritarian way. "It is impossible to establish the lay people in any truth, except the scripture were laid before their eyes in their mother tongue," he wrote. He tried to get permission to translate the Bible in English from the Bishop of London to no avail, so he left England, never to return. He went to Hamburg and likely Wittenberg. There is an entry in the matriculation registers of the University of Wittenberg of the name "Guillelmus Daltici ex Anglia", and this has been taken to be a Latinisation of "William Tyndale from England." There he translated the Greek New Testament into English and parts of the Old Testament from Hebrew. A partial English New Testament was printed in Germany in 1525.

A full edition of the New Testament was produced in 1526 by printer Peter Schoffler in Worms, a free imperial city then in the process of adopting Lutheranism. More copies were soon printed in Antwerp. It was smuggled from continental Europe into England and Scotland by putting pages between other pages in legal books. The translation was condemned in October 1526 by English Bishop Tunstall, who issued warnings to booksellers and had copies burned in public. Marius notes that the "spectacle of the scriptures being put to the torch... provoked controversy even amongst the faithful." Cardinal Wolsey condemned Tyndale as a heretic, and filed formal charges in 1529, signed by Henry VIII, King of England.

Tyndale was known to reside in Antwerp by that time, protected by sympathetic merchants. It took his pursuers seven years to find him but he was finally arrested in Brussels and thrown into a castle dungeon for 18 months before his trial. (Low Countries were part of the Hapsburg Empire at that time.) A long list of charges was drawn up against him. Worst among them—he maintained that faith alone justifies and that belief in forgiveness of sins is sufficient to accept the mercy and forgiveness of God and salvation. He was executed in 1536 by strangulation and his body burned at the stake. His last words were "Lord, open the King of England's eyes!"

Actually the Lord had. Not realizing the author, Henry read Tyndale's 1528 "Obedience of a Christian Man" in which it was advocated that the Monarch of a country, not the pope, should rule the church. That was what Henry quoted in 1534 when he proclaimed reform, married Ann Boleyn and extracted England from Catholicism. When the first New Testament in English was presented to Henry, he proclaimed, "In God's name let it go abroad among the people." Tyndale's New Testament became that of the Bishops Bible and the Great Bible – Henry decreed that every church in the land should display at least one English Bible and read from it. Tyndale's dying prayer was answered. Concerning Henry, it is ironic that God has use for an unwitting leader as well.

Tyndale did accurate work. In 1611, the King James Version was completed by 47 scholars. 90% of the wording of the New Testament is Tyndale's original version and 75% of the wording of the New Testament of the 1952 Revised Standard Version is also Tyndale's legacy.