

The Cost and Fruit of Biblical Revival

Excerpts from *Biblical Revival and the Transformation of Nations* by Stephen McDowell

Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury, was burned at the stake on March 21, 1556. He had espoused ideas on the authority of the Pope, the doctrine of the sacrament, and other things that were contrary to the doctrine of the established church. He faced pressures from authorities and threats to his life to recant. He did recant some of his ideas in writing, but was sentenced to death anyway. He repudiated his recantation in his last words before being tied to the stake in a street in Oxford, England. John Foxe records:

And when the wood was kindled, and the fire began to burn near him, he stretched forth into the flames his right hand, which had signed his recantation, and there held it so steadfastly, that the people might see it burned to a coal before his body was touched. In short, he was so patient and constant in the midst of these extreme tortures, that he seemed to move no more than the stake to which he was bound; his eyes were lifted up to heaven, and often he repeated the word, "This unworthy right hand!" so long as his voice would suffer him; and often used the words of the blessed martyr St. Stephen, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!" till, the fury of the flames putting him to silence, he gave up the ghost.¹



The fire that consumed Thomas Cranmer was so hot that it scorched doors on the buildings scores of feet away from where this martyr was giving up his life for the Truth. Cranmer was one of many people who gave his life to help bring about the Protestant Reformation, a Biblical revival that still impacts the world today.

Revival requires a great cost. Revivals throughout history have resulted in the death of thousands and thousands of people.² Those who have seen the Truth and commit to live by it no matter what, will most likely encounter some form of persecution. It has happened throughout history and is happening today in many nations. In America we experience minimal persecution thanks to those who established this nation upon Christian principles and ideas; but this is changing as we remove the Christian foundations.

Protestant Reformation

The focal point of the Protestant Reformation was the Bible being translated and made available in the common languages of the people. People began to read the Bible, and when they did these things happened: 1) Individuals were transformed; 2) The Church began to be changed, putting off corruption; 3) The state was gradually reformed. The fruit of the Reformation was revival of individuals, restoration of the church, and reformation of all society.

God uses individuals to change nations and the course of history. Some of those people God used in the Protestant Reformation included Martin Luther, John Calvin, William Tyndale, and John Knox.



[See *Biblical Revival and the Transformation of Nations* and *America's Providential History* to learn more about these reformers.]

William Tyndale

God's chief instrument in bringing the Reformation in England was William Tyndale. Much of Tyndale's life was spent fulfilling his vision: "If God preserves my life, I will cause a boy that driveth a plow to know more of

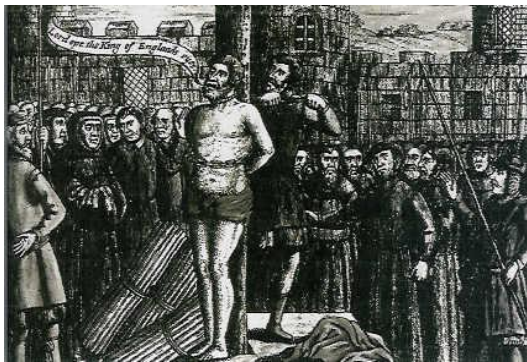
the Scriptures than the pope.”³ During 12 years in exile from England, he translated the Bible from the original languages with the idea of making it available to the common man. His New Testament was published in 1525 and his Old Testament about eleven years later. His work served as the basis for other English translations that would follow (including the King James Version), and, in fact, formed the foundation of the modern English language.

In 1536 Tyndale was burned at the stake. What was his crime? He was declared a heretic for giving the English people the Bible in their own language, desiring them to read the Word of God for themselves. Americans today find it hard to understand how this could be a crime punishable by death. We are so far removed from such tyranny, thanks to Tyndale and others making the liberating fruit of Biblical ideas available to those who founded this nation, we cannot imagine how dark these days were.

Revivals generally occur in a day of deep moral darkness and national depression. Failure to know and teach history keeps us ignorant today of how Christianity has liberated man. At the time of the Reformation, tyranny was the norm in civil government. Monarchy was most prevalent. Nothing was known of individuals establishing their own governments, and the rights of the individual were of little importance. There was little freedom. The people paid taxes to the king, to the barons, and to the priests, but they had no voice in saying what or how much the taxes would be.

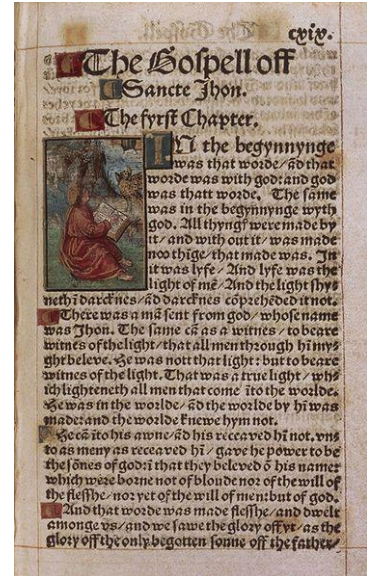
In matters of religion, freedom of conscience and freedom of worship were foreign to most people. The leadership of the church was like the blind leading the blind into the ditch. They were telling the people that God required of them all kinds of things that had no basis in truth. But the people did not know the truth for they did not have access to the Bible, the source of all truth, and even if they had a Bible, most people could not read it, for not one in a thousand could read. Many people who read the Bible or thought for themselves were considered heretics. These people were often tortured and punished. Many torture chambers came into being to “discover” who the heretics were—to get these people to confess to their crimes. They were put on the racks; the “thumb-squashers” were used on them; some were put in iron maidens; some were tied up in sacks and thrown into the river; many were burnt at the stake (like Huss and Tyndale). After all, they were “heretics,” and had to be purged from the land.⁴

Priests charged a fee for everything, including granting absolution for sin. They sold relics as well. Archbishop Peckham said in 1281, “The ignorance of the priests casteth the people into the ditch of error.... [T]he country lay under a dark pall of superstition and ignorance. Everywhere friars traveled with their holy relics which, for a fee, could be viewed and kissed. In Germany, in the city of Martin Luther, at



Tyndale's last words before being burned at the stake were “Lord, open the king of England’s eyes!”

Wittenberg in Saxony, the Castle Church contained over seventeen thousand relics including part of the rock on which Jesus stood when He wept over Jerusalem, the gown of the virgin Mary..., a piece from the burning bush of Moses, thirty-five portions of the cross, hay and straw from the manger at Bethlehem, some hair from Christ, His coat and girdle, and even a complete skeleton of one of the babes murdered by Herod at Bethlehem! The Elector of Saxony was proud of his collection. This was an Indulgence Church, and the pilgrim could earn one hundred and twenty-seven thousand seven hundred and nine years and one hundred and sixteen days off purgatory by viewing them all; as a bonus he helped to increase the Church revenues.”⁵



First page of Tyndale's Gospel of John.

Luther, Calvin, Tyndale and others were God’s instruments of liberty. The people were ignorant, and this kept them in bondage. Isaiah 5:13 declares that, “My people go into exile for their lack of knowledge.” Remember, a key aspect of revival is the restoration and establishment of truth.

Revivals in the Old Testament, and often under the New Covenant, began in the heart of one or more consecrated servants of God who became the energizing power behind the awakening. Tyndale was one such man who gave all to see God’s truth established. Others paid a great price as well. Many who embraced the truth were martyred merely for teaching ideas contrary to those held by the church.

Fruit of the Protestant Reformation

The fruit of the Protestant Reformation is still impacting the world after nearly five centuries. One of its most immediate positive effects was shaping the new nation of America. The people who gave birth to the original thirteen colonies were a product of the Protestant Reformation. Many of them had been driven from Europe as they sought to live out their new-found faith. The Pilgrims, Puritans, and pioneers who settled America were a product of the Bible. This book first began to become available to commoners in their language (German, English, French, etc.) as a result of the Protestant reformers. The Bible was by far the single most important book in the birth, growth, and development of the United States. In fact, without God and the Bible there would be no America as we know it today.⁶

The fruit of this revival impacted individuals. Multitudes put away sin, destroyed personal and social idols, and turned to the worship of God. It impacted the church as well. New theological ideas were recovered – *Sola scriptura* (“by Scripture alone”), *Sola fide* (“by faith alone”), *Sola gratia* (“by grace alone”), *Solus Christus* or *Solo Christo* (“Christ alone” or “through Christ alone”), *Soli Deo gloria* (“glory to God alone”) – and many new churches and church denominations came into being that were built upon these ideas. It also impacted the society at large.

As people begin to read and study the Bible, its comprehensive worldview began to govern the thoughts and actions of men. Liberty began to advance, not only personal liberty, but also religious, civil, political, and economic liberty. A profusion of civil documents of liberty began to come forth in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (such as the Mayflower Compact, the English Petition of Rights, the Fundamental Orders of Connecticut, the Massachusetts Body of Liberties, the English Bill of Rights, the Frame of Government of Pennsylvania, the Declaration of Independence, and the United States Constitution⁷). These were only possible due to the Bible translations in the prior two centuries.

New ideas of religious freedom, representative government, individual enterprise, jurisdictional authority, limited government, and private property began to shape America and influence some European nations. A new era of liberty and prosperity began to come into the world.

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To learn about various revivals in history, the fruit of these revivals, and what you can do to see God bring much-needed Biblical revival today, order *Biblical Revival and the Transformation of Nations*.

¹ *Foxe’s Book of Martyrs*, edited by Marie Gentert King, Old Tappan, N.J.: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1978, p. 245.

² See *Foxes Book of Martyrs, Fair Sunshine* by Jock Purves, and *By Their Blood, Christian Martyrs of the 20th Century* by James and Marti Hefley for the stories of some who were persecuted and killed.

³ Mark Beliles and Stephen McDowell, *America’s Providential History*, Charlottesville: Providence Foundation, 2010, p. 53.

⁴ The 5th Amendment to the United States Constitution prohibits forcing anyone to testify against himself. This came about in response to the practice of torturing people until they confessed to a “crime,” which they often did even if not guilty.

⁵ Brian Edwards, *God’s Outlaw*, Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, 1976, p. 40.

⁶ See Stephen McDowell, *Building Godly Nations*, Chapter 4, “The Bible: Rock of Our Republic,” Charlottesville: Providence Foundation, 2004, pp. 59 ff.

⁷ For more on the development of these and other documents of liberty, see McDowell, *Building Godly Nations*, pp. 105 ff.