

1 **William Tyndale (1491-1536), Reformierte Theologie als kontextuelle Schrifstaueslegung.**
2 Arne Dembek. Spätmittelalter, Humanismus, Reformation. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010.
3 508 pp. €9.00. ISBN 978-3-16-150302-3.

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6 In the early sixteenth century, William Tyndale, originally an unknown
7 Gloucestershire priest, had to leave England for Germany and the Low Countries to pursue
8 (alas, but not accomplish!) his project of translating the Greek and Hebrew Holy Scriptures
9 into English. In the twenty-first century, a relatively unknown scholar, again from Germany,
10 was to present the first modern critical monograph on Tyndale's theological achievement.
11 This German scholarly work strikes one as historically and theologically sound even when
12 compared to the books of English-speaking scholars who are either uncritically biased and
13 enthusiastic about their Reformation-compatriot, or interested in recasting him in a more
14 revisionist light.

15 Arne Dembek is a German Lutheran minister who defended his dissertation on
16 William Tyndale at the Evangelische Hochschule in Wuppertal. Mohr Siebeck was wise
17 enough to publish the dissertation in a book-format. The author also studied in Edinburgh,
18 where Professor Jane Dawson inspired him to write about the history of the English
19 Reformation. His "Doktorvater" in Germany was Professor Dr. Hellmuth Zschoch.

20 In the past two decades, there has undoubtedly been a Renaissance of Tyndale studies,
21 with the publication of *Tyndale's New Testament*, ed. David Daniell (New Haven: Yale
22 University Press, 1989), the modern biography also by David Daniell (New Haven: Yale
23 University Press, 1994), the founding of the Tyndale Society with its impressive international
24 conferences, and the launching of their scholarly journal *Reformation*. English-speaking
25 scholarship, however, has so far not provided such a compact, balanced and meticulously
26 written monograph on Tyndale as the one by Arne Dembek.

27 For all the recent international scholarly interest in Tyndale, only one of his works, *An*
28 *Answer to Sir Thomas Mores Dialogue*, edited by Sister Anne O'Donnell, (Washington, DC:
29 Catholic University of America Press, 2000) has earned a critically annotated edition. All the
30 other independent works of Tyndale are available from the three volumes edited by Walter
31 Hilton and published by the Parker Society between 1848 and 1850. Although Dembek's
32 critical apparatus is impressive, it is far from complete. Some of his omissions include
33 *Tyndale's Testament*, ed. David Daniell (Ware: Wordsworth, 2002) or András Mikesy's
34 bilingual *Martin Luther and William Tyndale on Paul's Epistle to the Romans* (**City:**
35 **Publisher**, 2008).

36 The book is logically structured: it has seven main chapters with several German-style
37 sub- and sub-subchapters. The first chapter contains Tyndale's biography from his birth
38 (Dembek proposes 1491 instead of the traditionally suggested 1494) until his arrival in
39 Germany in 1524. The second one is about his first New Testament translations (1525 and
40 1526); the third chapter discusses his main theological works *The Parable of the Wicked*
41 *Mammon* and *The Obedience of a Christian Man* (both written in 1528). The fourth chapter is
42 devoted to the Old Testament translations and prefaces; the fifth one to his anticlerical
43 polemical works (*The Practice of Prelates* [1530], and *An Answer to Thomas Mores'*
44 *Dialogue* [1531]). The sixth chapter is concerned with Tyndale's hermeneutical work (*A*
45 *Pathway into the Holy Scripture* 1532) and his two New Testament commentaries (*Exposition*
46 *of the First epistle of Saint John* [1532], and *An Exposition upon the v.vi.vii. chapters of*
47 *Matthew* [1532/33]). The last chapter explores Tyndale's revision of the New Testament
48 (1534) and his sacramental theology which is closer to the views of the Swiss Reformers than
49 to Luther's. Dembek is entirely correct in emphasizing that Tyndale was an original

50 interpreter of Scripture and that his translation-project is rooted in his Reformation
51 hermeneutics. The author is also aware of Tyndale's typological understanding and
52 explanation of the Bible.

53 Dembek's book has a unique feature which is perhaps simultaneously a merit and a
54 weakness. Throughout his monograph the author lets Tyndale speak for himself as his *oeuvre*
55 is practically unknown not only for German speakers but even for the modern English
56 audience. Dembek thus amply quotes the primary sources; he always gives the Parker Society
57 version in the footnotes and his own German translation in the main text. The book therefore
58 reads relatively easily for those whose German is perhaps poor. The quotations are
59 economically portioned and selected; however, a more critical dialogue with these texts would
60 have been more persuasive. Dembek's comparison of Tyndale and Luther is along the lines of
61 traditional scholarship. His insights into similarities in the theologies of William Tyndale and
62 the Strasbourg Reformer Martin Bucer (1491-1551) are highly original. The main narrative of
63 the text is occasionally interrupted by helpful *excursuses*.

64 All in all, Dembek's monograph on William Tyndale is a ground-breaking work by a
65 theologian, written mainly for a theological audience. The book does not only fill a gap in
66 German scholarship, but also provides a model for English-speaking scholars to explore
67 Tyndale's theological work in a comprehensive, informative, and illuminative way.
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