

to restrain the hot-heads or encourage Elizabeth's native caution." (274) At Yellow Ford in Ulster, English troops under Henry Bagenal suffered a terrible defeat; the news reached Whitehall during Burghley's funeral. Essex was soon sent to Ireland to subdue the Tyrone rebellion and, with Cecil gone, Elizabeth raised the largest expeditionary force of her reign, numbering more than 25,000 over the next three years. She proclaimed, "This is therefore the cause that after so long patience we have been compelled to take resolution to reduce that kingdom to obedience by using an extraordinary power and force against them." (287) As history and Berleth show, her eventual victory was pyrrhic. By the time the last and greatest of the Irish "twilight lords" had surrendered, the Queen was three days in her grave, two waves of English settlers had been exterminated, almost half the Irish people were dead, and much of Ireland had become a barren wilderness.

## **The Voice of God**

---

**William Tyndale: A Biography**  
by David Daniell. 1994.

---

*Reviewed by Warren Hope, Ph.D. Dr. Hope is writing a life and study of the British poet Norman Cameron.*

One of the most enlightening events in English history took place on October 24, 1526. On that date, Cuthbert Tunstall, then the Bishop of London, delivered a remarkable sermon at St. Paul's. No copy of the sermon has been preserved, unfortunately, but the substance of it and some of its supporting arguments were recorded by witnesses. As a result, it is still possible to gain a sense of the effect of the talk. Tunstall raised his voice that day to denounce a book and to call for the collection and burning of copies of it. The book, he contended, was an heretical work, full of errors—errors of the kind that could mislead readers into damnation. In sum, the book constituted "strange learning" and was not to be tolerated. Within days of this talk, servants of the Church and State brought copies of the pestiferous book to St. Paul's and publicly put them to the torch. In time, people found with the book in their possession were also publicly burned.

What handiwork of the devil was it that so exercised the Bishop of London?  
The New Testament.

Nothing to my mind so clearly shows the contradictions in Tudor society, the strains caused by the clash between what was once called the Dark Ages and the Renaissance, than this single event. Do not misunderstand me, though.

---

## The Elizabethan Review

---

Tunstall did not want *all* of the New Testaments in the realm gathered up and burned. He did not want to eradicate the gospel from the land. No. Latin Testaments could, of course, flourish and be of use to priests and nobles in their good works. Greek testaments should, of course, be available for the perusal of scholars. What Tunstall objected to was the New Testament in English, the translation by his fellow humanist, William Tyndale, the man who, for English speakers, deserves to be known as the voice of God. For it was Tyndale who gave God his voice in English. And the Bishop of London could not permit that voice to reach the people of England. After all, next to God, Bishops and Kings, Cardinals and nobles look pretty puny and can sound ridiculous.

Tyndale, although a priest, was a man of God rather than a man of the Church—and while there need not be a difference between these two, there certainly can be. Tyndale seems to have possessed the attributes later urged in the words of an old evangelical hymn—

Dare to be a Daniel,  
Dare to stand alone,  
Dare to have a purpose firm,  
Dare to make it known.

Tyndale fixed on his firm purpose early in his career, made it known, and no doubt realized that it would require him to, at times at least, stand alone—with only his faith in God to support him. That story, first told by Richard Webb, is repeated by Tyndale's most recent and best biographer, David Daniell:

...Master Tyndale happened to be in the company of a learned man, and in communing and disputing with him drove him to that issue that the learned man said, we were better be without God's law than the Pope's: Master Tyndall hearing that, answered him, I defy the Pope and all his laws, and said, 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.

This story—and there is no reason to think it is apocryphal—not only states Tyndale's purpose but also identifies his audience: "a boy that driveth the plough." Tyndale's aim was to allow ordinary laboring people to have direct, unfiltered, uninterpreted contact with the word of God. Why? There can be little doubt about that, given his willingness to "defy the Pope and all his laws." He wanted to break up the Church's monopoly on salvation, a monopoly based, as Bishop Tunstall's stance shows, on the distortion of the word of God. Tyndale was convinced that salvation comes only from faith, a faith inspired by familiarity with God's word, and open to all regardless of rank, wealth or leaning. The rites and rituals, the superstitions and dogmas of the Church meant less than wind to Tyndale when compared with the word of God. "Let not your hearts be troubled," Tyndale wrote, delivering his master's message

---

## Hope

---

in words that could reach and relieve a 16th century ploughboy as well as a 20th century commuter.

Tyndale was, more than anything else, an educator. Education, at root, means to lead out—to lead out of darkness into the light, to lead out of Egypt and slavery into Canaan and liberty. Tyndale exemplifies this full rooted meaning of the word. He lived in a time for which transition is far too weak a word. Feudalism fell and capitalism rose, Roman Catholicism weakened and Protestantism strengthened, monarchies were shaken and republics flourished, a manuscript culture was replaced by the printing press, literacy spread and gullibility diminished, and all of these shifts mirror a shift in the relation between God and men. With direct access to the word of God, men were free to work out their salvation as individuals, communing directly with God, rather than relying on the intermediaries of an institution, the Church. This relationship between God and men—a relationship based on the word rather than the image and therefore the distant and invisible rather than the local and readily graspable—influenced the relations between men, having a leveling and liberating effect in economics, politics, the arts, as well as religion. Tyndale's role in this educational movement was crucial. David Daniell provides us with an understanding of how he prepared himself for that role and how he conducted himself in it to the end, when he was strangled and burned at the stake in Brussels as a heretic—an act performed by the Emperor Charles V but financed by English gold.

Daniell is a match for his rich, complex and controversial subject because his knowledge is as great as his sympathy. The result, therefore, is neither an ignorant praising of Tyndale nor a learned attack on him, but rather a sober evaluation of his immense contribution to the life and culture of the English-speaking world—as translator, writer, theologian, thinker, and remarkable man of God.

Daniell traces the background of Tyndale's family, explores his early life and influences in Gloucestershire, and carefully maps the traditions, tropes and thinkers he would have come in contact with at Magdalen College, Oxford. He also examines the intricacies of international publishing (much of Tyndale's mature life was spent on the Continent), the complexities and implications of the period's theological disputes, and the state of learning at the time. Daniell demonstrates extraordinary patience in gathering evidence, good judgment in weighing evidence, and writes with clarity and wit. His book is a fundamental contribution to our knowledge of the Tudor period and a model for other biographers. I can think of no better introduction to the life and work of one of humanity's heroes and benefactors than this book.