

# Homily for William Tyndale, Priest and Reformation Martyr, 1536

October 6, 2020

By the Reverend Stephen Gerth

*James 1:21–25, Psalm 1, John 12:44–50*

When I sat down to read Morning Prayer today, I found myself sad. Last week's *Angelus* referred to the cruel and unchristian executions—burning at the stake—of Hugh Latimer and Nicholas Ridley, bishops who opposed the return of Roman Catholicism under Queen Mary Tudor. Executions of Christians by other Christians for heresy began in the year 385. The first was a bishop in the country we know as Spain. His name was Priscillian. The last person to be burned at the stake for heresy in England was Edward Wightman, on the eleventh of April in 1612.<sup>1</sup> He was a Puritan.<sup>2</sup>

William Tyndale was born circa 1494, according to *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*.<sup>3</sup> He studied at Oxford and Cambridge. While at Cambridge, he came to believe that the Bible should determine what was

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/101686171/edward-wightman>, (accessed 6 October 1536).

<sup>2</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edward\\_Wightman](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edward_Wightman), (accessed 6 October 2020).

<sup>3</sup> *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, (ODCC) 2ed. (New York: Oxford University Press 1978), s.v. "Tyndale, William," 1400–01.

believed and taught and that people should read the Bible in their everyday language.<sup>4</sup> Tyndale had a real gift for languages. He was determined to translate the Bible into English. When he found no church support in his native land, he fled to Hamburg—Germany. Later, his exile continued in Antwerp—now Belgium. There that agents of Henry VIII kidnapped him, but his execution was done under the authority of the Charles V.<sup>5</sup> Charles was the head of the House of Hapsburg, Holy Roman Emperor and Archduke of Austria, Lord of the Netherlands, and King of Castile and Aragon. His empire, not the later British, gave us the expression, *el imperio donde nunca se pone el sol*—the empire where the sun never sets.<sup>6</sup>

Concerning his work, the Oxford Dictionary says, “[Tyndale’s] Biblical translations, made direct from the Greek and Hebrew into straightforward, vigorous English, remain the basis of both the [Authorized—King James—Version completed in 1611] and the [Revised Version—English Revised Version

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/biography/William-Tyndale>, (accessed 6 October 2020).

<sup>5</sup> Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Christianity: The First Three Thousand Years* (New York: Viking, 2010), 626.

<sup>6</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles\\_V,\\_Holy\\_Roman\\_Emperor](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_V,_Holy_Roman_Emperor), (accessed 6 October 2020).

completed in 1895]<sup>7</sup>—and I would add our *American Revised Standard Version*.

In the Letter to the Galatians, Paul writes, in the midst of what seems to have been a bitter struggle in a congregation that he gathered about Jewish law’s role for followers of Christ. He’s not gentle with those who demand gentile converts to living also according to the law. In Galatians, we learn that Paul called out Peter for stopping to share meals with Gentile Christians when pressured to do so by Jewish Christians in that community. As the letter approaches its close, Paul writes, “Brothers and sisters, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness . . . Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ . . . Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for whatever a person sows, that the person will also reap.”<sup>8</sup> Theological arguments are never resolved by cruelty or violence, perhaps only by love, forgiveness, and grace.

✠ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son,  
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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<sup>7</sup> ODCC, s.v. “Tyndale, William,” 1400–01.

<sup>8</sup> Galatians 6:1a, 2, 7.