

Bible Burning in Reformation England

BY

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Around August 1526 an Episcopal Conclave condemned William Tyndale's English translation of the New Testament to be burnt. During October 1526 the Bishop of London called in all copies of the book and by the end of the month a sermon was held at St. Paul's Cross (the preaching post at St. Paul's Cathedral) and a few copies were burnt. The symbolic burning was followed by systematic repression of Tyndale's succeeding biblical translations and persecution of Tyndale himself. Copies of his translations were seized – at home or in their place of production in the Low Countries – or were bought – again, at home or where they were printed – by the bishops and then were burnt. Book merchants who were caught with the forbidden books were forced to burn them in public rituals of penance. This was an insistent campaign to contain the dissemination of a new, evidently Lutheran, translation of the Bible – the first English biblical translation since the late fourteenth century.¹

The reaction of the English bishops was to a great extent predictable. Unauthorized Bible translations had been illegal in England since a Church council in Oxford in 1407-1409 banned Wycliffite translations (English translations of the Bible made by the reformer and heretic John Wyclif and his disciples in the late 14th century) and forbade future unauthorized translations of the Bible.² Furthermore, since the early days of Henry VIII (1509-47) readers of English biblical books (presumably, Wycliffite Bibles) were persecuted and punished.³ The

1 See details below and J.F. Mozley, *William Tyndale* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1937; reprint, Westport: Greenwood Press, 1971), 110-44.

2 See Margaret Deanesly, *The Lollard Bible and Other Medieval Biblical Versions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1920; reprint, 2002), 296.

3 John Foxe, *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online* or TAMO (1583 edition) (HRI Online Publications, Sheffield, 2011), 827ff (modern pagination). Available from: <http://www.johnfoxe.org>. Shannon McSheffrey, »Heresy, Orthodoxy and English Vernacular Religion 1480-1525«, *Past & Present* 186 (2005): 47-80.

identification of Tyndale's translation as a Lutheran book, clearly inspired by Martin Luther's translation of the New Testament to German, warranted that the book received the same treatment as other Lutheran literature in England, namely confiscation and burning.⁴

Despite the efforts of the bishops the impact of the campaign in terms of Bible production and Bible reading must have been limited. And in the late 1530s a new policy prescribed that the reading in the English Bible (though not Tyndale's translation) was permitted, in fact, encouraged. Yet, if the repression campaign had little impact on the production and dissemination of English Bibles, it seems to have had a significant impact on the shaping of Protestant conceptions of the English Bible, the book that was burnt in public bonfires during this period. It is a conventional notion of English history that the English Reformation, perhaps more than other Protestant movements, has produced a special biblical religion and culture, a religion that by the late sixteenth century excluded almost entirely other religious practices. During the later reign of Elizabeth (1558-1603) the Bible was left as the sole source of religion for the people.⁵ The origins of the process in which the status of the Bible was elevated to such heights can be seen in the ways that ideas about the value and utility of vernacular Bibles were constructed in reactions to and in discourses about the burnings of Tyndale's biblical translations. My suggestion in the following is that in coping with harassment and persecution of readers and book merchants and the destruction of Bibles – not only during Henry's reign but also during Mary's (1553-58) – the evangelical movement (later the Protestants) produced powerful notions and images that shaped the view of Scriptures in English as a sacred book, the true and only Word of God, a symbol of Protestant belief, devotion, and during the days of persecution, of hope.

4 On burning of Lutheran literature in England see Carl Meyer, »Henry VIII Burns Luther's Books, 12 May 1521«, *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* IX, no. 2 (1958): 173-87; Richard Rex, »The English Campaign against Luther«, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 39 (1989): 85-106.

5 J.R. Green argued that some time between the middle of the reign of Elizabeth and the meeting of the Long Parliament in 1640, Englishmen became the people of one book, namely the Bible, J.R. Green, *A Short History of the English People* (London, 1876), 447. The transformation began, symbolically, with Henry's 1538 Injunctions, see Brian Cummings, »Iconoclasm and Bibliophobia in the English Reformations, 1521-1558«, in *Images, Idolatry, and Iconoclasm in Late Medieval England*, ed. Jeremy Dimmick, James Simpson, and Nicolette Zeeman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 186. Patrick Collinson dated the final transformation to around 1580, Patrick Collinson, »From Iconoclasm to Iconophobia: The Cultural Impact of the Second English Reformation«, in *The Impact of the Reformation 1500-1640*, ed. Peter Marshall (London: Arnold, 1997), 282.

To explore how did public, ceremonial and ritual burnings of English Bibles shape conceptions of the Bible, I discuss four themes: (a) the first burning of Tyndale's New Testament; (b) stories about Henrician Bible merchants; (c) Marian martyrs and English Bibles; (d) Bible burning and Bible burners in Elizabethan controversies. First, however, I outline shortly the changing attitudes of the English monarchs and their governments to the question of the utility of an English Bible.

Bible burning and stories about it took place in a shifting political and religious landscape. The Reformation in England is characterized by a back-and-forth movement of partial reform, reform and counter-reform. Henry VIII introduced some sort of reform, though not necessarily a Protestant Reformation, during the mid and late 1530s. But the 1540s saw signs of stagnation if not setback in the process of reforming the Church. After his death (1547), during the reign of the minor king Edward VI (1547-53), England experienced a full-blown Protestant (Calvinist) Reformation that has radically reformed the Church as well as traditional religion, which had been left mostly untouched under Henry. But this Reformation lasted shortly as well. When Edward died in 1553, the throne was occupied by his sister Mary, a Catholic. Mary's reign ushered in a new reformation (or counter-reformation), where the new Protestant regime was ruled back to what seems to be a pre-Reformation religion. But, as was by now the rule and not the exception, also this major change in the life of ordinary parishioners was short-lived. Mary died in 1558 and was succeeded by Elizabeth, a Protestant. And the Church was reformed again, though this time more moderately than under Edward. The »Elizabethan Settlement« introduced what later will be known as Anglicanism, that is, a Protestant Church that retained some Catholic characteristics.

The policy regarding the English Bible shifted a few times during the period according to the identity of the monarch and following generally the principled disagreement between the Roman Catholic Church and the Protestant churches regarding the usefulness of a vernacular Scriptures. While the latter rejected the medieval Latin Bible (Vulgate) as a source of authority and made new vernacular Bibles translated from the original Hebrew and Greek, the former insisted on the authority of the Vulgate, objected to vernacular Bibles based on the original languages, and in periods sought to suppress unauthorized Bible translations.

Henry VIII's first reaction to Tyndale's New Testament was repressive. The repressive policy continued until the middle of the 1530s

when, following the break with Rome (Henry's Reformation), Henry's injunctions to the clergy (1536/1538) called all parishes to buy Bibles, and the priests were instructed to discourage no one from reading the Bible or hearing it being read. An authorized translation of the Bible was commissioned. But soon after, the King realized the effects of free Bible reading. Instead of having the effect of confirmation of accepted doctrine, free Bible reading, according to the King, had invoked unorthodox opinions and disrespect of authority. As a result, from 1539 to his death Henry sought to control Bible readers, to (severely) limit Bible reading and to supervise Bible production.⁶ After the death of Henry attitudes toward the Bible became softer. In 1547 Parliament removed the restrictions on printing and reading Scriptures. The same year, in the new injunctions, the clergy were again ordered to provide each parish church with a copy of the Bible in English.⁷ However, during the reign of Mary the policy toward the English Bible turned sceptic again. A proclamation from 1553 forbade public reading of Scriptures, and English Bibles were removed from parish churches (or were made unavailable to parishioners). Bible (private) reading or possession in general was never condemned by the regime, but Protestant Bibles were definitely suspect.⁸ The coming of Elizabeth to the throne again marked a policy change. Elizabeth ordered the English Bible back into the parish church, where parishioners could use it.⁹ During Elizabeth's long reign the English Bible in its various versions became the only legitimate source of religion. The veritable infrastructure for the religion of English men and women, the English Bible became both the ultimate guide for religious life and the single focus of religiosity. The Protestant conception of the Bible eventually triumphed and remained uncontested at least until the emergence of radical religion in the 1640s.¹⁰

6 On Henry and the Bible see Avner Shamir, »Henrik den 8. og de uregerlige bibel-læsere«, *1066 Tidsskrift for Historie* 28, no. 1 (2008): 26-37.

7 Walter Howard Frere, ed. *Visitation Articles and Injunctions of the Period of the Reformation*, 3 vols. (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1910), vol. 2: 118.

8 On Mary and the Bible see Claire Cross, »The English Universities, 1553-58«, in *The Church of Mary Tudor*, ed. Eamon Duffy and David Loades (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 70-71.

9 On Elizabeth and the Bible see Cameron A. MacKenzie, *The Battle for the Bible in England 1557-1582* (New York: Peter Lang, 2002), 25-52.

10 Just a few references to the history of the Bible in England: Allan K. Jenkins and Patrick Preston, *Biblical Scholarship and the Church: A Sixteenth-Century Crisis of Authority* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007); MacKenzie, *The Battle for the Bible in England 1557-1582*; David Norton, *A History of the English Bible as Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); David S. Katz, *God's Last Words: Reading the English Bible from the Reformation to Fundamentalism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004); David Daniell, *The Bible in English* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).

William Tyndale's New Testament

Spectacular book burnings were not a rare event in the early years of Luther's Reformation. During the early 1520s, sermons were celebrated in which books (sometimes many books) of Luther were burnt all over Europe. England was no exception. In 1521, following the Edict of Worms, Lord Chancellor Thomas Wolsey arranged for Luther's books to be burnt at St. Paul's Cross. A great procession led to the place, and in the presence of many dignitaries an oration and a sermon were held. The papal bull against Luther was read and the Edict of Worms was published. At the same time, some of Luther's books were thrown into a bonfire.¹¹ A spectacle similar to the one of 1521 could be seen in early 1526 when Wolsey held a great ceremony at St. Paul's in which a sermon against Lutheranism was preached and »great baskets« of Lutheran books were thrown into a bonfire.¹²

The details of the book burning of late October 1526 in which Tyndale's translation was burnt are not known, but even if it was not as spectacular as the previous book burnings, it followed the same pattern: a public ritual that featured a sermon and a symbolic book burning. In a sense, it was no different than a long succession of ceremonial book burnings: during the fifteenth century and probably the early sixteenth century Lollard books were burnt at St. Paul's,¹³ after 1520 Lutheran books suffered the same fate. And for all we know, for the English bishops Tyndale's book was just another erroneous, heretical and Lutheran book. The reactions to the burning, though, show that for some, Tyndale's translation was not just another book, and that the battle for and against a vernacular Bible was also fought in the semantic field, that is, in how supporters and opponents referred to and talked about the book.

For various reasons, the English Church opposed Tyndale's translation. Bishop of London Cuthbert Tunstal, who ordered the burning of Tyndale's translation, condemned the authors (the identity of the author was not known at the time) for profaning »the majesty of Scripture, which hitherto had remained undefiled«, and abusing »the most

11 *I Diarii di Marino Sanuto*, (Venice, 1879-1903; reprint, Bologna: Forni 1969-70), vol. 30: 314-15, 341-43. English translation in Rawdon Brown, ed. *Calendar of State Papers and Manuscripts Relating to English Affairs Existing in the Archives and Collections of Venice and in Other Libraries of Northern Italy* (London, 1864-), vol. 3: 122.

12 Foxe, *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online* (1583 edition), 1217.

13 Millar Maclure, *The Paul's Cross Sermons, 1534-1642* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1958), 20.

holy word of God, and the true sense of the same«. ¹⁴ The translation, he maintained, did not retain the majesty and meaning of Scriptures, which was the most holy Word of God. A very early reaction to the burning arrived from Rome. On hearing about the burning, Cardinal Lorenzo Campeggio, papal legate to England, wrote to Cardinal Wolsey, Archbishop of York and Lord Chancellor of England, congratulating him for the burning of the »sacred codex of the bible, perverted in the vernacular tongue, and brought into the realm by perfidious followers of the abominable Lutheran sect«. No other »holocaust could be more pleasing to almighty god«, he wrote. ¹⁵ The book was not the sacred Bible, but a perversion of the sacred Bible.

The following year, when John Hackett, England's Ambassador to the Low Countries, who tried since late 1526 to have the authorities suppress the printing of Tyndale's New Testament (by now processed in two workshops in Antwerp), finally reported the success of his mission of getting the books destroyed in the place of their production, he wrote to Cardinal Wolsey that »all syche Inglyshe bookes« were burnt. ¹⁶ Yet initially Hackett had problems convincing the authorities that an English book should be heretical and dangerous. The authorities wanted him to translate the book into Latin or Dutch so that they would be able to understand the errors and heresies that according to Hackett characterized the book. Of course this was problematic since many of the errors and heresies would have disappeared once the book was retranslated into Latin. Only heavy political pressure made the authorities in Antwerp agree to the demands of the English Government. In Hackett's final report, Tyndale's translation was described not as the New Testament but rather as just an English book.

The Church's difficulty of seeing the value of Tyndale's translation is aptly revealed by a comment made by the humanist and later Lord Chancellor Thomas More. In his *A Dialogue Concerning Heresies* (1529) – part of More's controversy with Tyndale – he wrote that it was a great marvel that any good Christian »hauyng any drop of wyt in his hede«, would complain about the burning of »that booke«. Those who called it New Testament »calleth it by a wronge name« unless they called it »Tyndals testament or Luthers testament«. ¹⁷ More argued strongly

¹⁴ Mozley, *William Tyndale*, 115.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 117.

¹⁶ Alfred W. Pollard, ed. *Records of the English Bible: The Documents Relating to the Translation and Publication of the Bible in English, 1525-1611* (Folkestone: Dawsons, 1974), 148-49.

¹⁷ Thomas More, »A Dialogue Concerning Heresies«, in *The Complete Works of St. Thomas More: Vol. 6. A Dialogue Concerning Heresies*, ed. Thomas M.C. Lawler, Germain Marc'hadour, and Richard C. Marius (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 285.

against the translation, mainly because he believed that Tyndale's English rendering of central Christian concepts – such as seniors instead of priests, congregation instead of church and love instead of charity – were incorrect translations and yet had the potential of *successful* signification. Tyndale's translation offered substitutions for the most important semantic fields that determined the way the Church communicated its doctrine. Tyndale suggested new words that would dissociate the religious discourse in English from the existing institutions of the Church and from its doctrine. It is therefore understandable that More, being aware of the power of naming, would not call Tyndale's translation a New Testament.

Opponents of the burning, in contrast, played down the Englishness of the book and talked about the »Gospel« and the »New Testament«. Tyndale himself was rather quiet about the burning, though obviously the rumours about it reached him. In the preface to *The Parable of the Wicked Mammon* (1527) he dryly remarked that he expected his New Testament to be burnt. If someone asked, he wrote, why he continued working on his translation, seeing that »they burnt the gospel«, then he would answer that in burning the New Testament »they did none other thing than that I looked for«. ¹⁸ In *The Obedience of a Christian Man* (1528) the tone was more antagonistic. He related that the Bishop of Rochester said that Martin Luther burnt books of canon law, »a manifest sign«, according to Rochester, that Luther would have burnt the pope himself. A similar argument, Tyndale wrote, would be: »Rochester and his holy brethren have burnt Christ's testament; an evident sign, verily, that they would have burnt Christ himself also, if they had had him!« ¹⁹ The burning of his translation was according to Tyndale the burning of Christ's testament. Two years later in *The Practice of Prelates* (1530) Tyndale laconically remarked about the Bishop of London: »He burnt the New Testament, calling it Doctrinam peregrinam, strange learning«. ²⁰

The most telling reaction to the suppression of Tyndale's translation was authored by his associates Jerome Barlow and William Roy in 1528. In a dialogue between two priest-servants (Jeffrey and Watkin), the burning of 1526 emerges:

¹⁸ In William Tyndale, *Doctrinal Treatises and Introductions to Different Portions of the Holy Scriptures*, ed. Henry Walter (Cambridge: The University Press, 1848), 43-44.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 221.

²⁰ David Daniell, *William Tyndale: A Biography* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 191.

Ieffraye

Diddest thou not heare whatt villany /
Thy did vnto the gospell?

Watkin

Why / did they agaynst hym conspyre?

Ief.

By my trothe they sett hym a fyre /
Openly in London cite.

Wat.

Who caused it so to be done?

Ief.

In sothe the Bisshoppe of London /
With the Cardinall autorite.
Which at Paulis crosse earnestly /
Denounced it to be heresy /²¹

Barlow and Roy lamented the burning of the Gospel, preventing the Gospel from coming to light. Later on in the dialogue, a poem is dedicated to the burning. They equalled Cardinal Thomas Wolsey (to whom they attributed responsibility for the burning) to a monster, tyrant, and Antichrist.

O miserable monster / most malicious /
Father of perversite / patrone of hell.
O terrible Tyrant / to god and man odious /
Advocate of antichrist / to Christ rebell.
To the I speake / o caytife Cardinall so cruell.
Causles chargynge by thy coursed commandment
To brenne goddis worde the wholly testament.²²

The poem had eight verses and each ended with the same line lamenting the burning of God's Word, the holy Testament. Barlow and Roy called Tyndale's translation Gospel, Testament and God's Word. But though the burning was a great blasphemy, readers of the dialogue could still find comfort:

21 Jerome Barlowe and William Royle, *Rede Me and Be Nott Wrothe*, ed. Douglas H. Parker (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), 76-77.

22 *Ibid.*, 147.

For though they caused to be brent
 The outwarde shaddowe or garment
 Of goddis worde so hye of pryce.
 Yett the grownde of his maiesty
 Printed in christen hertes secretly
 They are nott able to preiudyce.²³

Thus Barlow and Roy, in spite of making an identification between the burnt book and the Gospel, also distinguished between God's Word and its outward appearance (shadow or garment) and suggested that only the latter expired in the fire.

It seems that opponents of the translation avoided naming Tyndale's translation by terms such as New Testament or Gospel and thereby did not admit the book the status of the Word of God. All stressed the human aspect of the book. Tyndale and other evangelical writers, on the other hand, emphasized that the book was Scriptures, the Gospel and God's Word, indicating the divine aspect of the book. While for the established Church Tyndale's translation was an irritation, in Protestant memory it was a momentous development. In 1583, in the fourth edition of his *Acts and Monuments*, the enormously influential Protestant martyrologist John Foxe formulated the view that has dominated the Protestant narrative regarding Tyndale's New Testament. For Foxe Tyndale's translations opened »a dore of light« to the »eies of the whole English nation, which before were many yeres shut vp in darkenesse.« The suppression of his books was described as »Darckenes hateth light«. ²⁴ Foxe's view of the significance of Tyndale's translation came to dominate Evangelical narrative down to modern times. ²⁵

Henrician Book Merchants

The containment of Tyndale's New Testaments concentrated on the merchants who smuggled the books in from the Continent. But even though the repression resulted in the destruction of thousands of books, it also had the side effect of helping to establish Tyndale's New Testament as a Protestant symbol.

²³ Ibid., 79.

²⁴ Foxe, *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online* (1583 edition), 1100-01.

²⁵ See for instance, John Strype, *Memorials of the Most Reverend Father in God, Thomas Cranmer* (London, 1694), 81-86; Christopher Anderson, *The Annals of the English Bible* (London, 1845); Daniell, *William Tyndale: A Biography*, ch. 8.

When merchants were caught with forbidden books they would be dressed with the books and forced to walk in procession and throw the books into a bonfire, a process that was made to look like a penitential ritual. In 1531 the bookseller John Row was sentenced, beside other penances, to go to Smithfield (the meat market, the main site for executions) with books »tyed about hym«, to cast them into the fire and to stay there till they had burnt to ashes.²⁶ The humiliation of being dressed with books and being paraded in a public procession was perhaps a conventional punishment for selling books without a license, but when Bible translations were involved the consequences of this punishment could be unpredictable. In 1530 Thomas Sommers and three other merchants were caught in possession of »Lutheran books«. In 1544 John Bale, a friend of John Foxe and one of the fore-runners of Protestant martyrology, remarked that the Catholics caused the four »openlye to burne Newe Testamentes« at Cheapside (the market) in London.²⁷ Foxe later published the full account of the story in *Acts and Monuments*. Sommers and his companions were sentenced to ride in procession from the Tower to Cheapside each carrying a book in his hand and »behanged with bookes«. When law officers came to dress Sommers with the books he refused to let them make holes in his clothes, and instead he bound the books together with a string and »cast them about his necke (the leaues beyng all open) like a collar«. Sommers and the others rode to Cheapside where a fire was made and a pillory was set up for four persons, »in token that they had deserued it«. Arriving at Cheapside, they were commanded to cast the books in the fire. Yet when Sommers understood that the book he was carrying – Tyndale’s New Testament – was to be burnt, he threw it over the fire instead of into the fire, which was seen by »some of Gods enemyes«, and the book had to be brought back to him. Three times Sommers intentionally threw the book first over, then through and finally away from the fire, and in the end a bystander grabbed the book. Not long after, Sommers was arrested again and put in the Tower where he died »for the testimonie of his fayth«.²⁸

26 Foxe, *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online* (1570 edition), 1227.

27 John Bale, *The Epistle Exhortatorye of an Englyshe Christyane vnto His Dereleye Beloued Contreye of Englande* (Antwerp, 1544), fol, 14r.

28 Foxe, *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online* (1570 edition), 1420. Foxe dated the story to 1541, but a contemporary London chronicle dated it to 1530. The chronicler only mentioned the procession and burning of books of four merchants, one of them Sommers (»Thomas Somar«). It seems, however, that the chronicler mixed the story of Sommers with the story of John Tyndale (see below) who went through a similar process

For Bale the attempted burning of Sommers' New Testament was merely a reminder of the English bishops' denial of the people's right to read »the eternall testament of Christ« which was the »lyuely foode« of people's souls. For Foxe it was a story of martyrdom that proved the people's devotion to Scriptures. Marching merchants in a procession through the streets of London and exhibiting their crime was a matter of punishment and humiliation of both the merchants and the books. Forcing the merchants to burn the books was a ritual of penance, a way of forcing the merchants to dissociate themselves from the books. But as David Cressy has noticed, participants and chroniclers like Sommers and Foxe could reverse the intentions of the authorities and »appropriate the spectacle for polemical purposes«. ²⁹ The state staged a street theatre for penitential causes, yet the state could not control the repercussions of the show. Sommers and mainly Foxe »hijacked« the spectacle and turned it into a theatre of devotion and sacrifice. Saving one New Testament from the consuming fire was a powerful symbol in Foxe's narrative of devotion.

Saving biblical books at the price of defying the authorities was not always the active choice of merchants sympathetic to the evangelical cause. Foxe knew of a similar case, which he chose not to include in his book, doubtlessly because the Bible in this case was not heroically saved from burning and the merchants involved were no martyrs. The seventeenth-century historian John Strype found the account of the story among Foxe's papers and published it in his 1694 biography of Archbishop Thomas Cranmer. In 1530, three merchants, among them John Tyndale, the brother of the translator William Tyndale, were caught with copies of Tyndale's New Testament. They were sentenced by Lord Chancellor Thomas More to ride a horse while facing backwards with paper on their heads and New Testaments and other books »fastened thick about them, pinned or tacked to their Gowns or Clokes«. They were to ride to Cheapside and throw their books into a bonfire. The merchants were also fined. There were neither heroic scenes nor exhibition of evangelical devotion that day at Cheapside. Strype only remarked that the penance was observed. ³⁰

in 1530. Yet, since the chronicler mentioned Sommers, the incident cannot have taken place in 1541 – the chronicle was in all likelihood written before 1540. See Charles Lethbridge Kingsford, ed. *Two London Chronicles from the Collection of John Stow* (London: Offices of the Royal Historical Society, 1910), 5.

²⁹ David Cressy, »Book Burning in Tudor and Stuart England«, *Sixteenth Century Journal* 36, no. 2 (2005): 363.

³⁰ Strype, *Memorials of the Most Reverend Father in God, Thomas Cranmer*, 81.

In fact, Thomas Sommers seems to have been the only Henrician book merchant who saw the necessity of or the potential in rescuing New Testaments from the fire. Sometimes book merchants were willing to cooperate with the bishops in their attempt to contain the books. The year the two penitential book burnings took place, an English merchant knowingly sold copies of Tyndale's New Testament to Tunstal, the bishop of London, so that the latter could burn them. Buy-and-burn campaigns were usual at the time. In May 1527 the Archbishop of Canterbury William Warham bought copies of Tyndale's New Testament in order to burn them. It is assessed that his campaign recovered about a thousand books, but it is uncertain whether they were in fact burnt.³¹ According to the chronicler Edward Hall, John Stokesley, the new bishop of London (replacing Tunstal), caused in 1531 all the New Testaments that he bought to be publicly burnt at St. Paul's churchyard together with many other books.³² Even so the story of Tunstal's campaign was special. The merchant not only knowingly sold the books to Tunstal for destruction, he actually bought the books from William Tyndale, who knew that the books were destined to be destroyed.

The story was first reported by Edward Hall in his chronicle from 1548. According to Hall, the buy-and-burn operation was planned by Augustine Packyngton, a London merchant with connections in Antwerp. Packyngton approached Bishop Tunstal with the suggestion that Tunstal finance the acquisition of all available copies of the New Testament. Once he had the books, Tunstal could burn them at St. Paul's Cross. The bishop agreed. Packyngton then approached Tyndale in Antwerp. Tyndale was glad to hear that the actual buyer was Tunstal and that Tunstal's intention was to burn the books. Such a scheme would relieve Tyndale of his debts, the whole world would »cry out vpon the burning of Goddes worde«, and he would have enough money to make a new version of the New Testament. Hence the bargain was made: Tunstal got the books, Packyngton »the thankes« and Tyndale the money.³³

The plan made sense. Tyndale was able to keep on improving his translation, and Tunstal was fooled as he soon had to deal with a new printed version of the English New Testament – the books came into England »thicke and threfold«. Yet, would Tyndale gladly supply New Testaments for a public burning of God's Word in order to turn public

31 Mozley, *William Tyndale*, 120; Pollard, ed. *Records of the English Bible*, 125.

32 Edward Hall, *The Union of the Two Noble and Illustre Fanelies of Lancastre [and] Yorke (Hall's Chronicle)* (London, 1809; reprint, New York, 1965), 771.

33 *Ibid.*, 762-63.

opinion against the bishops? Was the burning of God's Word not a blasphemy, a monstrosity, as Barlow and Roy described it? It seems that the evangelical logic for the operation was that if the overall result of the burning was a better dissemination of God's Word (a better translation, a supportive public opinion) then the burning of Bibles was not a problem. And it was a logic shared by many evangelicals. Hall continued the story by reporting on the arrest and investigation of Tyndale's aide George Constantine, who explained that the evangelical exiles sustained themselves by relying on the purchasing power of the Bishop of London. Neither Packyngton, nor Tyndale nor Constantine seems to have attributed any special meaning to the burning of Bibles.

The story was repeated almost verbatim by John Foxe in *Acts and Monuments*, only Foxe reduced Tyndale's share in the act. Foxe shortened the dialogue between Tyndale and Packyngton in which Tyndale expressed his willingness and happiness to sell the books and see them burnt at St. Paul's Cross. In fact Tyndale's share in the story shrank to a single sentence in which Foxe related that Packyngton relayed the matter to Tyndale and »vpon compact made betwene them, the byshop of London hadde the bookes, Packyngton had the thankes, and Tyndall hadde the monye«. ³⁴ Was Foxe feeling uncomfortable about the story? The story was repeated many times since, the authors – evangelicals, propagandists and modern historians alike – showing no reservations about the reformer's compliance in Bible burning.

Foxe probably preferred the Thomas Summers type of book merchant. Or even more, the Avignon book merchant who died in 1540 for selling French Bibles, and whose story was first told by the French Calvinist Jean Crispin (whose martyrology was probably Foxe's source). ³⁵ The bookseller was selling French and Latin Bibles and was spotted by the Bishop of Aix and immediately arrested. When questioned about whether he did not know that it was forbidden to sell vernacular Bibles in all Christendom, the bookseller replied that he sold many Bibles that were printed with imperial and royal privileges, and that he did not know any nation throughout Christendom that did not have vernacular Bibles. The dialogue between the bookseller and the bishop illustrates a compelling point from the evangelical perspective: the Catholic bishop abhorred Scriptures and withheld it from the people,

34 Foxe, *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online* (1563 edition), 495.

35 Jean Crispin, *Histoire des Martyrs*, ed. Daniel Benoit, 3 vols. (Toulouse: Société des Livres Religieux, 1885-89), vol. 1: 390-91; Foxe, *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online* (1563 edition), 691-2.

while the Protestant bookseller willingly adopted God's Word.³⁶ The bookseller was eloquent and uncompromising. He turned a question about forbidden books into an argument about »the instrumente and the autenticke« letters of the alliance between God and the people, i.e. the Gospel. The Bible, according to the bookseller, was not just a book; it was Holy Scripture, Holy Gospel, Holy Testament. It was the authentic evidence of Christ's promise to mankind in whatever language it was printed and published. Yet, persuasive arguments and eloquence were not met with counter-arguments but with rage and violence. The bookseller was condemned to be burnt, and as »a signe or token« of the reason for his condemnation, he carried two Bibles hanging from his neck, one on the front and the other on his back.³⁷

Book merchants could be promoted as exemplary symbols of the evangelical movement. Not only that they literally speaking disseminated God's Word, they were doing it by defying the authorities' will and at not a small risk. The story about Augustine Packyngton shows, however, that book merchants (and more surprisingly, also reformers) also had a quite functionalist perception of sacred books. The early Evangelical movement found no absolute and independent sacred value in the Bible. Later Protestants seems to have entertained more dogmatic views of the Bible.

Marian Martyrs

The persecution of Protestants in the time of Queen Mary supplied John Foxe with a few more stories about dying with and dying for Bibles.

In 1554 Derek Carver, a brewer and immigrant from Flanders, was arrested and sent to Bishop Bonner. According to his confession (which Foxe apparently copied from official records), Carver denied the presence of Christ in the Eucharist, said that there was no sacrifice in the Latin mass, denied the sacramental status of confession and believed that the Catholic doctrine of the Church of England (after Queen Mary took power) did not agree with Scriptures and therefor was (from a Protestant perspective) illegitimate. The nineteenth-century editors of *Acts and Monuments* observed that Foxe probably censored Carver's confession, erasing his claim that baptism was only an external sign

36 Foxe, *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online* (1563 edition), 692.

37 *Ibid.*, (1563 edition), 692.

– a claim that Foxe did not agree with.³⁸ Carver also confessed that he had the Bible and Psalter in English read aloud at his house a few times, though Carver was not the reader. He could not read English at the time and only learnt the language by reading an English Bible while in prison. At the place of execution, before Carver was burnt, his English Bible was thrown into a barrel where the fire was made. As soon as Carver got into the barrel himself, »he toke vp the boke and threw it among the people«. The sheriff commanded the people »in the King and Queenes name, in payne of death« to throw the book inside again, but to no avail.³⁹ The Bible was not the reason for which Carver suffered death. It was his views regarding the sacraments. The Bible, however, became a sign of Carver's obstinacy, insisting on reading in it while in prison, as well as of his devotion and faith in God's Word when he faced death.

One of the few martyr stories from the Marian persecution that actually involved burnt Bibles was the account of the martyrdom of the weaver William Wolsey and the painter Robert Pigot, who were burnt in Ely in 1555 clutching New Testaments to their chests as they perished.⁴⁰ The two were questioned for not coming to mass, and after an interrogation they were sentenced to death for their denial of the doctrine of transubstantiation. Unexpectedly, at the day of his execution Wolsey was accused of denying Scriptures. This was a typical Protestant complaint against Catholics, claiming that Catholic doctrine was not based on the Bible but rather on human inventions, but now it was directed at a Protestant weaver. The layman Wolsey was accused, in the words of his inquisitors, of »meddling« with Scriptures.

What warranted the accusation of denying Scripture was probably a fact that Foxe did not reveal to his readers (or perhaps Foxe's informants did not tell him). Wolsey was accused of being an Anabaptist. Apparently, Wolsey denied that the Trinity was found in Scriptures and that baptism affected salvation, both notions which the Puritan Foxe would regard heretical.⁴¹ At the place of execution, »a great sheete knit full of bookes« was brought to the fire. These books were apparently New Testaments and Wolsey and Pigot each asked for a book, and died clutching them to their chests. By making a deliberate association between themselves and the burning New Testaments, the two martyrs

38 Ibid., (1563 edition), 1309.

39 Ibid., (1563 edition), 1311-12.

40 Ibid., (1570 edition), 1932-33.

41 See editors' third comment in Ibid., (1570 edition), 1933.

and Foxe turned what should have been a sign of guilt into a sign of devotion.⁴²

Prominent in Foxe's account of the Marian persecution was the arrest, investigation and martyrdom of the iron-maker Richard Woodman. Woodman was arrested in 1557 for his activities as lay preacher in Sussex and was brought before John Christopherson, the Bishop-designate of Chichester. Woodman later put his examination in writing, and Foxe printed his records. During his examination, a priest presented Woodman with a tricky question: was Bible burning equal to the burning of God's Word? Here is how Woodman tackled the problem:

A priest: »Here is a testamente in my hand: if I hurle him in the fyre and bourne him, haue I burned Gods worde, or not? I wyll bye a new for. xvi. pence.«

Woodman: »I say you haue burned gods word, and I beleue, he that wyll burne a testamente willingly, wold burne God him selfe if he were here, if he could. For he and his woord are all one.«

Woodman's reply elicited laughter from the assembled clergymen. Then the bishop who led the examination asked:

»why? if my counting house were full of bookes, and if my house should be on fyre by chaunce, and so be burned, were gods woord burned?«

Woodman: »No my Lorde, because they were burned agaynst your wyll: but yet if you should burne them willingly, or thinke it well, and not being sorye for it, you bourne gods word as well as hee. For he that is not sorye for a shrewd tourne, doth allow it to be good.«⁴³

The dialogue established a strong association between the book of the Bible and God's Word. Woodman maintained that burning the Bible was similar to burning God's Word, that is, his Gospel, and indeed similar to burning God himself. While the Marian Catholics (according to Woodman's notes) distinguished between God, his word and the material form of it, Woodman tended to fuse the three, though he admitted that in case of accidental burning the fusion was not complete.

42 See also the martyrdom of John Hullier who died in 1556 clutching a Book of Common Prayer to his chest, *Ibid.*, (1570 edition), 2236-37.

43 *Ibid.*, (1563 edition), 1665.

As was the case with Hall's account of the buy-and-burn campaign, Foxe seems to have felt uncomfortable with his source. In the 1570 edition of *Acts and Monuments* he added a gloss in the margin where he corrected Woodman, asserting that letters in a book were one thing, the testament and word of God another. In common usage, Foxe wrote, the Bible is called testament, as bread and wine are called the body and blood of Christ.⁴⁴ Foxe suggested that Woodman's identification of form (letters) with content (God's Word) was valid only in conventional usage. Foxe thus attempted to weaken Woodman's claim about representation and materiality. While Woodman made a strong association between the Bible and God's Word, Foxe tried to moderate this claim and made a weaker association where the Bible was only a testament, a sign of God's Word.

Discussing the ontology of Bibles was not a simple matter at a time of constantly changing religious dogma. In *Acts and Monuments* one could find yet another comparison that helped make the materiality of Bibles comprehensible: Bibles were like images. The comparison was invoked by the Bishop of Winchester Stephen Gardiner in late 1547 in a letter to a local captain. Gardiner protested the recent acts of iconoclasm in his diocese following the ascendance of Edward VI to the throne. An opponent of the Reformation, Gardiner invoked a double comparison between images and books. First, he said, if we condemn people for »reading the truth« in images made of simple material such as wood and stone, should we not also condemn them for reading books made of cloth and written with pitch? Second, if the few privileged who could read »one sorte of letters« (books) took away »the bookes of the reste« (images) and only valued proper letters, would not ordinary people justly mistrust the privileged?⁴⁵

Gardiner believed that the reason for the attack on images was that images were made from a »vile« material. If that was the case, then books should also be forbidden, since they were also made from vile material. Gardiner argued further that if reading letters was legitimate, then reading images should be so as well. Gardiner substantiated this argument by invoking the commonplace saying that images were »books for the laity«, they served as books to the illiterate.

Gardiner's letter was answered not by the local captain but by Edward Seymour, Lord Protector during the minority of King Edward VI, who was responsible for implementing the Protestant reform program.

44 Ibid., (1570 edition), 2220.

45 Ibid., (1563 edition), 785.

Seymour accepted that images were books of a kind, but he did not agree with Gardiner's comparison. According to Seymour, those who condemned images simply because they were made of vile material could also condemn books because they were made of old rags and printed with pitch. But if books and images had the same function, why should people such as Gardiner be more aggrieved when an image was burnt than when the Bible, »wherin the vndoubted word of God is comprised«, was burnt, torn to pieces or »made past of«. Seymour admitted that when images were removed from the churches the unlearned lost a form of learning. It was, however, a more serious offence, he suggested, if the privileged who read Greek and Latin were to take away from the unlearned their English Bibles.⁴⁶

Seymour's position on the question of images and books is interesting. He did not condemn images as such, only people's tendency to read them wrongly. Neither did he reject the comparison between images and books. Images, according to Seymour, could indeed be regarded as books. Seymour believed, however, that there were two problems with the images-as-books metaphor. First, as things to look at, images attracted worship in the form of kneeling, kissing and special reverence to their form; when it came to images people had a strong inclination toward idolatry. Second, as things to read, the »great letters« of images were prone to misinterpretation. Images were not reliable reading material. Books of the Bible on the other hand were a safer medium. As things to look at, Bibles did not attract any worship in the form of kneeling, kissing or candle lightning. As things to read, Bibles were easy to read and their message was precise.

In his letter, Seymour dismissed Gardiner's concern about the destroyed images, saying that when a statue of a saint was burnt only wood or stone was destroyed, not flesh and blood. Seymour did not actually express his view on burnt Bibles. But, seeing his functionalist approach to images, would he also claim that when Bibles were thrown into the fire only paper and ink were burnt and not God's Word?

Seymour's letter aside, the martyr stories that Foxe collected and edited shows the potential of the English Bible, as book, to function as an effective symbol in times of trouble. Protestants under persecution and martyrologists such as John Foxe could turn Bible burning and burnt Bibles into a symbol of suffering, devotion and hope. It was poetic in the case of William Wolsey and Robert Pigot and brave in the case of Derek Carver. The Bible, which previously (as a Latin text)

46 Ibid., (1563 edition), 786-87.

was restricted to ecclesiastical and scholarly use, was now (in English) made into an object that manifested the faith and religion of Protestants, all Protestants. Still, the explicit analogy between God's Word and its material manifestation in the English Bible, as Woodman saw it, seemed too dogmatic, not only to Catholic observers but apparently also to John Foxe.

Elizabethan Controversies

After the Elizabethan Settlement, Protestant controversialists went on the offensive, and the accusation of Bible burning was a sure card in their controversies with Catholic controversialists in exile.

In 1562, Bishop John Jewel anonymously published (as the main but not the sole author) the *Apologia ecclesiae anglicanae* (the *Apology*) on behalf of the whole Protestant clergy. The *Apology* was meant to justify the English Church's departure from the Catholic Church, to prove the unity of the clergy after the Elizabethan settlement and to attack the Roman Church. In the *Apology*, Jewel disputed the Catholics' accusations of Protestant treason, conspiracy and schism and attacked the pope and the Roman Church for their claim of being the true church. For Jewel the true church should be built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets; it should be proven from Scriptures. Yet, he said, the Catholics always abhorred »and fly the word of God, even as the thief fleeth the gallows.« They called Scriptures »bare letter, uncertain, unprofitable, dumb, killing, and dead«. ⁴⁷ The advocates of the Roman Church not only despised Scriptures and marginalized its use, they also burnt Scriptures »as in times past wicked King Aza did, or as Antiochus or Maximinus did«. When Catholics could not convince their opponents, they either burnt Scriptures or »craftily convey them from the people surely«. ⁴⁸

This accusation was repeated in writings against the Catholics from the 1560s onwards. It was directed at the Roman Church as such, and rarely mentioned any specifics. Thus, for instance, religious and political controversialist Thomas Lupton called the pope and the Roman Church traitors who hid, destroyed and burnt »Scripture, Gospell, & Gods worde«. The pope hid, withheld and burnt »the Bybles and Testaments, leaste the people shoulde loke on them and feede

⁴⁷ John Jewel, *An Apology of the Church of England*, ed. John E. Booty (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1963), 76-77.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 80.

themselves«. ⁴⁹ While rarely specific about Catholic Bible burning, Protestant controversialists alluded to specific biblical and ancient burnings of sacred books. Jewel mentioned King Aza, King Antioch, Emperor Maximian and King Herod. ⁵⁰ It was commonplace to compare Catholic Bible burning to biblical and early Christian stories of the burning of sacred books. Thus the preacher Edward Dering claimed that Scriptures was burnt in Emperor Diocletian's time, was hidden in the temple in Jerusalem at the time of King Manasseh, was cut to pieces in the time of Antioch, and »to compare lyke with lyke«, was kept unused during the Catholic »antichristian iurisdiction«. ⁵¹ Others made similar accusations, the names of the ancient persecutors varying slightly. Jewel himself, in a later publication, mentioned the book burning of Diocletian, who caused Scriptures to be burnt »in the open Market place« and that of Antioch, who burnt the books of the law »and cut them in pieces«. ⁵²

In a few instances Protestant writers were more specific in their allegations. Perceval Wiburn, a clergyman who contributed to a controversy about schism in the Church, repeatedly reminded his adversary, the Jesuit Robert Persons, of the Catholics' Bible burning. While discussing the qualities of Protestant Bible translations, he exclaimed: »I remember what was said in Queene Maries dayes, when yee burned the English Bibles, to excuse so horrible a fact withall: ye said the Bible was nauthtily translated.« Wiburn also asserted that »the Pope and you Papists« were successors of Antioch in »renting, cutting, burning, and destroying Bybles«. ⁵³

49 Thomas Lupton, *A Persuasion from Papistrie* (London, 1581), 149, 152, 155.

50 During the Jewish rebellion against the Syrian King Antiochus Epiphanes (167-160 BC) »the book of the law« was rent and burnt (1 *Macabees* 1:56). The Roman Emperor Maximian was co-emperor during the Roman persecution of the early fourth century. According to the legend King Herod burnt the genealogical records in Jerusalem to conceal his non-royal origin. King Aza (Asa) of Judea is remembered in the Old Testament as a reformer who was loyal to God and fought paganism. He did not burn any books. Did Jewel mean the later King Ahaz, who devoted himself to pagan worship?

51 Edward Dering, *A Sparing Restraint of Many Lawlesse Vntruthes, which M. Doctor Harding Dothe Challenge* (London, 1568), 6. King Manasseh was known for reintroducing pagan worship in Jerusalem, but there is nothing in the biblical story (2 *Kings* 21) to suggest that he hid Scripture in the temple. The idea that Scripture was kept hidden in the temple is probably a deduction from the biblical account of the finding of a book of the Torah in the temple in Jerusalem in the time of Manasseh's grandson, King Josiah (2 *Kings* 22:8), assuming that it was hidden by Manasseh who renounced the orthodox worship. According to rabbinic literature (*Sanhedrin* 103b) it was Manasseh's grandfather, King Ahaz, who sealed up the scrolls of the law (book of the Torah), and Manasseh's son, King Amon, who burnt the scrolls altogether.

52 John Jewel, *Certain Sermons Preached before the Queenes Maiestie* (London, 1583), sermon on Joshua 6 (no pagination).

53 Perceval Wiburn, *A Checke or Reprofe of M. Howlets Vntimely Shreeching in Her Maiesties Eares* (London, 1581), 154 and 160.

The association of Catholic Bible burning with ancient burners of Scriptures had roots in evangelical reactions to the burning of Tyndale's New Testament. Long before the controversies of the 1560s evangelical authors used to compare the suppression of Tyndale's New Testament to ancient persecutions. In 1530 William Barlow compared the burning of the New Testament to Antioch's burning of the books of the law. Both burnings were the work of the Antichrist and Satan, though apparently the burning of the »new law« (New Testament) was worse than the burning of the »old law« (Old Testament).⁵⁴ In 1544, George Joye compared the English bishops to Diocletian and other Roman figures associated with persecution.⁵⁵

The accusation of Bible burning was not left unanswered. Thomas Harding, one of the leading English Catholics in exile, replied to Jewel's *Apology* with a *Confutation* (1565) in which he refuted the *Apology* paragraph by paragraph. Harding did not like Jewel's sweeping accusation. Why did Jewel say of the Catholics »in generall«, that they »despise, hate, caste away, and burne the holy scriptures?« he asked. The Catholic Church, according to Harding, did not hate Scriptures and did not keep it from the people. When the Church burnt »corrupt« Bible translations, it did not burn Scriptures but only errors, »no more than one dothe the apple tree, that burneth the caterpillers«, as Harding figuratively put it. The comparison to Aza, Antioch, Maximian and Herod was false and slanderous. The Catholics had Bibles in every monastery, cathedral church, college and private library of learned people. »You burden us impudently«, he told Jewel, with »burning and conueying awaye of Scriptures«. ⁵⁶

Harding took Jewel's comparison of contemporary Bible burning to the Roman persecution and turned it against him. The Donatists (who opposed delivering the sacred books for destruction, even at the price of their lives), he argued, accused St. Augustine (who did not think one should risk his life for the sacred books) of Bible burning. To which Augustine answered: »Let him be thought to haue cast the holy scriptures into the fyre, who when they are read is conuict not to consent vnto them.« The real Bible burners, according to Harding, were the metaphorical ones who did not »consent« unto Scriptures. Since the

54 William Barlow, *A Proper Dyaloge, betwene a Gentillman and a Husbandma[n]* (Antwerp, 1530), »Vnto the Reader«.

55 George Joye, *A Present Consolation of the Sufferers of Persecution for Ryghtwysenes* (1544), no pagination.

56 Thomas Harding, *A Confutation of a Booke Intituled 'An Apologie of the Church of England'* (Antwerp, 1565), 220-21.

Protestants did not believe in the presence of Christ in the Eucharist then, according to Harding, they did not believe in Scriptures and thus committed the same sin of which they accused the Catholics. Harding finished his refutation by asking rhetorically whether Scriptures was truly burnt when *heretical* books were burnt.⁵⁷

A couple of years later Jewel answered the *Confutation* with a *Defence*. In his reply to Harding Jewel made clear that he was neither impressed by Harding's arguments nor by his metaphors. Whether the Catholics burnt Scriptures, »Heauen, and Earthe, and Sea, and Lande« may bear witness, but Harding's excuse was a poor one. It was an unwise peasant, Jewel told Harding, who burnt the tree *as well as* the caterpillars. The Catholics burnt whole books and not only errors. If books were to be burnt because they contained errors, then all the books in the world had to be cast into the fire. No, the reason, according to Jewel, for burning the Bible was not the errors in the translation but rather that it was translated into the vernacular.⁵⁸ Jewel did not disagree with Harding's argument that denying God's Word was equal to burning it. But he presented Protestant doctrine as the true interpretation of Scriptures. He resorted to another quote from Augustine: »He is to be thought, to haue deliuered the Testamente to the fire, that quarrelleth (as you doo) againste the wil, and meaninge of him, that made the Testamente«. Jewel believed that it was the Catholics who did not follow the meaning of Scriptures. There was little difference between the two quotations, yet Jewel's point was clear: it was not the Protestants who were Bible burners but the Catholics, actually and metaphorically.⁵⁹

It is interesting that the debaters did not argue about concrete instances of Bible burning in England. It was apparently important for Protestant polemicists to frame the Catholics in general as Bible burners, that is, as committing the most evident act of rejecting Scriptures, and it was important for the Protestants to associate Catholic Bible burning with biblical and ancient persecution so that the burning of Protestant Bibles by the authorities could be presented as anti-Christian persecution. In a sermon on *Psalms* 69:9 preached before the Queen around 1561-62, John Jewel decried the lack of learning among the clergy and proclaimed: »Suche thinges shalbe done vnto vs, as we before suffered: the truth of God shalbe taken away, the holy scriptures

57 Ibid.

58 John Jewel, *A Defence of the Apologie of the Church of Englande* (London, 1567), 477.

59 Ibid., 480. Harding's response was later ridiculed in Andrew Willet, *Tetrastylon papisticum* (London, 1593), 6.

burnt and consumed in fire. A marueilous darknesse and calamitie must needes ensue.« Though the context made it clear that he referred to Catholic Bible burning in the past, the way Jewel formulated his admonition to the clergy gave Bible burning a new meaning. It was not just a historical event associated with the Catholic Church, but also a providential punishment, a disaster that would fall upon the Church if the clergy forsook their duty to learn and teach.⁶⁰ Parts of Jewel's sermon, including his admonition to the clergy, and the construction of Bible burning as a providential act, were later reproduced under different circumstances by Protestant authors who sometimes strengthened the link to the Catholic Church and sometimes disregarded it.⁶¹

Still, the conception of Bible burning as a Catholic vice remained dominant and the destruction of Church Bibles during the Catholic »Rising of the North« (an unsuccessful attempt to depose Queen Elizabeth in 1569), which was immediately reported in different media, has only cemented the commonplace »knowledge« that the papists stood for Bible burning. This identification held during the seventeenth century and was in fact renewed when accounts about the destruction and desecration of English Bibles by Irish Catholic rebels in 1641 was reported in England. The 1640s and the emergence of radical religion saw new Bible burners. This, however, is another story.⁶²

Conclusion

The four themes analysed here shows that there was no straight progression in the development of Protestant views of the Bible. It seems nevertheless legitimate to say that functionalist approaches to the material book of the Bible were more likely in the first phase of the Evangelical movement and less in the later phases that mark the institutionalisation of Protestantism in England. It also seems fair to suggest that along with repression and persecution, the English Bible's symbolic value and utility in terms of polemic and propaganda grew stronger up to the »triumph« of Biblical religion during Elizabeth's time. From the early movement and on the identification of the Bible – its content and

60 Jewel, *Certaine Sermons*, sermon on zeal (no pagination).

61 Benjamin Rudyerd, *Sir Beniamin Ruddierd's Speach in Behalfe of the Cleargy* (Oxford, 1628), 7; *Ichabod: or, Five Groans of the Church: Prudently Foreseeing, and Passionately Bewailing Her Second Fall*, (Cambridge, 1663), 40; *Prophecys Concerning the Return of Popery into England, Scotland and Ireland*, (London, 1682), 13-14.

62 See Avner Shamir, »Bible Burning and the Desecration of Bibles in Early Modern England« (PhD dissertation, Roskilde University, 2010), chapters 3 and 4.

its reading – with the Evangelicals (Protestants) and the unchristian attack on the Bible with the established (Catholic) Church only got more obvious. Yet the nuances of Protestant views of the burnt Bible are important.

There was nothing surprising about the burning of Tyndale's translations. Tyndale admitted that he expected nothing else. Both Tyndale's opponents and supporters connected it with earlier attempts at containing the reading of vernacular biblical translations, namely the Wycliffite biblical writings. This link was expressed explicitly in the controversy between Tyndale and Thomas More. Here More had to relate to the accusation that the Church burnt both old and new translations and specifically to the allegation that among the burnt books of Richard Hunne (who was accused of reading Wycliffite literature and died in custody in 1514) a Bible was burnt.⁶³ But even though the attack on Tyndale's translation was framed within the standing prohibition of and old controversy about »old« Bible translations, there was also a new element in the debate, namely the status of the English Bible. It was not only a question of whether Tyndale's New Testament was good or bad, useful or dangerous, the question was also if this English book was the Gospel, the Testament of Christ, God's Word. It was not only a question of the quality of text, it was also a question about the divinity of it. And therefore the naming of the book was important. The Evangelical writers consciously, so it seems, identified the English text, Tyndale's book, with a divine text, namely, God's Word.

This association between text and God's Word, however, had its limits. There was not necessarily an attribution of value to the material book itself. Barlow and Roy, who glorified Tyndale's New Testament and persistently emphasized its divinity, clearly saw the difference between the combustible material book and the incombustible text or message of the Bible. If the story about the involvement of Tyndale in the buy-and-burn operation in 1530 is true, it clearly demonstrates Tyndale and his associates' functional thinking about books and Bibles. Lord Protector Seymour's letter from 1547, at the beginning of a true Protestant reformation in England, shows the same functional tendency. Books were like images, just much better. Their text was clear and their materiality did not attract idolatry. And even though the Bible was

63 More, »A Dialogue Concerning Heresies«, 317 and 330. On Hunne see J.D.M. Derrett, »The Affairs of Richard Hunne and Friar Standish«, in *The Complete Works of St. Thomas More: Vol. 9. The Apology*, ed. J.B. Trap (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 215-46.

doubtlessly an expression of God's Word, burnt Bibles were perhaps just burnt ink and paper.

The most explicit identification between the material English Bible and God's Word was made, perhaps not incidentally, by a lay preacher during the reign of the Catholic Mary. Asked about a hypothetical burnt Bible, Richard Woodman expressed a simple identification between the written Scriptures and God's Word. This view of the Bible was not approved by the learned John Foxe, who corrected Woodman's fusion of the human (the book) and the divine (God's Word). Foxe instead emphasized the representational significance of the Bible. Yet, Foxe also seems to have been uncomfortable with the functionality of Tyndale. Burnt Bibles could be of great symbolic value – as could be seen in Foxe's accounts of Thomas Sommers, who tried to save a New Testament from the fire, of Derek Carver who actually saved his Bible from burning, and William Wolsey and Robert Pigot who died with New Testaments clutched to their chests. Martyrdom and dedication to Scriptures were the important elements in Foxe's stories, not improper treatment of sacred material as such. Interestingly, Foxe accounted the story of Anne Lacy who kept her Bible in a dunghill in order to save herself. There was apparently nothing wrong in hiding the book of the Bible in a dunghill.⁶⁴

The status of the English Bible was established after the Elizabethan Settlement. And Protestant controversialists made a point of the opposition between the Bible-loving and Bible-reading Protestants and the habitual Bible burners, namely the Catholics. It was propaganda, but it also shows a profound conviction on the side of Protestant writers that one of the defining differences between the Protestants and the Catholics was their rival approaches to the English Bible. Bible burning became a synonym for the pre-reformed Church's corruption and the papists' present unwillingness to follow God's Word.

RESUMÉ

Bibelafrændinger i reformationstidens England

I oktober 1526 blev et antal eksemplarer af William Tyndales oversættelse af Det Nye Testamente brændt under en prædiken i St. Paul's Cathedral i London. Nu kom en tid med systematisk undertrykkelse af nye forsøg på at fremstille og sprede engelsksprogede versioner af Bibelen, der ellers ikke var udkommet

64 Foxe, *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online* (1570 edition), 2317.

siden slutningen af det 14. århundrede. Tyndales Nye Testamente fra 1526 samt efterfølgende oversættelser blev anset for kætteri under Henrik 8.

Bestræbelserne på at dæmme op for udbredelsen af engelske bibler havde i sig selv kun beskeden effekt; dog havde de en betragtelig virkning på udformningen af den protestantiske opfattelse af Bibelen. I langt større grad end i noget andet protestantisk land medførte Reformationen en bibelbaseret religion, som mod slutningen af det 16. århundrede havde fortrængt næsten enhver anden form for gudsdyrkelse end læsning af Bibelen. I nærværende artikel argumenteres for, at udspringet til den proces, som førte til så stærk en ophøjelse af Bibelen, skal findes i den måde, ideerne om værdien og nytten af en Bibel på folkesproget blev konstrueret på – nemlig som en reaktion på og diskurs om afbrændingen af Tyndales bibeloversættelser. Den evangeliske bevægelse klarede sig gennem forfølgelser og bogbrændinger ved at opbygge stærke og levende forestillinger om Bibelen som en hellig bog: Guds sande og enestående ord, et symbol på tro og fromhed, og, i en tid med forfølgelser, også et symbol på håb.

Opfattelsen af den engelske bibel og afbrændinger af samme udviklede sig gennem fire faser. Først var der straks-reaktionerne fra evangelisk orienterede skribenter. De, der støttede Tyndales oversættelse, betonedes dens guddommeligt-ophøjede værdi og fremstillede den som selve Den Hellige Skrift, Herrens budskab, Guds egne ord – i modsætning til modstanderne, som medgav, at Bibelen, når det kom til stykket, var menneskers værk. Derefter demonstreres, hvordan historier om bogkræmmere, som blev tvunget til at brænde forbudte bibler som led i bodsritualer, lod sig forvandle til farverige symboler på evangelisk offervilje for Bibelens skyld. Som tredje led vises, ved undersøgelse af beretninger om martyrer under forfølgelserne af protestanter i midten af det 16. århundrede, at sammenknytningen af henrettelse på bålet og afbrænding af bøger var et magtfuldt symbol på lidelse, fromhed og håb. I den protestantiske martyrhistorie manifesterede Bibelen som artefakt protestanternes tro og gudsdyrkelse – som mere og mere blev reduceret til netop bibelsk religion. Endelig udviklede protestantiske polemikere i deres kontroverser med katolikkerne under Elizabeth 1. den idé, at Romerkirken, katolikkerne, var at opfatte som vaneforbrydere for så vidt angår afbrænding af bibler. Dette blev et kendemærke for katolicismen; omvendt, naturligvis, var engelsk protestantismes særlige kendetegn dens kærlighed til og udlægning af den hellige skrift.