

**‘W.T. To the Reader’: Tyndale’s Story of His Translation**  
**(the preface to Tyndale’s translation of Genesis in his Pentateuch, printed in 1530),**  
**included in Dewey M. Beegle, God’s Word into English: The Adventure of Bible**  
**Translation (New York: Harper Brothers, 1960)**  
*(the original spelling is somewhat modernized)*

When I had translated the New Testament, I added an epistle unto the latter end, in which I desired them that were learned to amend [it] if aught were found amiss. But our malicious and wily hypocrites which are so stubborn and hard hearted in their wicked abominations that it is not possible for them to amend any thing at all (as we see by daily experience when their both livings and doings are rebuked with the truth) say, some of them that it is impossible to translate the scripture into English, some that it is not lawful for the lay people to have it in their mother tongue, some that it would make them all heretics, as it would no doubt from many things which they of long time have falsely taught, and that it is the whole cause wherefore they forbid it, though they other cloaks pretend. And some or rather every one say that it would make them rise against the king, whom they themselves (unto their damnation) never yet obeyed. And lest the temporal rulers should see their falsehood, if the scripture cam to light, causeth them so to lie.

And as for my translation in which they affirm unto the lay people (as I have heard say) to be I wot not how many thousand heresies, so that it cannot be mended or corrected, they have yet taken so great pain to examyne it, and to compare it unto that they would fain have it and to their own imaginations and juggling terms, and to have somewhat to rail at, and under that cloak to blaspheme the truth, that they might with as little labour (as I suppose) have translated the most part of the bible. For they which in times paste were wont to look on no more scripture then they found in their duns [the commentaries of Duns Scotus] or such like devilish doctrine, have yet now so narrowly looked on my translation, that there is not so much as one I therein if it lack a title over his bed, but they have noted it, and number it unto the ignorant people for an heresy. Finally in this they be all agreed to drive you from the knowledge of the scripture, and that ye shall not have the text thereof in the mother tongue, and to keep the world still in darkness, to the intent they might sit in the conscience of the people, through vain superstition and false doctrine, to satisfy their filthy lusts their proud ambition, and insatiable covetousness, and to exalt their own honour above king & emperour, yea and above god himself.

A thousand books had they lever to be put forth against their abominable doings and doctrine, than that the scripture should come to light. For as long as they may keep that down, they will so darken the right way with the mist of their sophistry, and so tangle them that ether rebuke or despise their abominations with arguments philosophy and with worldly similitude and apparent reasons of natural wisdom. And with wresting the scripture unto their own purpose clean contrary unto the process, order and meaning of the text, and so delude them in descanting upon

it with allegories, and amaze them expounding it in many senses before the unlearned lay people (when it hath but one simple literal sense whose light the owls cannot abide) that though thou feel in thine heart and art sure how that all is false that they say, yet couldst thou not solve their subtle riddles.

Which thing only moved me to translate the new testament. Because I had 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: for else whatsoever truth is taught them, these enemies of all truth quench it again, partly with the smoke of their bottomless pit whereof thou readest Apocalypse ix. that is, with apparent reasons of sophistry and traditions of their own making, founded without ground of scripture, and partly in juggling with the text, expounding it in such a sense as is impossible to gather of the text, if thou see the process order and meaning thereof.

And even in the bishop of London's house I intended to have done it. For when I was so turmoiled in the country where I was that I could no longer there dwell (the process whereof were to long here to rehearse) I this wise thought in my self, this I suffer because the priests of the country be unlearned, as god it knoweth there are a full ignorant sort which have seen no more Latin than that they read in their portesses [breviaries or prayers for the canonical hours] and missals which yet many of them can scarcely read (except it be Albertus [i.e. Albertus Magnus] de secretis mulierum in which yet, though they be never so sorely learned, they pour day and night and make notes therein and all to teach the midwives as they say, and Linwood [William Lyndewode's Provinciale, a digest of English canon law written in 1433] a book of constitutions to gather tithes, mortuaries [customary gifts claimed from the heirs of dead parishioners], offerings, customs, and other pillage, which they call not theirs, but God's part and the duty of holy church, to discharge their consciences withall: for they are bound that they shall not diminish, but increase all thing unto the utmost of their powers) and therefore (because they are thus unlearned, thought I) when they come together to the alehouse, which is their preaching place, they affirm that my sayings are heresy. And besides that they add to of their own heads which I never spake, as the manner is to prolong the tale to short the time withall, and accuse me secretly to the chancellor [i.e. the Bishop's Chancellor of the diocese] and other bishop's officers. And indeed when I came before the chancellor, he threatened me grievously, and reviled me and rated me as though I had been a dog, and laid to my charge whereof there could be none accuser brought forth (as their manner is not to bring forth the accuser) and yet all the priests of the country were that same day there. As I this thought the bishop of London came to my remembrance whom Erasmus (whose tongue maketh of little gnats great elephants and lifteth up above the stars whosoever giveth him a little exhibition) prayseth exceedingly among other in

his annotations on the new testament for his great learning. Then thought I, if I might come to this man's service, I were happy. And so I got me to London, and through the acquaintance of my master came to Sir Harry Gilford the king's graces controller, and brought him an oration of Isocrates which I had translated out of Greek into English, and desired him to speak unto my lord of London forme, which he also did as he showed me, and willed me to write an epistle to my lord, and to go to him myself which I also did, and delivered my epistle to a servant of his own, one William Hebilthwayte, a man of mine old acquaintance. But god which knoweth what is within hypocrites, saw that I was beguiled, and that the council was not the next way unto my purpose. And therefore he got me no favor in my lord's sight.

Whereupon my lord answered me, his house was full, he had more then he could well find, and advised me to seek in London, where he said I could not lack a service. And so in London I abode almost a year, and marked the course of the world, and heard our praters, I would say our preachers how they boasted themselves and their high authority and beheld the pomp of our prelates and how beside they were as they yet are, to set peace and unite in the world (though it be not possible for them that walk in darkness to country long in peace, for they can not but ether stumble or dash themselves at one thing or another that shall clean unquiet altogether) and saw things whereof I defer to speak at this time, and understood at the last not only that there was no room in my lord of London's palace to translate the new testament, but also that there was no place to do it in all England, as experience doth openly declare.

[ ... ] Notwithstanding yet I submit this book and all other that I have other made or translated, or shall in time to come (if it be god's will that I shall further labour in his harvest) unto all them that submit themselves unto the word of god, to be corrected of them, yea and moreover to be disallowed & also burnt, if it seem worthy when they have examined it with the Hebrew, so that they first put forth of their own translating another that is more correct.