



God's Bestseller: William Tyndale, Thomas More, and the Writing of the English Bible---A Story of Martyrdom and Betrayal

Brian Moynahan

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The English Bible---the most familiar book in our language---is the product of a man who was exiled, vilified, betrayed, then strangled, then burnt.

William Tyndale left England in 1524 to translate the word of God into English. This was heresy, punishable by death. Sir Thomas More, hailed as a saint and a man for all seasons, considered it his divine duty to pursue Tyndale. He did so with an obsessive ferocity that, in all probability, led to Tyndale's capture and death.

The words that Tyndale wrote during his desperate exile have a beauty and familiarity that still resonate across the English-speaking world: "Death, where is thy sting?...eat, drink, and be merry...our Father which art in heaven."

His New Testament, which he translated, edited, financed, printed, and smuggled into England in 1526, passed with few changes into subsequent versions of the Bible. So did those books of the Old Testament that he lived to finish.

Brian Moynahan's lucid and meticulously researched biography illuminates Tyndale's life, from his childhood in England, to his death outside Brussels. It chronicles the birth pangs of the Reformation, the wrath of Henry VIII, the sympathy of Anne Boleyn, and the consuming malice of Thomas More. Above all, it reveals the English Bible as a labor of love, for which a man in an age more spiritual than our own willingly gave his life.

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Caroline Greeven says

I am not religious and have no interest in the Catholic Church, the bible or religious dogma in general and yet this is still one of the most profoundly moving books I have ever read. I think about the ideas, the personalities and the questions this book raises on a regular basis. It is a truly gripping description of the power of the written word and the bravery of people who sought to share those words (knowing they risked their lives to do so)..

What I really love about this book are the passages about language and the ways in which Tyndale helped shape "modern English." There are large sections of this book that just sing with the power of words, and how they can be used to both corrupt and reveal the ideas behind them. The author also makes the case that Tyndale profoundly changed the implications of the Bible-specifically in using the word "love" rather than "charity." Two distinctly different concepts.

Laura Mathieson says

It's a scholarly book, a biography of the first person to translate the Bible into English. This was considered heresy at the time, especially by Thomas More, who hated Tyndale and brought great passion to bear in order to catch and burn him. There's a lot of intrigue in the book, meticulously researched, but the author keeps us straight through all the switching allegiances. Also fascinating are the explanations of how the individual words were used to create a crisis in the Church - how using "the congregation" instead of "the Church" was a direct challenge to the whole concept of people needing an intercession between them and God. Tyndale's Bible meant that for the first time ever the middles classes could read for themselves the Word of God - and make up their own minds.

Not an easy book, dense and full of facts, but absorbing and informative - I thoroughly enjoyed it.

Anna says

2.5 stars. Several people recommended "Fire in the Bones" by Wilcox as a biography of William Tyndale, but it was not available at our library so I got this instead. It is a history book, but to me it is fascinating to discover all the political intrigue that went on to try and stop the printing of the Bible into English.

**I am not quite done with it, and I would add a few more comments about the book. The author really tries to make sure he quotes from original sources, but at times it is hard to read the old English and it can be a little dry. The opening chapter "On the Burning of Heretics" was my favorite because it was eye opening to see how reactionary the Catholic church was to even comments that were considered blasphemous. I also

think it is fascinating to read how Thomas More was a major persecutor of the Reformation. In my mind I picture the stalwart man of integrity depicted in the play and book "A Man for all Seasons," but he was also a self-proclaimed enemy of the reformation.

All in all the book is interesting, but in parts it can be rather dry.

Daniel says

Excellent read. So happy that I saw this on the shelves as I was hunting for something else to read. Reveals the lively drama that played out in the early 1500's as so-called Christians took to burning people who questioned authority. The very drama of such a practice ensured (burnings were very dramatic and ritualistic) that the martyrs would be remembered long after their grisly demise.

I was surprised and intrigued to learn more of the character of Tyndale and his chief adversary, the man for all seasons, Thomas More. Tyndale was exceedingly sweet and tender with friends, and gifted with a wonderful sense of languages: his translations are a huge percentage of what's in our Bibles today. Yet he could be very sharp against anyone who opposed him or did not give him the respect he thought he deserved. More, while fiercely loyal and very tender with his daughter Meg, was consumed with a desire to burn heretics. His zeal followed him to the grave, as it was likely his agent (a detestable fellow called Phillips) who at last outfoxed Tyndale and betrayed him to a trial and subsequent strangling and burning. More was cunning in worldly ways, and fanatical in his adherence to his own point of view (bitterly insulting anyone who cared to offer a contrary point of view, if they hadn't the political power to hurt him). At last, his courage got him in tight quarters, when he crossed the equally dangerous (but more powerful) "defender of the faith" (and ultimately underminer of it), King Henry VIII.

How real and fresh everything seemed (and was) to these people who lived through this time of changes. What a debt of gratitude we owe the courageous Tyndale for his diligent efforts to bring the word of God to even the ploughboy, that all may know God and come unto Him.

Joe Schweitzer says

It took a few restarts for me to read this. Some of the historical facts were hard to grasp at first. But I am forever grateful for the protestant movement and their sacrifice to get the Bible accessible, translated and into the hands of the common man.

Rob Markley says

I'm filling this in a long time after reading and afraid it didn't leave much of an impression

Andrew Krupnicki says

I myself am not religious, and I chose to read this book from a translator's perspective. It turned out to be much more of a page-turner than I had anticipated; Tyndale, his friends and enemies alike, were given new life and purpose through Moynahan's descriptive telling of their beliefs and struggles. I have come to admire Tyndale and his "fugitive" work (although our worldviews are quite different). An excellent read for anyone interested in the development of the English language, the Reformation, or Christian faith in general.

John Baker says

A surprisingly good read, given its a history book disguised as a near-thriller! All sorts of interesting stuff happening through this time period.

I was surprised (should not have been but there you are) that this first major piece of widely-read publishing in English brought concordances into fashion, to aid the reader. I realized that the difficulty in reading "olde English" is there were no common spellings for words used in daily speech so pretty much anything goes. A 'u' might be in place of a 'y' or a 'v' and context is the only guide. The OED did not come a moment too soon.

Kirshaq says

Loved this book. I will never read the Bible again and not think of William Tyndale and his belief in making the Bible available to everyone. He gave his life for the Bible. Highly recommended to anyone who reads the Bible.

Trelesa says

I really enjoyed the history of William Tyndale's struggle to translate and publish the Bible into English. It really is appalling how viciously he and other supporters were opposed. I would imagine it might be a little hard to read if you are Catholic, as this history shows that the Catholic church actively pursued with violent efforts the suppression of the English translation, for reasons that appear to be quite self-serving.

I can see honest, pure intent in both Tyndale and More. However, knowing More's deadly means and violent wishes towards those supporting the English publication, it is a little hard to find him so inspiring as I remember in the movie "A Man For All Seasons". Tyndale, on the other hand, remains an amazingly inspiring example.

I would give it 4.5 stars if possible. The information was well researched and well presented. Probably because of the subject matter and excerpts with old English spelling, it was hard to get through at times. Well worth it, though.

G. Lawrence says

Brilliant. A fascinating account of Tyndale, his work, and his nemesis, Thomas More. Engagingly told, lively, fair and balanced. Excellent work. I'd give it ten stars if I could!

Michele says

I really like to read scriptures and they are important to me. This book helped me appreciate good ol' William Tyndale ever so much more. I knew he did a lot for me but you get an in depth look at what a sweet, tender-hearted, pro woman, unselfish, man he was.

It wasn't always easy reading and it took time to get through to be sure, but I am very glad I pushed through and finished. It was worth it.

I'll probably never feel the same about the Bible again and will continue to have a deep respect for this man. One thing that surprised me: He identified himself as a heretic in the first line of the introduction. 134

179: He adored the Bible, as God's word and it sparkled and refreshed him as writing, as a brilliant tale well told. 'This is a book worthy to be read in day and night and never to be out of hands' ".

Jefferson Vann says

This book is filled with historical details, but reads like a detective novel. The personalities of the characters come alive as Moynahan examines the facts, and makes his case. It is the story of two relentless opponents, both on a collision course. It travels back to the 16th century, and reveals the thoughts and emotions of heroes and villains.

Laura says

Loved this book. Moynahan really brings the historical events to life. I knew that William Tyndale was burned for translating the bible into English, but that means more to me now after having read about the political and religious tensions in Europe at the beginning of the reformation. One comes to really admire and love Tyndale for his brilliance as a translator, his humility as a Christian, his dedication to his life's work, and his sacrifice. He's now on my short list of people I'd like to meet in the afterlife. Meanwhile, I strongly recommend this biography.

Eliza says

This is definitely a very interesting book! I asked for it as a birthday gift from my in-laws (they let me pick one) last year because I have a fascination for the Renaissance, particularly the Reformation. This book tells the story of William Tyndale, the first man to, at the time illegally, translate the Bible into English. His translation is still the base for many modern translations. The book traces his footsteps from Gloucestershire,

where he was born, and the Low Countries and Germany, where he went to escape his enemy Thomas More. In general it was a fascinating story and book, although i feel Brian Moynahan sometimes spent a bit too long explaining certain aspects of life at the time, or certain parts of Tyndale's Bible translation. I noticed myself skimming paragraphs sometimes. But apart from that, great book, learned a lot!
