Tyndale's Gospel of St John: Translation and the Theology of Style

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ABSTRACT

Building on Rowan Williams's claims about William Tyndale's importance for English Reformation theology, this paper outlines a theological matrix within which we can situate and interpret Tyndale's translation work. Focusing on Tyndale's translation of the fourth Gospel in his 1534 New Testament, the central claim is that in light of more recent developments in biblical interpretation, the very style of Tyndale's translation has evident theological implications with compelling resonances for contemporary Anglicanism. This analysis of the theology of Tyndale's literary style also attempts to contribute to the ongoing reassessment of Tyndale's reputation. Tyndale's biographer, David Daniell, has lamented that 'Tyndale as theologian…has been at best neglected and at worst twisted out of shape', while 'Tyndale as conscious [literary] craftsman has been…denied'. As a close reading of Tyndale's Gospel of John shows, Tyndale the theologian and Tyndale the craftsman can and should be approached as one and the same.

KEYWORDS: William Tyndale, translation, Reformation theology, literary style, Anglicanism, Rowan Williams

Early in his acclaimed history of the Reformation, Diarmaid MacCulloch remarks incisively on the effect that the encounter with *koiné* Greek had on readers in Western Christendom, 'when scholars heard for the first time the unmediated urgency of the angular street Greek poured out by …Paul of Tarsus as he wrestled with the problem of how Jesus represented God'.[1] As MacCulloch describes it:

1. Diarmaid MacCulloch, *The Reformation: A History* (New York: Viking Press, 2003), p. 80.

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> The struggle sounded so much less decorous in the original than in Latin that the shock was bound to stir up new movements in the Church and suggest that it was not so authoritative or normative an interpreter of scripture as it claimed. If there is any one explanation why the Latin West experienced a Reformation and the Greek-speaking lands to the east did not, it lies in this experience of listening to a new voice in the New Testament text.[2]

A certain degree of hyperbole notwithstanding, MacCulloch's point is accurate and arresting: the very style of the Christian Scriptures in their original language had far-reaching theological and ecclesial consequences. In MacCulloch's example, the distinctive character and rhetorical power of Paul's own Greek opens the ears to fresh dimensions of the faith. For the Latin West in the aftermath of the Middle Ages, the Greek made all things new. Of course, this is not to downplay the thoroughgoing ways in which the *content* of the New Testament was newly understood in the sixteenth century, but the *style* of the New Testament —to employ an admittedly somewhat artificial distinction—played a major role in itself. It is a detail perhaps too seldom appreciated in Reformation historiography.

In light of MacCulloch's observation we can grasp better what lies behind Rowan Williams's rather surprising remark about the great translator William Tyndale, when he characterizes him as 'the true theological giant of the English Reformation'.[3] Although recognized as a trail-blazing translator, Tyndale is rarely acknowledged as a major player in Reformation theology *per se*. Williams's subsequent essay offers the beginnings of a reassessment, outlining a centerpiece of the reformer's theology from the treatise *The Parable of the Wicked Mammon*, specifically, how for Tyndale 'We are delivered by Christ from slavery into freedom; and that freedom is experienced and expressed as indebtedness—not to God, but to each other.'[4] But Williams's most provocative comments, which he chooses not to unpack, are found near his essay's end:

> By common consent, [Tyndale] achieves a vigour and a music in his work as a translator which no one has really rivaled in our language. And I should want to say in conclusion that *the best testimony to his vision of communities and relationships that are not abstract or formal is the language he heard and wrote*. He does not write for rootless individuals but for persons with flesh and history. The Bible is no record of God's will for abstract

2. MacCulloch, *The Reformation*, p. 80.

3. Rowan Williams, 'Introduction', in *Anglican Identities* (Cambridge: Cowley Publications, 2003), p. 3.

4. Williams, 'William Tyndale (c. 1494–1536): The Christian Society', in *Anglican Identities* (Cambridge: Cowley Publications, 2003), p. 12.

> fraternity but the story of peoples and families working justice in their concrete situations and finding universal vision only through the specifics of local and particular callings…. Not the least of Tyndale's gifts is to remind us what angular and particular persons sound like when they are praying, arguing or wooing.[5]

Williams's point is that the rhetorical qualities of Tyndale's biblical translations exemplify a key element in his vision of Christian society; in other words, as in the case of Paul's Greek mentioned above, style itself can and does have theological effects. I propose to take up where Williams leaves off. The purpose of this paper is to outline a theological matrix within which we can situate and interpret Tyndale's translation work, and then to offer a reading of a small part of Tyndale's 1534 New Testament—specifically, selections from his version of the fourth Gospel—that illustrates the viability and value of approaching Tyndale in this way. My central claim is that in light of more recent developments in theological reflection and biblical interpretation, the style of Tyndale's translation has evident theological implications with compelling resonances for Anglicanism. Moreover, the analysis of the theology of Tyndale's literary style can make a modest contribution to the ongoing rectification of the treatment Tyndale has received over the centuries, as lamented by his biographer, David Daniell. 'Tyndale as theologian, making a Reformation theology that was just becoming discernibly English when he was killed, has been at best neglected and at worst twisted out of shape', asserts Daniell. 'Tyndale as conscious [literary] craftsman', he continues, 'has been not just neglected, but denied'.[6] As a close reading of Tyndale's Gospel of John shows, Tyndale the theologian and Tyndale the craftsman should be approached as one and the same.[7]

5. Williams, 'William Tyndale', p. 23 (emphasis mine).

6. David Daniell, *William Tyndale: A Biography* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), p. 2. By quoting Daniell here I do not mean to imply a lack of work on Tyndale as translator since the publication of his biography. See, for example, Brian Cummings, 'The Theology of Translation: Tyndale's Grammar', in John T. Day, Eric Lund, and Anne M. O'Donnell (eds.), *Word, Church, and State: Tyndale Quincentenary Essays* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1998), pp. 36-59, and Morna D. Hooker, 'Tyndale's "Heretical" Translation', *Reformation* 2 (1997), pp. 127-42. I greatly benefited from both articles in preparing this essay. Important earlier works on Tyndale's translations include (classically) B.F. Westcott, *A General View of the History of the English Bible* (London: MacMillan, 3rd edn, 1905); J.F. Mozley, *William Tyndale* (London: Oxford University Press, 1937); and Gerald Hammond, *The Making of the English Bible* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1983).

7. Tyndale's Lutheranism, often overstated by critics, plays a large role in the ignoring of his theology, but David Daniell's biography does an exceptional job of tracing out Tyndale's frequent and significant departures from Luther's thinking

Theological Aesthetics and Translation

The Bible is by any estimation one of the great works of world literature, but what does the term 'world literature' mean? It is a thorny question, the possible answers to which are often fraught with a discomfiting combination of hubris, dilettantism, and literary essentialism. The comparativist David Damrosch, however, has recently proposed several characteristics of 'world literature' that point toward new directions for understanding the category. The cornerstone of Damrosch's claims is that world literature has less to do with a mode of writing than with a mode of *reading*, and particularly with reading that consciously negotiates cultural boundaries in a way that allows the text to yield refractively new and creative interpretations not possible without such border crossings. Accordingly, as Damrosch says, 'world literature is writing that *gains* in translation'.[8] Translation is itself a mode of reading and interpretation, and what Damrosch has to say about it serves as an

(pp. 155-280). The leading study of Tyndale's theology is now Ralph S. Werrell's groundbreaking book, *The Theology of William Tyndale* (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co., 2006). Brief but interesting remarks on Tyndale the theologian are also to be found in Carl R. Trueman, 'The Theology of the English Reformers', in David Bagchi and David C. Steinmetz (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Reformation Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 163-65. See also John T. Day, Eric Lund, and Anne M. O'Donnell (eds.), *Word, Church, and State: Tyndale Quincentenary Essays* (Washington: Catholic University Press, 1998). J.R.H. Moorman, *A History of the Church of England* (Harrisburg: Morehouse Publishing, 3rd edn, 1973), p. 172, provides a traditional (and not quite internally consistent) view, in which Tyndale's theology is ignored except insofar as it 'unfortunately' rears its ugly head in 'glosses and notes of a strongly protestant flavour' found in Tyndale's insufficiently 'plain' translation. One might also compare the entry for Tyndale in the glossary in Stephen Sykes, John Booty, and Jonathan Knight (eds.), *The Study of Anglicanism* (London: SPCK; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, rev. edn, 1998), p. 506, wherein one learns mainly that Tyndale is 'popularly known as "the English Luther"', his translations were 'printed on the continent in difficult and fugitive circumstances', he 'was given help by expatriate English sympathizers', and his translation 'was publicly burned in London'. Certainly a 'seminal contributor to the English Reformation' can be made to appear all but inconsequential.

8. David Damrosch, *What Is World Literature?* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), p. 288 (emphasis mine). The literature on translation theory is vast. Valuable introductions to the field include Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi, *Post-Colonial Translation: Theory and Practice* (London: Routledge, 1999), and Susan Bassnett, *Translation Studies* (London: Routledge, 2nd edn, 2002). For a relevant understanding of 'translation' in the broad sense, and in the context of the missionary movement, see Andrew F. Walls, 'The Ephesian Moment: At a Crossroads in Christian History', in *The Cross-cultural Process in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission and Appropriation of Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), pp. 72-81.

effective starting point for a consideration of Tyndale: 'In an excellent translation, the result is not the loss of an unmediated original vision but instead a *heightening of the naturally creative interaction* of reader and text.'[9] Surely Tyndale produced 'excellent translations', in many ways unsurpassed in English thereafter, and although some translators can certainly work against such 'creative interaction', Tyndale was not one of them. Is it not worth considering how his (specifically) English Bible manages to invite and increase 'the naturally creative interaction of reader and text'? It seems a reasonable supposition, partly because a broader readership in England could encounter the Bible in the vernacular than ever could in Latin (still less in Greek or Hebrew), but no less because that very readership was encountering no clumsy, clouded 'translationese', but a successful work of art in English.[10]

Before proceeding to Tyndale's writing, however, it is important to reframe theologically these matters of art and creativity—the creativity of the reader as well as that of the writer—and then refine them to apply specifically to the art of translation. Rowan Williams again provides a useful springboard, this time in his recent book *Grace and Necessity*. Considering the analogous relationship between what he calls 'the practice of art' and the divine act of creation, Williams focuses on the 'making other' that not only constitutes creation but is 'intrinsic to God's being'.[11] Human art is itself an act of 'making other', and that which is made is at once not the artist *and* infused with a kind of love by the artist that is revealed through a beauty that supplements—or, better, affords a superabundance of purpose to—mere functionalism.[12] 'Human making that is more than functional', Williams contends, 'more than problem-

9. Damrosch, *What Is World Literature?,* p. 292 (emphasis mine).

10. It is worth noting the irony of how just as 'a wave…of protestant fervour' in the 1530s 'led to the destruction of much that was ancient and beautiful' in English churches (Moorman, *A History of the Church of England*, p. 171), a protestant William Tyndale was producing his final revisions of an English New Testament of great literary beauty.

11. Rowan Williams, *Grace and Necessity: Reflections on Art and Love* (London: Morehouse Publishing, 2005), p. 159. For the larger scholarly discourse on the relationship between theology and literature, see Diane Apostolos-Cappadona (ed.), *Art, Creativity and the Sacred* (New York: Crossroad, 2nd edn, 1996), and David Jasper, 'The Study of Literature and Theology', in Andrew W. Hass, David Jasper and Elisabeth Jay (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of English Literature and Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 15-32.

12. Williams is aware of how it might sound strange to speak of the love of the artist for her/his work of art, but, as he recognizes, 'It would be very eccentric to see art as central to the distinctively human and at the same time as operating independently of love' (p. 166).

solving, gives us some clue as to what the theologian means by creation, the setting in being of something that is both an embodiment of what is thought or conceived and also a radically independent reality with its own logic and integrity unfolding over time.'[13] Translation is often seen as a 'lesser' act of literary creation—if it is seen as one at all—in part because of the unexamined assumption that it is primarily if not solely 'functional'. Tyndale's work, however, illustrates for us that function and beauty in translation are not only not mutually exclusive, but ideally complementary. Tyndale may well have envisioned his work in quite 'functional' terms, and in the most 'functional' of images—the determination to have, as he put it, even 'a boy that driveth the plough' know God's word—but the very success of Tyndale's work shows how in Tyndale's case, form, as it were, far outstripped the immediate goals of function.[14] Tyndale the artist, like any artist, 'imagines a world that is both new and secretly inscribed in all that is already seen'—in this case, new to the English language but somehow existing potentially and potently in the Greek.[15] This act of imagination, which, according to Williams, involves an act of self-giving on the part of the artist (a dimension tragically literalized in Tyndale's martyrdom) corresponds to nothing less than 'an act of generative love that is at the centre of holiness'.[16]

These reminders are of immense import when we are considering translated writing—the medium of Scripture for the vast majority of believers throughout Christian history, be they readers of the Septuagint, the Vulgate, the Authorized Version, or what have you. As the Orthodox theologian David Bentley Hart remarks about the nature of Divine Being in general, 'Such is the nature of God's infinity that immediacy and mediation are the same in him'.[17] God is revealed and mediated by the word that is Scripture and the Logos incarnate as Jesus, and the particularities of both, not to mention their irreducible otherness, play constitutive roles in the phenomenology of revelation. God is present, *immediate*, in both (and always), but mediated just the same. This confluence of immediacy and mediation, however, is raised to a new level when exper-

13. Williams, *Grace and Necessity*, p. 160.

14. Daniell states that 'Nine-tenths of the Authorised Version's New Testament is Tyndale's' (*William Tyndale*, p. 1).

15. Williams, *Grace and Necessity*, p. 166. Tyndale, it seems, thought this true even more so of the Hebrew of the Old Testament. The 'properties of the Hebrew tongue', in Tyndale's estimation, 'agreeth a thousand more with the English than with the Latin' (Daniell, *William Tyndale*, p. 290).

16. Williams, *Grace and Necessity*, p. 167.

17. David Bentley Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Truth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), p. 296.

ienced through a translated text, since *the text itself* both makes immediate *and* actively mediates the word of God as written in the source language. Translation engenders at once difference and sameness, distance and presence. Consequently, reading Scripture in translation involves a meta-phenomenon that can itself reveal and comment on something of the primary encounter with Christ that reading God's word can effect. It not only amplifies, so to speak, the creativity inherent in the act of reading, but opens it even more fully to participation in the ongoing act of divine creation itself. In T.J. Gorringe's view, 'human beings, whom even Barth did not shrink from speaking of as co-creators with God, are as it were God's way of exploring the possibilities and reaches of God's creation, precisely in and through the senses'.[18] The translated text of Scripture, particularly when it achieves a distinctive beauty because of the very music possible in the target language, becomes a means by which God—along with author, translator, and reader—co-creates the world anew.

Here one might pause briefly to reflect on the need for human imagination as a means of participating in God's creation and in reading Scripture. 'Can we not see', Christopher Herbert asks, 'that God leaves space for us to enter his story, and leaves space for our imaginations to be deeply involved?'[19] The devaluing of the imagination and, with it, the recognition that 'a gospel is a work of art' has had, as Herbert laments, sad consequences for an Anglicanism that should recognize and celebrate such things:

> I am concerned that in the Church of England at the moment, the most strident voices belong to those who do not seem to have much time for imagination or for playfulness. There is a noisy, almost angry, literalism… and…a plodding, narrow biblicism which is punitive in tone and joyless in character.[20]

Walter Brueggemann's pointed assessment of such biblicism is worth repeating: 'The only way to turn [the Bible] into a fixed idol is to imagine that the final interpretation has been given, an act of imagination that is a deep act of disobedience to the lively God who indwells this text.'[21]

Translation, to summarize, is a mode of 'making other'. It is intrinsically an acknowledgment of, acceptance of, even a celebration of difference, of the diversity of God's creation. In the case of Scriptural translation, it

18. T.J. Gorringe, *The Education of Desire: Towards a Theology of the Senses* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2001), p. 27.

19. C. Herbert, 'Faith and Imagination', *Anglican Theological Review* 87.3 (Summer 2005), p. 388.

20. Herbert, 'Faith and Imagination', pp. 384-85.

21. W. Brueggemann, *An Introduction to the Old Testament: The Canon and Christian Imagination* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), p. 13.

becomes a replication of the Divine presence/absence, always immediate and always mediated. And in the case of truly artful Scriptural translation—as we see in the work of Tyndale—it reflects God's enjoyment of diversity by enabling the discovery of new possibilities for beauty both in God's world and in God's Word.

Tyndale's Gospel of St John

In his survey *A History of the English Bible as Literature*, David Norton concludes of Tyndale that apart from 'the stylistic decision of major literary consequence that he would translate as simply and clearly as possible, a decision that was of course made for religious reasons, literary questions hardly mattered to him'.[22] Perhaps Norton is right, but surely a lack of interest in 'literary questions' might be reasonably attributed to the canonical evangelists and the apostle Paul—all of whose texts have been subjects for illuminating literary readings which often demonstrate the inherent synergy of literary and theological issues in Scripture.[23] In the case of the fourth Gospel, the intersection of literary and theological questions might be especially observable because of its intensive focus on *signs*. As is often pointed out, signification is a dominant theme in John's Gospel. Mark McIntosh, for instance, writes of 'John's conception of the world's reality as sacramental, that is, as pointing to and sharing in a reality beyond itself', and consequently Jesus' central discourse in the book is an example of him 'training his disciples to read the world truthfully'.[24] John Ashton takes the point even further when he argues, *contra* Bultmann, for the importance of both text and event in understanding John's message:

22. David Norton, *A History of the English Bible as Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 17.

23. For just two of many recent and well-received examples, see A. Katherine Grieb, *The Story of Romans: A Narrative Defense of God's Righteousness* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002); and David Rhoads, *Reading Mark, Engaging the Gospel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004). Mark W.G. Stibbe, *John as Storyteller: Narrative Criticism and the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) offers a solid literary analysis of John's Gospel.

24. Mark A. McIntosh, *Discernment and Truth: The Spirituality and Theology of Knowledge* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 2004), p. 10. Interestingly, William Countryman, viewing the sacramentalism of the fourth Gospel in less cosmological and more specifically ecclesial terms than does McIntosh, detects a 'strongly ambivalent attitude toward the Christian sacraments of baptism and the eucharist', and proposes that the evangelist saw 'the sacramental rites as both essential and inadequate' (*The Mystical Way of the Fourth Gospel: Crossing Over into God* [Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, rev. edn, 1994], p. 7).

> For those who receive the message of Jesus' disciples, as for the readers of the Gospel, *the works have been transformed into words*, spoken in the one case, written in the other. With Jesus' passing the chance of witnessing his signs has gone forever. This is not a matter of regret: 'It is good for you that I go.' There is no longer any risk of wrongly assessing the function of signs, of following Thomas in confusing sight with faith. But whatever our final verdict upon the truth of the story told in the Gospel it cannot be preserved if the events of that story are swallowed up and cancelled by a proclamation that has no room for them.[25]

The emphasis placed on signs and the process of signification gives this particular gospel a meta-literary dimension and invites its reader to consider the potential analogies between the process of signification and the function of translation, since the translated scriptural word signifies simultaneously 'another' text (in this case, the original Greek) and a very present reality of the living God 'in' Scripture.

Under the rubric of the Gospel's a meta-literary dimension, we might consider, just as an opening example, the final verses of John as translated by Tyndale:

> Peter turned about, and saw that disciple whom Jesus loved following: which also leaned on his breast at supper and said: Lord which is he that shall betray thee? When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus: Lord what shall he here do? Jesus said unto him, If I will have him to tarry till I come, what is that to thee? Follow thou me. Then went this saying abroad among the brethren, that that disciple should not die. Yet Jesus said not to him, he shall not die: but if I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? The same disciple is he, which testifieth of these things, and wrote these things. And we know, that his testimony is true. There are also many other things which Jesus did: the which if they should be written every one I suppose the world could not contain the books that should be written.[26]

25. John Ashton, *Understanding the Fourth Gospel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), p. 522. Ashton adds, 'Not the least of the Gospel's ironies is the emphasis upon dialogue and discourse at the expense of action, the stress upon words as opposed to works, so that Bultmann can actually argue that Jesus' works must be thought of exclusively as words. The truth is that the two must be held together; no understanding of the book is possible if one loses sight of the simple fact that it is not a theological tract but a Gospel. What the divine agent "heard" from God is disclosed not in his words but in his life; the "what" is displayed by the "how". The matter of the Gospel, its true content, is indistinguishable from its form: the medium is the message' (p. 553).

26. Biblical quotations are taken from William Tyndale, *Tyndale's New Testament* (ed. and introd. David Daniell; New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989). References are made to chapter numbers only, since there is no verse numbering in Tyndale's translation.

John's Gospel ends by self-reflexively representing a world of textual variation that encompasses both insecurity and infinitude. Peter's sighting of the Beloved Disciple in the narrative moment opens into a flashback of the Last Supper, implying how events are already being transformed into memories (signs) by the disciples themselves. But at this moment that very memory does not bring into focus the *koinonia* experienced at the Last Supper itself but rather the potential for the fracturing of that fellowship. Jesus' response to Peter's question then leads, rather ironically, to a misunderstanding about John: that he 'should not die', which the passage explicitly seeks to clarify, even as it subtly eulogizes the disciple as truthful witness and writer ('The same disciple is he, which testifieth to these things, and wrote these things.'). In other words, the passage serves at once to communicate *and* correct the precarious process of the reception of Jesus' own sayings. We read the process of the text's reception—that is, of its interpretation, indeed, its translation (in the widest sense)—canonized in synecdochic fashion. The book then ends with the prospect of unbounded fecundity—actions and a corresponding narrative that would not just exceed the book in question but could exceed creation itself. In translation, the redactor's comment cannot help but point self-referentially to the translated text—the rewriting of the recording of the record made by this 'same disciple'. Even without including the 'many other things which Jesus did', the translated text underscores in itself the inevitable productivity of the gospel in deed and word.[27]

The intersection of word and deed in the fourth Gospel can be illustrated more fully through an examination of its fourth chapter, particularly the artfully constructed conversation between Jesus and the Samaritan woman.

> And it was about the sixth hour: and there came a woman of Samaria to draw water. And Jesus said unto her: give me drink. For his disciples were gone away unto the town to buy meat. Then said the woman of Samaria unto him: how is it, that thou being a Jew, asketh drink of me, which am a Samaritan? for the Jews meddle not with the Samaritans. Jesus answered and said unto her: if thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that sayeth to thee give me drink, thou wouldst have asked of him, and he would have given thee water of life.

Although an admittedly somewhat old-fashioned 'close reading' of Tyndale's text does not in itself exhaust interpretive possibilities, its diction, sound, rhythm and syntax should not be ignored. Tyndale's careful use of rhythm and assonance as the Samaritan woman is intro-

27. On the various arguments surrounding the possible interpolations of a redactor in John's Gospel, see Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), pp. 362-68.

duced sets the scene admirably. The thematically and theologically significant 'water' varies the pace significantly at the end of the sentence, slowing down momentarily the pace of the narrative as well—an effect emphasized by the assonance of the vowel sounds in 'draw' and 'water'. The directness of Jesus' question to the Samaritan woman is contrasted with the phrasing put in her mouth, paradoxically at once convoluted and carefully balanced: 'how is it', interrupted by her ethnic identification of Jesus, 'asketh drink of me', followed by her own self-definition which would seem to separate her from her interlocutor in the same way it is separated from her label for him. Unlike the woman's question, Jesus' response in Tyndale's translation maintains the word-order of John's Greek as closely as possible in English, right down to its final word, 'life' (ζων).

The entire conversation, of course, is in no small part about the erasure of boundaries—and, with them, enmities—made possible by the fact of Jesus, the divine act his very presence represents. The matter becomes clear when the dialogue culminates in the subject of worship, with the woman distinguishing between the tradition of her 'fathers' who 'worshipped on this mountain', and perceiving (erroneously, in the final analysis) that Jesus insists that 'in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship'. Jesus' reply reframes the entire question:

> Jesus said unto her: woman believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the father. Ye worship, ye wot not what: we know what we worship. For salvation cometh of the Jews. But the hour cometh and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the father in spirit and in truth. For verily such the father requireth to worship him. God is a spirit, and they that worship him must worship him, in spirit and truth.

Tyndale's rendering of Jesus' articulation of the difference between Samaritans and Jews is brilliant. The translator bookends the statement with the parallel phrases 'Ye worship' and 'we worship', accentuating the distance between them, and he employs an almost comical assonance along with the homonyms 'wot' and 'what' to allow his description of the Samaritans' worship to give just a hint of the confusion that her worship involves, separated as it is from the salvation that comes from the Jews. This phrasing contrasts pointedly with the directness of Jesus' statement of the Jews' worship in the second half of the sentence: 'we know what we worship'. Ultimately, however, such distinctions are rendered moot by the transcendence of God made manifest in Christ. God's very holiness demands worship rooted not in a particular physical space but in a mode of Being, and Jesus the Messiah ('I that speak unto thee am he'), the supreme act of divine signification, subsumes in

Himself the kind of divisions the passage contains and that Tyndale stylistically underscores.

It is interesting to note how Tyndale renders Jesus' directness in this early chapter, since that stylistic characteristic comes to be of further importance, with further complexity, later in the Gospel. The lengthy discourses of chs. 14–17 in John's Gospel enhance the reader's sense that she is hearing Christ's word without mediation, and Tyndale's own directness, his 'everyday immediacy' in Daniell's words, is especially appropriate for much of these chapters.[28] As Daniell asserts, 'The meditative nature of the fourth Gospel demands a particular kind of technique of translation. Here the Greek must be allowed its proper value all the time—it will do much of its own stylistic work in English if left unhindered.'[29] He then goes on to cite the opening verses of John 14 by way of example:

> And he said unto his disciples: Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God and believe in me. In my father's house are many mansions. If it were not so I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you even unto myself, that where I am, there may ye be also.[30]

Tyndale's short, declarative sentences do as little as possible to call attention to themselves rhetorically or stylistically—with the possible exception of the alliteration of 'many mansions', a good example of Tyndale's willingness to adopt Vulgate usage (*mansiones*) when it allows for more mellifluous English (here via alliteration)—until Jesus' promise of return and reconciliation is offered in a broadly paratactic sequence of phrases that at once maintains the directness of the message and allows it to attain a kind of climax. One finds such directness in Tyndale's work generally, but it does unique work in the fourth Gospel, wherein there is both a close connection between deeds and words as signifiers of the Kingdom.

The fourth Gospel's message, it has been argued, centers on Jesus' essential role in our reunion with God. As Countryman puts it:

> 'the unity of which Jesus speaks here is not, as in some mystical writings, a union simply of the worshiper and God. It is equally the worshipers' unity with one another…. [J]ust as it is Jesus' own oneness with the father that

28. Daniell, *William Tyndale*, p. xxiv.

29. Daniell, *William Tyndale*, p. 136.

30. Daniell remarks on the profundity of Tyndale's 'Let not your hearts be troubled', contrasting it with an English version of Jesus' advice, in this case from the Good News Bible, outside the Tyndale tradition: 'Do not be worried and upset'—'as if the disciples were being told by Jesus', Daniell pithily comments, 'to cheer up after having missed a bus' (W*illiam Tyndale*, p. 137).

> makes of him the road by which others may come to God, so the believers' loving unity with one another represents our journey back along that road to our divine origin.[31]

Tyndale's rendition of the extraordinary prayer to the Father from Jesus that makes up the Gospel's seventeenth chapter indeed exemplifies this point, even as it shows Tyndale varying his style to complement the high theology of the discourse. Consider the following passage: 'I pray for them, and pray not for the world: but for them which thou hast given me, for they are thine. And all mine are thine, and thine are mine, and I am glorified in them.' It opens with the perfect iambic pentameter of the first clause, while the second clause ends with the ringing pronoun 'thine', the vowel sound of which becomes insistent in the following sentence. Now directed toward the Father and not (just) to his disciples (and therefore not just to us), Jesus' discourse in Tyndale's rendition flows through longer sentences, becoming expansive even as an increasingly vivid picture of the interpenetrating unity of Father, Son, and the faithful is painted:

> I pray not for them alone: but for them also which shall believe on me through their preaching, that they all may be one, as thou father art in me, and I in thee, that they may be also one in us, that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And that glory that thou gavest me, I have given them, that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.

Tyndale's style here demands a level of concentration from his reader that enacts the theme of oneness that resonates throughout these sentences, that draws the reader toward active participation in the text. The preaching of the disciples here, their words, will lead others to belief, but the temporal linearity implicit in that idea—first Jesus preaches to His disciples, then the disciples preach to others—is complemented, powerfully, by the resolutely non-linear and transcendent images of mutual indwelling and simultaneously shared glory. The final sentence is a nearly unbroken sequence of monosyllables, with only two uninflected two-syllable words: 'glory' and 'perfect', which also happen to be the only two words in the passage that have their origin in Latin rather than the Anglo-Saxon lexicon. The simplicity of the diction, however, is complicated by the swirl of repeated personal pronouns that invite the reader to slow down over the passage, to reflect on the very Trinitarian mystery in which we are caught up: how 'I', 'we', 'thou' and 'them' can remain distinct yet be 'one' and in one another. Tyndale's work is a tour

31. Countryman, *Mystical Way*, p. 117.

de force of balance that lexically puts the reader right at home yet stylistically forces her outside herself—toward the recognition that her true home must be elsewhere.

Tyndale's greatest gifts, however, are found in his renderings of narrative, and it will not do to discuss Tyndale's version of the fourth Gospel without some comment on the Passion narrative therein. Here, however, we see Tyndale's translation manifesting the Gospel's distinctively logocentric emphases. A narrative that had opened by invoking the creativity of the divine Word both transcendent and incarnate demonstrates, throughout the tense moments leading to the crucifixion itself, the dangers of the reification of the Word. 'Word-made-flesh' can never be reduced to 'Word-as-thing', capable of being possessed and therefore controlled. Pilate's attempt in the interrogation scene of ch. 18 to label and thus objectify Jesus points to his terrible incapacity to imagine and thereby recognize a Person, the living God, before him:

> Then Pilate entered into the judgement hall again, and called Jesus, and said unto him: art thou the king of the Jews? Jesus answered: sayest thou that of thyself, or did other tell it thee of me? Pilate answered: Am I a Jew? Thine own nation and high priests have delivered thee unto me. What hast thou done? Jesus answered: my kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, then would my ministers surely fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews, but now is my kingdom not from hence. Pilate said unto him: Art thou a king then? Jesus answered: Thou sayest that I am a king. For this cause was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. And all that are of the truth hear my voice. Pilate said unto him: what thing is truth?

The whole scene turns on the taking and putting of words from and into other mouths—an analogue to the act of translation itself, wherein Tyndale's words here both are and are not John's. 'Art thou the king of the Jews?' elicits first only Jesus' query about the origin of such a label: where did it come from? Pilate's response indicates he is relating what he has been told. 'What hast thou done?' then garners an oblique answer to the previous question—an answer that challenges the entire project of definition by acknowledging that Jesus both is and is not a 'king'. Pilate's failure here shows itself in deeply linguistic terms, inasmuch as his questions betray his inability to handle the ontological 'is/is not' of metaphor and the power inherent in it. Again, the analogy to translated discourse is evident. Tyndale's own text functions in a Christ-like fashion; in its case it is and is not John's words, 'bear[ing] witness' and thereby revealing the truth in a way that must be experienced as an activity, not a thing. 'All that are of the truth hear my voice': the act of hearing involves the reader through the living word (the 'voice') of Jesus in

'truth' conceived as relational event. Tyndale's subtle addition to the Greek in Pilate's famous last question clarifies for his reader Pilate's blindness: 'what *thing* is truth?' Tyndale's Pilate wants not a philosophical definition as much as a static, tangible object, the knowledge of which can be reduced to the knower himself.[32] The irony is rich, of course: on the one hand Pilate is looking truth in the face in an unprecedented, physical way, but he cannot see Him because the incarnate Word which is Truth cannot be possessed like any other mere thing. Similarly, when reading Tyndale we must be careful; we run the risk of failing to experience Tyndale's representation of John as such—as a re-presentation of the original which allows us, in the reading of it, to participate in a hermeneutic event rather than dominate a reified text.

The paradox of translation both erasing and re-inscribing difference, so resonantly parallel to the redemptive activity of Christ whose very historical particularity enables us to be one with each other and with God, as Christ and the Father are one, while maintaining the distinctiveness of all, plays out memorably in the linguistic self-referentiality of John's Crucifixion story in the nineteenth chapter:

> And they took Jesus and led him away. And he bare his cross, and went forth into a place called the place of dead men's skulls, which is named in Hebrew, Golgotha. Where they crucified him and two other with him on either side one, and Jesus in their midst. And Pilate wrote this title, and put it on the cross. The writing was, Jesus of Nazareth, king of the Jews. This title read many of the Jews. For the place where Jesus was crucified, was nigh to the city. And it was written in Hebrew, Greek and Latin. Then said the high priests of the Jews to Pilate: write not, king of the Jews: but that he said, I am king of the Jews. Pilate answered: what I have written, that have I written.

Jesus' bearing of the cross here coincides with his entrance into a place whose purpose is to turn human beings into things—'dead men's skulls'—and its purpose has itself become reified in its very name. Jesus is crucified amid other such victims, distinguished from them by Pilate's further, final, futile attempt to label him. Rather shockingly, a scene focused on a tortured body momentarily turns into a scene focused on

32. Rowan Williams offers a summary of earlier Anglican approaches to John's Gospel (by Westcott, Hoskyns, Temple, and Robinson, respectively) in 'Anglican Approaches to the Fourth Gospel', in *Anglican Identities* (Cambridge: Cowley Publications, 2003), pp. 121-37, tentatively concluding that such an overview shows how 'If historical mediation is essential to a distinctively Christian account of the knowledge of God, that history must be seen as always and irreducibly other to us. There is a dimension of the knowledge of God in Christ that is never capable of being absorbed into self-recognition only' (p. 136).

linguistic and interpretive variety and uncertainty: at the climactic moment of the Crucifixion itself, the reader is suddenly forced to think about language and writing. The multilingual sign Pilate writes is, ironically, an act of translation itself, but from a source text (presumably in Aramaic) that never existed—the ultimate translation betrayal. Jesus never makes the claim the Jews try to assign to him, and Pilate's confining, reductive, and fictional label for him will shortly be demolished by the Resurrection. Tyndale's translation, in contrast to Pilate's multilingual representation of Jesus, is not only founded on the true Greek but is fruitful in its ability to allow its true source to become new. Etymologically, translation *must* 'bear across'; artful translation of Scripture does more than that. It encourages, through its own unique aesthetic of style, its reader, like Jesus in this scene, to 'bear the Cross'. Doing so allows the reader to participate in the powerful, sometimes terrible beauty of the Word.

Tyndale, the Theology of Style, and Anglicanism Today

William Tyndale—martyred prior to the Church in England's break with Rome, not to mention before its theological first-flowering in the works of Richard Hooker—had nothing to say *about* the *ecclesia anglicana*. Nevertheless, he still speaks *to* much of that Church—our Church—daily, by means of his creation of a language and a style for biblical English that remains at the core of 1989's NRSV. Read from the perspective offered in this essay, Tyndale's translation can teach us much that could be genuinely relevant—or, at least, thought-provoking—for the contemporary Anglican Communion. It can do so because what Tyndale imagined and created was a style that, to reiterate Rowan Williams' observation above, 'remind[s] us what angular and particular persons sound like'. That is to say, Tyndale's translation in its very style dramatizes the power of the particular, the way in which the transformation of the universal Good News into local terms—even when the Gospel has been claimed and colonized by a language, Latin, with universalizing pretensions—is fundamental to evangelization. Since Tyndale's time, of course, the English language itself has become the language of subjugation for some—a medium for an ironically doubled message of freedom in Christ and oppression by occupiers. But by remaining cognizant of the text's translated status and reading accordingly, we can not only re-inscribe Tyndale into contemporary Anglican controversies, but even suggest how his work may make a contribution toward resolving them.

For example, the global and hence culturally diverse nature of the Anglican Communion as it exists today has been well documented, as has the degree to which tensions among members of this diverse

Communion often arise out of profound differences of belief about the nature of Scriptural authority. Underlying such cultural and hermeneutic diversity, of course, are the unequal power relationships remaining even today in an Anglican Communion whose historical roots are colonialist. Christopher Duraisingh offers a provocative outline of the problem and its possible solution when he contrasts a eurocentric cultural model with a postcolonial one. The former, according to Duraisingh, is universalizing and monologic, while a 'postcolonial way of visioning things is … multivoiced, dialogical, and polycentric'.[33] A postcolonial perspective encourages us to read Scripture attuned to its multiplicities, for it is, as Duraisingh puts it, 'only as the gospel is read and reread in a variety of cultures that its multifaceted splendor is drawn out'.[34] The author suggests how this perspective sheds new light on a reading of Acts, for instance:

> In the place of a single monologic tradition, vernacularization takes place on the day of Pentecost. All traditions and languages are destigmatized and affirmed…. Perhaps the most powerful image of the Pentecost story is the richness of diversity…. The colonialist approach to the Acts of the Apostles understands it as the story of the expansion of a conquering church, or the planting of it into every corner of the world. But it is equally valid to read the book as the story of the unfolding of the gospel, its nature being increasingly revealed as it is appropriated and reappropriated by culture after culture.[35]

The communication of the gospel is itself here a matter of re-inscription and re-enculturation, which necessarily subverts any monologizing tendencies in the text even as its common message binds varied cultures together. Duraisingh warns us, however, that 'it is critical to become aware how many of us uncritically share the monologic mind-set of the colonial past and tend, sometimes unconsciously, to reduce the dynamic and multi-voiced stories of the gospel to a unitary, unchanging, and static substance'.[36] In other words, we must learn to recognize how, when faced with the truth, we can unwittingly replicate the interpretive desires demonstrated by Pontius Pilate.

Finally, Duraisingh asks, 'Can the Anglican Communion become a movement away from eurocentrism to a Communion of genuine pluralism

33. Christopher Duraisingh, 'Toward a Postcolonial Re-visioning of the Church's Faith, Witness, and Communion', in Ian T. Douglas and Kwok Pui-Lan (eds.), *Beyond Colonial Anglicanism: The Anglican Communion in the Twenty-first Century* (New York: Church Publishing, 2001), pp. 337-67 (347).

34. Duraisingh, 'Toward a Postcolonial Re-visioning', p. 351.

35. Duraisingh, 'Toward a Postcolonial Re-visioning', pp. 350-51.

36. Duraisingh, 'Toward a Postcolonial Re-visioning', pp. 352-53.

through acknowledgement of its plurality?'[37] We should hope so, and, perhaps paradoxically, one small part of effecting such a transformation would involve taking the five-centuries-old source of the Gospel in English, Tyndale's translation, as an instructive example in itself—looking back on this 'eurocentric' text with a postcolonial eye. Tyndale's translation is utterly committed to the remaking of the Gospel into a particular language for a particular people, and therein one finds its potential, realized over the centuries later, to speak to what would have been for the translator an unimaginably wider audience. It opens the possibility for bringing the Gospel into the world anew, for renewing the message by pointing toward the infinite re-creations made possible by the interaction of author, text and readers. Its very existence witnesses to the need for diverse renderings and experiences of the Gospel, and its very aesthetic qualities call attention to the beauty possible in such diversity. Tyndale's translation, artful Greek rendered into artful English, with the distinctiveness of the latter serving to refract and supplement that of the former, does more than merely participate in the 'pluralization' of Scripture. It proves plurality to be essential to the creation and survival of a Church lived in English, even as that Church continues to evolve beyond the boundaries of the English language.

37. Duraisingh, 'Toward a Postcolonial Re-visioning', p. 360.