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Church Paradigm versus Scripture Paradigm in the Debate of Sir Thomas More and William Tyndale

Tibor Fabiny

1 Introduction

Religious pluralization is a modern term. It is a valid and legitimate historical category in as far as this phenomenon is a unique characteristic feature on the religious map of early modern Europe. While for over a millennium the three ecumenical creeds, originally called 'symbols', (the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed and the Athanasian Creed) were heard, confessed and recited in unison, now, all of a sudden, we have indeed a poliphony of creeds and confessions that contradict one another: the Augsburg Confession, the Helvetican Confession, the Scottish, the Belgian Confession, etc. True, some of the mainline reformers, such as the Lutheran compilers of *The Book of Concord* (1580), were keen on emphasizing that their confessions reflected the same faith as found in the three ecumenical creeds¹ and that they were therefore not innovative sectarians but were proposing a new dogma for the Church on her pilgrimage in this world. They did emphasize the continuity with the ancient Church but recognized no continuity with later reforms. Therefore, the term 'religious pluralization' seems to be valid only historically but not theologically. None of the creeds of the 16th century would have claimed that it was just 'one' out of 'many'. Each creed claimed that its articulation of faith was *the only true* and valid one and that all others were dangerously erroneous and heretical. Such is the nature of creed and dogma.

¹ Cf. Kolb/Wengert 2000, 19.

In a secular age like ours, which is based on ideological pluralism, dogmatic thinking seems rather alien, unless we are committed theologians to whom the truth-claim of doctrinal statements can never be entirely indifferent.² Given the theological implications of my topic, however, my perspective, too, will include theological concerns.

Five hundred years ago, unlike today, people were much more willing to die for what they believed to be the truth. Martyrs of the faith could be found on opposing sides. Brad Gregory, in his outstanding book *Salvation at Stake*, mentions that during the 16th century some 5000 men and women were legally executed across Europe for religious heterodoxy.³ We should always keep in mind that the Catholic—later canonized—Sir Thomas More (1478–1535) and the Protestant martyr William Tyndale (1494–1536) were only two among them. In 1526, in his self-imposed exile, Tyndale published the first translation of the New Testament into English in Worms, Germany. It was based on Erasmus' third edition of the Greek New Testament and Luther's edition of the German translation (both appeared in 1522).⁴ In October 1526, Cuthbert Tunstall, Bishop of London, published a list of prohibited books which included Tyndale's New Testament. Moreover, in March 1528 the Bishop gave permission to Thomas More to read heretical books and commissioned him to refute them. In June 1529, More published *A Dialogue Concerning Heresies*. Six years earlier, he had already published the *Responsio ad Lutherum* (1523) under a pseudonym.⁵

When we turn to the subject of 'Representing Religious Pluralization' in the More-Tyndale controversy, we could say that, from a historical point of view, this debate was the beginning of the breakdown in the monopoly of the medieval Church. It is not difficult to recognize that the demonopolization of one authority (the Church) immediately opens up the way for the remonopolization of another (the Word of God as manifested in Scripture). For both More and Tyndale the question of primacy was at stake: of whether the primary authority was the Church or Scripture.⁶ This difference is of such importance that in the present paper I wish to concentrate, above all, on how More and Tyndale conceived of the question of primacy within the relationship of Church and Scripture. I am especially interested in the meta-

² Bagchi (1997, 261) says that speaking of theological 'heresy' today indicates a fundamentalist frame of mind and thus the "death of heresy" has been "for Church historians of immense benefit".

³ Cf. Gregory 1999 and Gregory 2003, 191.

⁴ Cf. Tyndale 2000a, xxi.

⁵ Cf. Tyndale 2000a, xxii.

⁶ On the More-Tyndale debate see: Chambers 1952, 172–203; Lewis 1954, 157–221; Flesselman-Van Leer 1959; Flesselman-Van Leer 1960; Marius 1962; Pineas 1963a; Pineas 1963b; Pineas 1968, 36–119; Clebsch 1964, 181–203 and 286–317; Egan 1960; Hitchcock 1971; Horacek 1978; Fox 1982, 147–166; Marius 1984, 386–406; Ní Chuilleanáin 1988; O'Donnell 1991a; Rockett 1999; Bagchi 1997; Gregory 2003.

phors and images they used to describe this intimate, for us indeed 'chicken-and-egg'-relationship. Their use of language and choice of words have, of course, further ecclesiological and scriptological consequences.

"Scripture versus Church in Tyndale's *Answer Unto Sir Thomas More's Dialogue*" has been the topic discussed in a philologically thorough and accurate article by Anne M. O'Donnell. Concerning their debate, O'Donnell observes:

Each adversary accepts the validity of the other's preferred texts because of their common source in the Bible. However, the two authors emphasize different passages because of their different theological presuppositions. Tyndale focuses on the Church described in scripture, which he usually interprets denotatively. More, on the other hand, accepts the Church as developed through a millennium and a half and often interprets scripture connotatively. In effect, Tyndale and More argue past each other.⁷

Brad Gregory goes even further when he demonstrates that sometimes the same biblical texts were quoted by both More and Tyndale to justify their respective theological positions.⁸

2 Tyndale's View: The Begetting Power of the Word

Luther was the first who emphasized that the Church was derivative; that it was not a creator, maker or initiator but only a "creature", namely, of the word, a result of the impregnating effect of the word of God. As early as 1520, in the *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, he argued as follows:

For the church was born by the word of promise through faith, and by this same word is nourished and preserved. That is to say, it is the promises of God that make the church, and not the church that makes the promise of God. For the Word of God is incomparably superior to the church, and in this Word the church, being a creature, has nothing to decree, ordain, or make, but only to be decreed, ordained, and made. For who begets his own parent? Who first brings forth his own maker?⁹

Luther's ideas are echoed by William Tyndale's *An Answer Vnto Sir Thomas Mores Dialogue* (1531) in the section "Whether the church were before the gosspeil or the gosspeil before the church":

⁷ Cf. O'Donnell 1991a, 122.

⁸ Cf. Gregory 2003.

⁹ Luther 1959, 107.

Another doute there is/whether the church or congregacion be before the gospell or the gospell before the church. Which question is as hard to solue/as whether the father be elder then the sonne or the sonne elder then his father. For the hole scripture and all beleuinge hertes testifye that we are begotten thorow the worde. Wherefore if the worde begette the congregacion/and he that begetteth is before him that is begotten then is the gospell before the church. [...] Christ must first be preached yet men can beleue in him. And then it foloweth/that the worde of the preacher must be before the faith of the beleuar. And therefore in as moch as the worde is before the faith/and faith maketh the congregacion/therfore is the word or gospell before the congregacion.¹⁰

If we compare Luther and Tyndale, we can say that their arguments and imagery are strikingly similar. For both Luther and Tyndale the Church is like an offspring. Tyndale has Luther's images probably (perhaps subconsciously) on his mind (though this is not noted in the critical edition of his *Answers*) – when he begins his argument with the sarcastic rhetorical question: “Which question is as hard to solue, as whether the father be elder then the son, or the son elder then his father.” He reiterates Luther's idea that the preaching of the gospel creates “believing hearts”, i.e. the congregacion, or Church. For him, the word of God is also a divine power as “we are begotten through the word”. However, Tyndale, just like Luther, tends to forget that for the birth of a child a mother is also needed. And human beings, or, “believing hearts”, though indeed begotten by the word, are brought to this life by the labour of mothers. The faith-community, i.e. the Church, is also necessary for the believer to be delivered and nurtured. A mother is also needed for the impregnation of the seed. The word as the divine seed comes undoubtedly from above, but a new life is always conceived in the womb of this earthly mother: the faith-community, consisting of frail human beings, fragile and sinful earthly vessels, who preach and guard the gospel. Though Luther and Tyndale are right, as far as the biological process is concerned, their ecclesiological imagery is one-sidedly masculine and the mother-image is conspicuously missing from their vocabulary.

Tyndale goes on to elaborate his ideas with the help of a new image:

as the ayre is darke of it selfe and recaueth all hir light of the sonne: even so ar all mens hertes of them selfe darke with lies & recaue al their trueth of gods worde/in that they consent therto. And morouer as the darke ayre geueth the sonne no lighte/but contrary wise the light of the sonne in respecte of the ayre is of it selfe and lighteneth the ayre and purgeth it from darknesse: even so the lienge herte of man can geue the word of god no trueth/but contrary wise the trueth of gods worde is of hir selfe

¹⁰ Tyndale 2000a, 23/14–18 and 23–27.

and lyghtheneth the hertes of the beleuers and maketh them true/and clenseth them from lies/as thou readest Ihon .xv. ye be cleane by reason of the word. Which is to be vnderstond/in that the word had purged their hertes from lies/from false opinions and from thynkyng euell good/and therfore from consentinge to synne. And Ihon .xvij. sanctifie them o father thorow thy trueth. And thy word is trueth. And thus thou seist that gods trueth dependeth not of man.¹¹

Again, Tyndale is right to a certain extent: it is true that the word of God is the sun, the divine and supernatural light that illuminates the “dark air”, the blind human heart, and that the process is not the reverse. However, Tyndale's analogy here is also imperfect. No human heart exists independently, in abstraction; no man is an island, each soul is a member of a ‘continent’, a community. Thus new faith is not born all of a sudden separately, due to the life-giving illumination of the sun only, but light gradually grows out of darkness with the help of the preaching, teaching and praying of others – the community of believers. The rays of the sun are undoubtedly primary, but they are mediated by other men, through the faith of the Church. It is indeed true that the word “cleanses” or “purges” the soul of the unregenerate individual, but this word never comes to the individual ‘naked’, *in vacuo*, but via the community. It is indeed true that the truth sanctifies the disciples, as Tyndale quotes Jn 17, and he is partly right that “god's trueth dependeth not of man”. However, we have to add again that, though God's truth does not indeed depend on ‘natural men’, it does depend on ‘spiritual men’, the ones that have already been sanctified by the truth, as they are the mediators of the ‘rays of the sun’. Again, the one-sided imagery and one-sided emphasis, which neglects the significance of the *congregatio sanctorum*, renders Tyndale's ecclesiology defective.

3 More's Position: The Primacy of Orality

Thomas More first criticized Tyndale's views in his *Dialogue Concerning Heresies* (1529) and proposed the distinction between the written and the unwritten word in the twenty-fifth chapter of the book.¹² The passage by Tyndale quoted and commented on above was from his *Answers Vnto Sir Thomas Mores Dialoge* (1531). J. F. Mozley describes Tyndale's answer as “plain”, “workmanlike”, “terse”, “direct” and “vigorous”.¹³ More's *Confutation of Tyndale's Answer* soon followed. This huge work of half a million

¹¹ Tyndale 2000a, 23/27–24/11.

¹² Cf. More 1981, vol. 1, 137–153.

¹³ Mozley 1971, 221.

words was published in two parts: the first three books were published in 1532, the next five in the following year. Mozley characterized it as follows:

The Confutation is eloquent proof of the devastating effects of controversial zeal on More's mind and style. [...] Its gigantic length alone is almost fatal to it. [...] it is strange that More's common sense and literary judgment did not teach him that this length of wind was simply damaging his own cause.¹⁴

However, in his excellent work on More's ecclesiology, Brian Gogan, while acknowledging the "largely indigestible" density of More's reply, notices the *Confutation's* merits, too: "Nonetheless it is of key importance in the exposition of More's thought on the church and related topics."¹⁵ Richard Marius praises More's remarkable knowledge of the Bible in the *Confutation*, saying that he "rarely if ever advances a theological argument without buttressing it with scripture."¹⁶

Let us see how More responded to Tyndale's section on "Whether the church were before the gospell or the gospell before the church". He begins with great vehemence, sarcasm and anger, saying that Tyndale wrestles alone and mocks only himself when he misinterprets More's words. When More becomes calmer, he makes it clear that in his *Dialogue* he had only stated that the Church was before the *written* gospel. He is again determined to emphasize the primacy of oral communication in the transmission of the Gospel:

I sayed in my dyaloge that the chyrche was before the gospell was wryten, and that the fayth was taught and men were baptyesed, and masses sayd and the other sacraments mynystred amonge crysten people, before any parte of the newe testament was put in wrytyng/and that this was done by the word of god vnwryten.¹⁷

Faith had already been taught in the Garden of Eden to Adam when there was no writing and therefore the orally transmitted word of God enjoys the same authority as the written word:

And I sayed also there, and yet say here agayne/that the ryght fayth whiche Adam had and suche as in the same fayth succeeded hym, longe ere wrytyng beganne, was taught by the worde of god vnwryten/and so went from man to man, fro the father to y^e sonne by mouth. And I sayed that thys worde of god vnwryten/is of as greate authoryte as is the worde of god wryten.¹⁸

¹⁴ Mozley 1971, 223f.

¹⁵ Gogan 1982, 174.

¹⁶ Marius 1973, 1349.

¹⁷ More 1973, vol. 1, 225/28–33.

¹⁸ More 1973, vol. 1, 225/33–226/4.

For More, it is ultimately God and his Holy Spirit that instructs human beings. The Spirit teaches both by the written and the unwritten word, even if there are people who believe only in the written word:

[T]he churche of Cryste hath ben, is, and euer shall be, taught and instructed by god and hys holy spyryt wyth hys holy worde of eyther kynde/ that is to wyt bothe wyth hys worde wryten and hys worde vnwryten/ and that they whyche wyll not byleue goddes worde but yf he put it in wrytyng, be as playne infydeles as they y^e wyll not byleue it wryten [...].¹⁹

More had made this distinction between God's "worde wryten" and "worde vnwryten" in his *Responsio ad Lutherum* (1523). Paul, he says, delivered his teaching without writing. More was asking Luther: "Will you deny that both the written and the unwritten word are equally true [...]?"²⁰ More says that Peter, the uneducated fisherman, also confessed Christ without Scripture, by the direct inspiration of the Spirit, and therefore this faith in Christ (and not the person of Peter) was the rock upon which he was to build his Church: "Or is something heard only when it is written? Or, before the gospels were written, did the Christians not hear the apostles?"²¹ In the *Confutation* More reaffirms this idea: Peter's confession is the foundation of the Church, and the Church is united by a common confession of faith.

As for Tyndale's simile concerning light and darkness, More says he never said the opposite and furiously adds that Tyndale and his heretic friends are in darkness as they "thynke (yf they thynke as they saye) bothe euyll good & good euyll".²² This vehemence and *ad hominem* attack is not much to the credit of the otherwise sophisticated humanist and theologian: why did he suppose that every sentence by Tyndale was a direct critique addressed to him; why could he not see that Tyndale, in his evangelical zeal, was in fact preaching while writing?

The last three lines of Tyndale's section concerning the gospel and the word receive a twenty-two-page commentary by More. This is Tyndale: "And Cryste also sayth hym selfe Iohan .v. I receyue no wytnesse of man. For yf the multytude of mannys wytnesse myghte make ought trew: then were the doctryne of Machomet trewer then Crystes."²³ Here, More, the

¹⁹ More 1973, vol. 1, 226/5–10.

²⁰ "Negabis utrumque ex aequo uerum, et scriptum uerbum et non scriptum" (More 1969, vol. 1, 242/19 f., translation S. Mandeville).

²¹ "An dumtaxat auditur: quod scribitur: An prius quam scripta sunt euangelia Christiani non audierunt apostolos?" (More 1969, vol. 1, 244/21–23, translation S. Mandeville).

²² More 1973, vol. 1, 228/14–16.

²³ As quoted in More 1973, vol. 1, 229/34–36. Cf. Tyndale 2000a, 24/13–15: "And Christ also saith him selfe Ihon. v. I receaue no wittnesse of man. For if the multitude of mans wittnesse might make ought true/then were the doctrine of Mahomete truer then Christes."

philologist, the Greek and Latin scholar, launches a sweeping attack on Tyndale – and not without cause. What is at issue is the proper interpretation and translation of Jn 5:34, which is about the nature of Jesus' testimony. In the debate with the pharisees, the question Jesus raises is who bears witness to him. Although, he says, John the Baptist was sent by God to bear witness to him, he still has a greater witness than John's: the witness of the Father. As we read it in the *Authorized Version* of 1611: "But I receive not testimony from man".²⁴

However, in his 1531 *Answer* Tyndale wrote: "I receaue no wittnesse of man".²⁵ More refers to both the Greek and Vulgate texts: "ἐγὼ δὲ οὐ παρὰ ἀνθρώπου τὴν μαρτυρίαν λαμβάνω" and "ego autem non ab homine testimonium accipio".²⁶ In the 1526 Worms New Testament, Tyndale wrote: "I receave no recorde of man".²⁷ More correctly criticizes Tyndale for not taking into consideration the definite article in the original Greek text, which has important implications for the translation. Tyndale did not do so out of ignorance, More says, but out of malevolence because thus, Tyndale could suggest that Jesus had denied that anybody could bear witness to him:

And therefore I saye that Tyndale sholde in his englysh translacyon not haue lefte oute that artycle the/ but sholde at the leste wyse haue translated yt thus, I receyue not the recorde of man/ where as wyth his translating no record, y^t article the, wheruppon the wayght of the sentence hangeth/ he hath not onely lefte oute but clene excluded also. For yf he had translated yt, I receyue not recorde of man, though he lefte oute the: yet he myght take yt in there to and mende yt, makynge yt, I receyue not the recorde of man. But now that he hath translated yt, I receyue no recorde of man: he hathe excluded yt vterly but if he take in not, and putte out his false no/ for he can not saye I receyue no the recorde of man. And thys hathe he done not of ignoraunce but of malyce, to make yt seme that Cryste vterly refuseth and reiecteth all maner wytnesse of man, in testyfycacyon and wytnessynge of hym and his trowth. And this translacyon therefore deuyseth Tyndale/ bycause he wold haue vs wene that Cryste wolde haue the wytnesse of all his chyrche vterly serue of noughte.²⁸

For More, Tyndale's improper grammatical solution is a sign of his purposeful heretical subversion of the Catholic Church:

²⁴ Quoted from Theile/Stier 1981, 383.

²⁵ Tyndale 2000a, 24/14.

²⁶ Quoted from Theile/Stier 1981, 382.

²⁷ Tyndale 2000b, 205.

²⁸ More 1973, vol. 1, 234/19–35.

And thus appereth it not onely that Tindale hath mysse translated and mysse construed these wordes of Cryste, I receyue no wytnesse of man, for the furnysshyng of hys heresy, by whyche he wolde take awaye the credence of Crystes catholyke chyrche: but also ye se it proued by these wordes of saynt Iohan baptyste, that euery trew byleuyng man that byleueth goddes worde, is a good wytnesse of god and hys worde / whyche clerely proueth that Crystes catholyke chyrche is a very specyall wytnesse. For onely in that chyrch is the number of trewe byleuyng menne / and all that are fallen owte of that catholyke knowen chyrche are very false byleuyng heretykes.²⁹

Tyndale, however, revised his New Testament. No one, to my knowledge, has noticed so far, that unlike in the 1526 Worms New Testament, in the 1534 revision, Tyndale has made this correction and rendered Jn 5:34 as follows: "I receive not the record of man."³⁰ This can mean two things: first, it could imply that Tyndale did change his version exactly the way More suggested. Would this be evidence that Tyndale read the *Confutation*? Scholars, including Anne O'Donnell, have usually left this question open.³¹ Or, secondly, it could mean that More was wrong in assuming that Tyndale's version was made out of malice and not out of ignorance. He was wrong to suggest that Tyndale distorted the Bible in order to suggest that the Church cannot bear witness to him.

Tyndale passionately defended his 'scripture-principle' in his answer to More's third book. He agrees with More that the Gospel was preached before it was written down, but then holds that we are certain only of what was written down. Tyndale believes that tradition stops when the Scriptures are written down. Tyndale does not believe in the development of dogma, for example that the confession of one's sins to a priest, confirmation, matrimony, holy orders and the anointing of the sick were sacraments instituted by Christ.³² While in the *Dialogue* More said that "scripture self maketh vs not byleue the scripture/ but the chyrch maketh vs to know the scripture", Tyndale replied: "your church teacheth not to know the scripture: but hideth it in the latine from the comen people."³³ Moreover, Tyndale emphasized that the apostles had foreseen that false teachers would distort the word of God and therefore they insisted that it should be fixed in written form.

²⁹ More 1973, vol. 1, 241/10–21.

³⁰ Tyndale 1989, 140. The fact that in 1534 Tyndale did revise the English translation of Jn 5:34 the way More suggested, is not mentioned in the notes of the critical edition in More 1973, vol. 3, 1552.

³¹ Cf. Tyndale 2000a, xxviii.

³² I am grateful for this comment to Sr Anne O'Donnell.

³³ More 1981, vol. 1, 254/5 f.; Tyndale 2000a, 136/10 f.

In his *Confutation*, More responds to Tyndale's question of "Whyther the apostles left aught vnwritten, that is of necessity to be byleued".³⁴ More again defends oral tradition and miracles. The Holy Spirit, he says, has promised to be with his Church until the end of the world. More was arguing against what we might call 'grapholatry'.³⁵ He says that one of the proofs that the Catholic Church is the true one is that there are still miracles among Catholics, while there are no miracles among heretics: "among all y^e false chyrche of fals heretikes there be no miracles at all."³⁶ Concerning Scripture, he says that, though it may be true in itself, yet "yt is not so playne"³⁷ and there are difficulties which must be taken into consideration. These parts are especially dangerous for the unlearned: "vnto the vnlearned yt shalbe lykely full ofte, that in suche dyspycyons the false parte maye seme treweste."³⁸ On the other hand, however, the unwritten word of God "may stay all to gether",³⁹ as the teaching of the Church is written into the hearts of men:

For I say that the trewth of that artycle taught and byleued as the chyrche without any doute or questyon byleueth/may be so surely grauen in mannys harte, that though he neuer haue redde nor herde neyther any scripture in that poynte: yet presupposynge yt for an vndouted trouth, he shall set at nought all the false wrested scripture of the false prophete, and all his false myracle to/and shall euer conster the scripture by the knowen artycle of the catholyque fayth, which was taught and byleued byfore those textes of scripture were wryten, and hath yet the same trouth now that yt hadde then, not wythstandynge all the textes that seme to saye the contrary.⁴⁰

More's words echo the classic dictum of Vincent of Lérins' *Commonitorium* (5th century) concerning the true faith of the Church, which was confessed "ubique, semper, omnibus" – everywhere, always and by all.⁴¹ These are the criteria of universality, apostolic antiquity and conciliar consent.⁴² Moreover, this faith is the faith of the martyrs, which was "wryten in theyre soules":

And by this fayth in the worde of god vnwryten in theyr bokes/and yet wryten in theyre soules: dyd there many martyrs stand and shed theyr blood in wytnesse of the trouth therof, that neuer red nor herde the

³⁴ More 1973, vol. 1, 254/1 f.

³⁵ Three hundred years later Coleridge would criticize the 'bibliolatry' of his age. See Coleridge 1988, 10.

³⁶ More 1973, vol. 1, 253/21 f.; see also 271/6–9.

³⁷ More 1973, vol. 1, 270/10.

³⁸ More 1973, vol. 1, 270/14 f.

³⁹ More 1973, vol. 1, 270/18.

⁴⁰ More 1973, vol. 1, 270/18–29.

⁴¹ Cited in Oden 2003, 162.

⁴² Cf. Oden 2003, 156–186.

scripture in theyr dayes/and wold in the same word vnwryten, wyth goddes grace haue wythstanden false myracles to, which had yet bene vndoutedly the sorest pynche, sauyng for the mo and more meruelouse myracles that them selfe saw byleued done on the tother syde for the trouth.⁴³

Germain Marc'hadour and Thomas M. C. Lawler are right in saying that for More the *consensus fidelium* is the ultimate authority and that the Church for him is "like a living person [...]; it receives its cohesion from that living soul, the Holy Spirit, the agent of unanimity in the household of the faith".⁴⁴

More's final argument against *sola scriptura* concerns the Jews and their attitude: they did believe in the Scriptures but they never recognized Christ:

euery fole knoweth that all the worlde saue the Iewes in theyr turnynge to Crystes bylyefe, were not led by the scripture but by the miracles / and byleued not Cryste for the scripture, but byleued the scripture for Cryste, & Cryste for the myracles. And the Iewes whyche people moste byleued the scripture/of them I saye fewest byleued in Cryste.⁴⁵

More quotes both in his *Dialogue* and the *Confutation* the ambiguous passage of Jn 5:39: "Search the scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me."⁴⁶ The original text: "Ἐρευνᾶτε τὰς γραφάς" – in the Vulgate "Scrutamini scripturas"⁴⁷ – can be interpreted both as an indicative and an imperative. Erasmus retained the ambiguous double interpretation. The indicative has an ironic undertone: the rabbies did scrutinize the Scriptures but they did not recognize that Scripture bore testimony to Jesus. Marc'hadour and Lawler mention that in his *Dialogue* More could easily have exploited the ambiguity of this passage to expose and deprecate 'bibliolatry', but More did not. Instead, he simply affirmed the authority of the Church over Scripture by suggesting that, if Christ did not provide readers of Scripture with the proper understanding, "so sholde the scripture stand them in as good stede/as a payre of spectacles shold stande a blynde freer".⁴⁸ In the *Confutation*, More quotes the passage in the imperative mood but he immediately adds that this does not mean that only Scripture bears witness to Christ:

⁴³ More 1973, vol. 1, 270/29–36.

⁴⁴ Marc'hadour/Lawler 1981, 499.

⁴⁵ More 1973, vol. 1, 282/11–16.

⁴⁶ Cf. Tyndale's *New Testament* (1526 and 1534) as well as the *Authorized Version* of 1611.

⁴⁷ Quoted from Theile/Stier 1981, 384.

⁴⁸ More 1981, vol. 1, 117/1 f. See also Marc'hadour/Lawler 1981, 512.

As the wordes of Criste: *Scrutamini scripturas, quoniam ipsae testimonium perhibent de me*. Loke you in y^e scriptures, for they bere witness of me. Which thyng no man denyeth/ but we deny them that nothing witnesseth Cryste ellys but the scripture alone. For our sauour hym selfe whyche sayde those wordes, sayde that saynte Iohan also bare wytnesse of hym bysyde the scripture/ & that hys father bare wytnesse of hym bysyde the scripture/ and that hys owne workes bare wytnesse of hym bysyde y^e scripture/ and that the holy goost at hys comynge bare wytnesse of hym bysyde the scripture/ and hys apostles (as hym selfe sayd they shold) bare wytnesse of hym besyde the scripture.⁴⁹

4 Tyndale's 'Representational' Position: God's Signs, Man's Feeling Faith, the Double Church

One of Tyndale's most original ideas, to which More fails to respond properly, concerns his theory of how God transmitted his revelation before writing was invented. Tyndale raises the question: "[H]ow did god continue his congregacion from Adam to Noe/ & from Noe to Abraham/ and so to Moses/ with out wrytyng/ but with teachyng from mouth to mouth."⁵⁰ He sarcastically remarks that he will only accept that there was no scripture in the age of orality "when our lady hath a new son". — Scripture is, for Tyndale, more than writing:

God taught Adam greater things then to write. And that there was wrytyng in the world longe yer Abraham ye and yer Noe doo stories testifie. Notwithstandinge/ though there had bene no wrytyng/ the preachers were euer prophetes glorious in doynge of miracles/ where with they confirmed their preachyng. And beyonde that god wrote his testament vn to them all waye/ both what to doo and to beleue/ even in sacramentes. For the sacrifices which god gaue Adams sonnes were no dumme popetrie or supersticious mahometrie/ but signes of the testament of god. And in them they red the worde of god/ as we do in bokes/ and as we shuld doo in oure sacramentes/ if the weked pope had not taken the significacions a waye from vs/ as he hath robbed vs of the true sens of all the scripture.⁵¹

Tyndale's hermeneutics, contrary to the general impression, is not exclusively based upon the written letter, and thus the bare literal sense, but upon signs which preceded written texts. This is a special 'semiotical herme-

⁴⁹ More 1973, vol. 1, 348/14–26.

⁵⁰ Tyndale 2000a, 25/8–10.

⁵¹ Tyndale 2000a, 25/12–25.

neutics': miracles, sacrifices, sacraments and signs were given by God so that they should be 'read' by the people. The problem is that their old significacions have been "taken [...] a waye" by "the weked pope", and thus "the true sens of all the scripture" was stolen. The rainbow and the rite of circumcision were given as testaments to the chosen people which "preached gods word vnto them".⁵² We can feel the echo of Alan of Lille's "Omnis mundi creatura, Quasi liber, et pictura"⁵³ or Duke Senior's words in Shakespeare's *As You Like It*: "tongues in trees, books in the running brooks, / Sermons in stones [...]"⁵⁴ Writing, Tyndale says, was given only after Moses.⁵⁵

More is rather embarrassed in responding to these ideas. He reproves Tyndale for emphasizing these signs only to degrade the real sacraments: "But thys is all Tyndales purpose to pull down the sacramentes and haue them taken for bare symple sygnes."⁵⁶ More also says that God never really explained the meaning of these symbols. Never did God explicitly tell the significance of the sacrifice to Abraham: "Where fyndeth he that Abraam was taught, that in offerynge vppe his sonne Isaac, and then the shepe in hys stede/ yt sholde sygnyfye the offerynge of Cryste vppon the crosse."⁵⁷ If Tyndale says that the Pope has taken away the significance of these sacraments, he must say which Pope he means. Such are More's prosaic questions concerning Tyndale's 'semiotical hermeneutics'.

A key text in the debate over the primacy of the Church or Scripture is Augustine's frequently quoted sentence: "Ego vero Evangelio non crederem, nisi me catholicae Ecclesiae commoveret auctoritas."⁵⁸ Luther, Tyndale and More equally refer to it. Luther adds the following remark:

This one thing indeed the church can do: it can distinguish the Word of God from the words of men; as Augustine confesses that he believed the gospel because he was moved by the authority of the church which proclaimed that this is the gospel. Not that the church is therefore above the gospel; if that were true, she would also be above God, in whom we believe because the church proclaims that he is God. But, as Augustine says elsewhere, the truth itself lays hold on the soul and thus renders it able to judge most certainly of all things.⁵⁹

⁵² Cf. Tyndale 2000a, 25/25–32.

⁵³ Alanus de Insulis 1855, 579a.

⁵⁴ Shakespeare 1975, 2.1.16 f.

⁵⁵ Cf. Tyndale 2000a, 25 f.

⁵⁶ More 1973, vol. 1, 278/2–4.

⁵⁷ More 1973, vol. 1, 278/29–31.

⁵⁸ "I would not believe the Gospel, unless the authority of the Catholic Church moved me to it" (*Contra epistolam Manichaei quam vocant fundamenti*, V, 6, in: Augustine 1845, 176).

⁵⁹ Cf. Luther 1959, 107.

Luther makes it clear that the discernment between the Word of God and the words of men is not the work of the soul or of any human authority but only of "the truth", by which Luther means 'the Spirit of Truth', or the Holy Spirit. "There is such a mind also in the church, when under the enlightenment of the Spirit she judges and approves doctrines."⁶⁰ Therefore it is not we who judge, whether we be Popes, priests or councils, but we are all judged by the "mind of the Spirit" who judges all things (1 Cor 2:16). The Church and the councils have erred; therefore, they do not have the authority of the Spirit of God.

Augustine's dictum was mentioned twice in Henry VIII's *Assertio* against Luther, and More mentions it in his *Responsio ad Lutherum* in 1523,⁶¹ as well as in his *Dialogue Against Heresies* in 1529.⁶² Tyndale's response to More's quotation of Augustine is straightforward: Augustine was not converted by the authority of the Church, since he was a pagan philosopher at that time, who would never have accepted such an authority, but by the "living spirituality" of believers whose lives corresponded to their beliefs and who were willing to suffer martyrdom for their faith:

If they allege sent Augustine which saith/I had not beleued the gossell/ excepte the auctorite of the church had moued me. I answer/as they abuse that sayenge of the holy man/even so they allege al the scripture and all that they bringe for them/ even in a false sens. S. Augustine before he was conuerted as an hethen man and a philosopher full of worldly wisdom vn to whom the preachinge of christe is but folishnesse/saith paul .j. Corin.j. And he disputed with blynd reasons of wordly wisdom agensst the christen. Neuerthelesse the earnest liunge of the christen acordinge vn to their doctrine and the constant soferinge of persecucion and aduersite for their doctrines sake moued him and stered him to beleue that it was no vayne doctrine/but that it must nedes be of god/ in that it had soch power with it. For it happeneth that they which will not heare the worde at the begynninge/ are affir warde moued by the holy conuersation of them that beleue.⁶³

Tyndale uses a domestic simile concerning a Christian wife and a heathen husband in order to illuminate what he means by St Augustine's conversion:

As Peter warneth christian wiues that had hethen husbands, that wold not heare the truth preached/ to liue so godly that they might winne their hethen husbands with holy conuersacion. And Paul saith how knowest thou christen wife/whether thou shalt winne thine hethen husbande/

⁶⁰ Luther 1959, 107.

⁶¹ Cf. More 1969, vol. 1, 603–607, and vol. 2, 735.

⁶² Cf. More 1981, vol. 1, 181 and 249, and vol. 2, 655. See also More 1973, vol. 2, 676.

⁶³ Tyndale 2000a, 47/31–48/13.

with holy conuersacion ment he. For many are wonne with godly liuyng / which at the first ether will not heare or can not beleue. And that is the auctorite that S. Augustine ment. But if we shall not beleue/ tyll the liuyng of the spiritualtie conuerte us/we belike to byde longe ynough in vnbeleffe.⁶⁴

This is a good opportunity for him to make a distinction between what he calls "historical faith" and "feeling faith". If you believe your mother who tells you that you will burn your finger, if you put it into the fire, that is historical faith; but if you experience the burning of your fingers by putting them into the fire, that is feeling faith. The former "hangeth of the trueth and honestie of the teller or of the comen fame and consent of many",⁶⁵ while

a felynge faith is as iff a man were there present when it was wonne and their were wounded and had there lost all that he had and were taken presoner there also. That man shuld so beleue that all the world coude not turne him from his faith [...]. So now with a historical faith I maye beleue that the scripture is Gods by the teachyng of them/ and so I shuld haue done though they had told me that roben hode had bene the scripture of God. Which faith is but an opinion and therfore abideth euer frutelesse and fauleth a waye/ iff a moare gloriouse reason be made vnto me or iff the preacher lieu contrarye.⁶⁶

In his *Confutation*, however, More repeats that "yf I byleue not the chyrche, then can I not byleue the gossell, syth I byleue the gossell for the chyrche"⁶⁷ and adds that "Tyndale vntruely gloseth"⁶⁸ the words of Augustine. Moreover, he defends the idea of historical faith, saying that the story we receive is not an alien story: we could not have this historical faith without "the inward workyng of goddes owne holy spyryte".⁶⁹

Tyndale appeals to Paul's distinction between the carnal sons of Abraham and the sons of promise (Rom 9:7 f.) to make a distinction between appearance and reality, between those who "believe with their mouths" and those who "repent and feel that the law is good" and the law of God is written in their hearts. One is "carnal Israel", the other is "spiritual". The other *locus classicus* is Gal 4:21–31, Paul's allegorical interpretation of the two sons of Abraham. It represents the eternal conflict between Isaac and Ishmael, Esau and Jacob, the Egyptians and Moses: the carnally minded always persecute

⁶⁴ Tyndale 2000a, 48/13–22.

⁶⁵ Tyndale 2000a, 48/28 f.

⁶⁶ Tyndale 2000a, 48/33–49/17.

⁶⁷ More 1973, vol. 2, 738/3–5.

⁶⁸ More 1973, vol. 2, 738/26.

⁶⁹ More 1973, vol. 2, 748/3.

the spiritually minded. Tyndale considers More's faith and the Pope's faith as identical with the Devil's faith. The faith of the elect is written into their hearts by the spirit of God.

And he that hath not that written in his herte is popish and of the spiri-
tualtie which vnderstandeth nothyng saue his awne honoure his awne
profit and what is good for him selfe only: and when he is as he wold be/
thinketh that al the world is as it shuld be.⁷⁰

The "great multitude" always persecutes the "little flock": Abraham's fleshly seed afflicts the spiritual:

And the fleshlye shall persecute the spirituall/as Caim [sic] did Abel and
Ishmaell Isaac & soforth/and the greate multitude the smal litle flocke
and antichrist wilbe euer the best christen man. So now the church of
god is dowble/a fleshly and a spirituall: the one wilbe and is not: the
other is and maye not be so called/but must be called a lutheran/an here-
tike and soch like.⁷¹

The Reformation vision refuses to accept that the Church, world or reality in general is what it seems to be. This prophetic vision claims to see beyond the veil and mask of appearance, since the true reality, it claims, was revealed to the faithful by God, who are thus not misled by the deception of Satan. Tyndale complains that Master More "wyl not vnderstond" this vision of the double Church and of the double faith, namely "that the church ys some tyme taken for the electe only which haue the law of god written in their hertes and fayth to be saued thorow christe written there also".⁷²

If we are to investigate the origins of the Reformation idea of a dualism between true and false, we have to say that this vision comes from apocalyptic literature. Reformation biblical scholars rediscovered the apocalyptic idea of dualism inherent in the genre of Jewish and Christian apocalyptic literature. The idea of a double vision, a juxtaposition of Christ and Antichrist, the lamb and the beast, the bride and the whore, as applied to the true and the false church, was an old hermeneutical tradition. Anti-Catholic polemic, such as the little German tract *Passional Christi und Antichristi* illustrated with twenty-six woodcuts by Lucas Cranach (1521)⁷³ or Thomas Becon's *The Actes of Christe and of Antichrist*,⁷⁴ usually contrasted the lives and doctrines of the two figures in several ways.

⁷⁰ Tyndale 2000a, 55/1–5.

⁷¹ Tyndale 2000a, 105/7–12.

⁷² Tyndale 2000a, 112/28–30.

⁷³ Cranach 1972; cf. p. 271 in this volume.

⁷⁴ Cf. Becon 1844, 498–539.

The idea of a 'double church' goes back to the *Liber Regularum* written by the 4th century Donatist Tyconius.⁷⁵ Luther, in his Commentary on Genesis as well as in his other works on ecclesiology *Against Hanswurst*, echoed Tyconius as mediated by St Augustine's typology:

For the history of every age bears witness to this: that the true church always endured hardships; but that it was the false church which carried on persecutions, while the true church was always condemned by that other hypocritical one. Therefore there is no doubt among us today that the church of the pope is the church of Cain. We, however, are the true church. Just as Abel did no harm to Cain, so we, too, not only do no harm to them but allow ourselves to be harassed, condemned, and slain by the pope's church.⁷⁶

For there are two kinds of churches stretching from the beginning of history to the end, which St Augustine calls Cain and Abel. The Lord Christ commands us not to embrace the false church; and he himself distinguishes between two churches, a true one and a false one. We are concerned *non de nomine*, 'not with the name' of the church, but with its essence.⁷⁷

Luther's ideas are echoed just a decade after Tyndale's death in John Bale's *Image of Both Churches*, the first English commentary on the Book of Revelation:

Herein is the true Christian church, which is the meek spouse of the Lamb without spot, in her right-fashioned colours described. So is the proud church of hypocrites, the rose-coloured whore, the paramour of antichrist, and the sinful synagogue of Satan, in her just proportion depainted, to the merciful forewarning of the Lord's elect. And that is the cause why I have here entituled this book *The Image of Both Churches* [...]. He that knoweth not this book, knoweth not what the true church is whereof he is a member. For herein is the estate thereof from Christ's ascension to the end of the world under pleasant figures and elegant tropes decided, and nowhere else thoroughly but here, the times always respected.⁷⁸

Richard Marius points out that "More hated the very mention of a 'true church' [...] and he spends an inordinate amount of time repeating arguments designed to show that the church must be visible and well known".⁷⁹ More also reverses the pattern of persecution, saying that wherever heretics appeared, the Catholic Church had suffered persecution.⁸⁰

⁷⁵ Cf. Tyconius 1989 and Fabiny 2000.

⁷⁶ Luther 1958, 254.

⁷⁷ Luther 1966, 194.

⁷⁸ Bale 1849, 251.

⁷⁹ Marius 1973, 1286.

⁸⁰ Cf. More 1973, vol. 2, 832/10–13.

5 What, then, is the Church?

The crucial issue in the More-Tyndale debate is undoubtedly the ecclesiological question of the identity of the Church. In his *Dialogue* of 1529, More gave a broad and inclusive definition, evoking both the parables of the wheat and the tares and the parable of the net:

The chyrche therfore must nedys be the comen knowen multytude of crysten men good and bad togyther/whyle the chyrche is here in erth. For this nette of Cryste hath for the whyle good fysshes and bad. And this felde of Cryste bereth for the whyle good come and cocle/tyll it shall at the day of dome be purifyed/and all the bad caste out/and the onely good remayne.⁸¹

Tyndale's response in *The Answer* begins with a long section in which he enumerates at least four different significations of the Church as (1) place or house, (2) the entire clergy, (3) a local congregation and (4) the congregation of the elect. This last definition is closest to Tyndale's heart:

it is sometimes taken generally for all that embrace the name of Christe though their faythes be nought, or though they haue no fayth at all. And some times it is taken specially for the electe only in whose heres God hath written his lawe with his holy spirite and geuen them a felinge faith of the mercy that is in christe Iesu oure lorde.⁸²

Tyndale cannot tolerate More's image of the mystical body of Christ from which the heretics have fallen out. He mocks both the expressions "mystical sense" and "mystical body" with a pun:

And in the end/when he [More] saith that the heretikes be faullen out of Christes mystical bodi which is the pope and his. I answer that ye be a mystical body and walke in the mist and will not come at the light/and the heretikes be departed out of youre mist and walke in the clere light of gods worde.⁸³

Here is Tyndale's more exclusive definition of the Church of the elect:

Christes electe church is the hole multytude of all repentyng synners that beleue in Christ and put all their trust and confidence in the mercye of god/felynge in their heres/that god for Christes sake loueth them and wilbe or rather is mercifull vn to them and forgeueth them their synnes of whych they repent/and that he forgeueth them also all the mocions

⁸¹ More 1981, vol. 1, 205/4–10.

⁸² Tyndale 2000a, 12/24–29.

⁸³ Tyndale 2000a, 114/11–15 and 110/14 f.

vn to synne of which they feare lest they should therby be drawn in to synne agayne. And this faith they haue with out all respecte of their awne deseruynges/ye and for no nother cause then that the mercifull trueth of god the father which can not lye/hath so promised and so sworne.⁸⁴

Tyndale's view of the "electe church" focuses on the faith of individuals. They are a "multitude of [...] repentyng synners". Faith is at work in the lives of these individuals: they repent their sins, they put their trust in the mercy of God, they have feeling in their hearts and they fear that they will fall into sin again. There is an element of anxiety in this definition: faith is 'at work' in feeling and fearing.

Tyndale was not happy with the metaphor of the Church as a mother either. He believed in the individual's responsibility for his faith: for him, communal faith or the faith of the Church, does not exempt the individual from judgement. He quotes Jesus who told Peter in Lk 22:31 f: "I have prayed for thee that thy faith shall not fail." Jesus did not say, and therefore it is not a 'proper text', Tyndale ironically remarks, "I haue prayd for the/that my mothers faith shall not faile".⁸⁵

As regards the identity of the Church, More criticized not only Tyndale but his fellow-reformer Dr Robert Barnes (1495–1540), chaplain of Henry VIII.⁸⁶ In *A supplicatyon unto kinge henrye the eyght*, published in Antwerp in 1530, Barnes had attempted to convert the King to the Protestant faith. Although a Protestant, he used the image of the Church as the "holy mother" who receives her holiness from her Spouse:

Our holy mother the church has another holiness that comes from God the Father through the sweet blood of His blessed Son Jesus Christ, in whom she has all her confidence and trust. To Him alone she holds fast in steadfast faith. By His purity she is pure, though confessing her own uncleanness. She believes that she has an advocate for her sin before the Father in heaven, who is Christ Jesus and that He is the satisfaction for her sins. Of His mercy, and not because of her merits, he has chosen her to be His. Because she is His, she must be clean so long as she abides in Him.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ Tyndale 2000a, 28/15–25.

⁸⁵ Tyndale 2000a, 37/26 f. See the commentary on page 266 concerning Panormitanus' belief that "Mary preserved the faith of church when Peter fell".

⁸⁶ On Barnes see Lusardi 1973, 1365–1415.

⁸⁷ Tjernagel 1963, 43. In More 1973, vol. 2, 1044/18–27: "But oure holy mother y^e church hathe a nother holynes/y^e cometh from god the father thorow y^e sweat bloud of his blessed sonne Iesus Christ/in whome is alle hyr confidens & trust. Vn to whome she styecketh onely by stedfast faith/by whose purenes she ys also puer in that y^e she dothe confesse hyr vncleannes/for she beleueth stedfastly y^e she hathe an aduocate for hyr synne to the father of heuen/which is christe Iesus. And he is the satisfaccion for hyr synnes. And he of his marcy & not of hyr merites hathe chossen hyr for to be his/and by cause she ys hys/therefore must she be clene so longe as she abyde in hym."

Barnes, in accordance with Luther,⁸⁸ noticed 'tokens of the church' (*notae ecclesiae*); but while Luther mentions seven marks, Barnes recognizes only two: the preaching of the word and good works as a consequence of this preaching. Though not a separate 'token', Barnes also considers the cross and suffering as part of the life of the Church:

Our holy mother the chyrche thorow out all the world scatered far and longe / in hyr trew hed Cryste Iesus taught / hath lerned not to fere the contumelys of the crosse nor yet of deth, but more and more is she strengthened, not in reystynge but in sufferynge.⁸⁹

More devoted Book VIII of his *Confutation* to refuting Barnes's idea of the Church. Here, with the wheel coming full circle, we should note again the power of the sexual metaphor. While Luther and Tyndale spoke about the Word as "begetting" the Church, for More the Church is the mother who "engenderes us to God":

For holy chyrch is our mother, as ye call her your self/ and therefore is it she whych engendreth vs to god, & which both with mylke and strengre mete, must fede vs & foster vs vp / & none other nuryce is ther by whom we can be truely & faythfully brought vp. And therefore yf we myghte not knowe her / we were in daynger eyther to be hunger storuen, or ellys in stede of holsome fode to be fed wyth poysen.⁹⁰

From More's inclusive idea of the Church only the heretics are excluded:

[T]he comon knowen catholyke people, clergy, lay folke, and all / whych what so euer ther lyuynge be (amonge whom vndowtedly there are of bothe sortes many ryght good and vertuouse) do stande to gether and agre in the confesson of one trew catholyke fayth, wyth all olde holy doctours and sayntes, and good chrysten people bysyde that are all redy passed thys fyftene hundred yere byfore, agaynste Arrius, Ootho, Lambert, Luther, and wycliffe, zuinglius, Hutten, Huse, and Tyndale, & all rable of such erroneus heretykes.⁹¹

More, unlike Tyndale, took the image of the mystical body of Christ very seriously:

For it is the comon knowen chyrche of all crysten people, not gone out nor caste oute. This hole body bothe of good and badde is the catholyke chyrche of Cryste, whyche is in thys worlde very sikely, & hath many

⁸⁸ Cf. Luther 1966, 143–178.

⁸⁹ More 1973, vol. 2, 875/28–31.

⁹⁰ More 1973, vol. 2, 892/2–9.

⁹¹ More 1973, vol. 1, 480/36–481/5.

sore members/as hath somtyme the naturall body of a man, and some sore astonyed, and for a tyme colde and dede/ whyche yet catcheth hete and lyfe agayne, yf it be not precyded and cut of from the body.⁹²

He affirms this idea even in his reply to Barnes:

And specyally is yt [the church] holy bycause of the holy hed therof our holy sauour hym selfe, whose mystycall body is the whole knowen catholyke chyrche/ in whych for all the cure done vppon yt in the bap-tysme, yet are there many sykke members by many great new synnes [...] of those sortes ordynaryly doth and shall our sauour (the sore cancred members that wyll not in conclusyon be cured, left vnto the rotte and shaken into the fyre) brynge forthe and make perfyte his gloryouse chyrche, and present yt to his father bryghte and smothe, wythoute any spot or wryncle to lyue and endure in heuen/ but neuer shall his chyrche be clerly wythout spot or wryncle, whyle yt wandereth in this wreched worlde.⁹³

We can do no better than to end this section with More's remark concerning the subject and nature of his debate with Tyndale: "For ye well remember that all our mater in this boke, is bytwene Tyndale and me no thynge ellys in effecte, but to fynde out whyche chyrche is the very chyrche."⁹⁴

6 'Heretics' and 'Hypocrites' as they Mutually Saw Each Other

Sir Thomas More suffered martyrdom in the Tower of London for his faith in the Catholic Church, the body of Christ, mother of believers, on July 6, 1535. William Tyndale suffered martyrdom for his belief in Scripture as the faith-begetting Word of God near Brussels, exactly 15 months later, on October 6, 1536.

While alive, the former held the latter to be a heretic, and the latter held the former to be a hypocrite. What is the image of a 'heretic' in the eyes of a 'hypocrite', and what is the image of a 'hypocrite' in the eyes of a 'heretic'? Of course, each saw the other contemptuously as "rabble": More spoke against "all the rable of [...] erroneus heretykes",⁹⁵ while Tyndale complained that "the prelates had sett vpp soch a rable of ceremonies".⁹⁶ More associated heresy with beastliness, disease, pestilence, single virus, new-fangledness,⁹⁷ seditious violence, filthiness, barking and biting. At the

⁹² More 1973, vol. 1, 398/27–35.

⁹³ More 1973, vol. 2, 855/2–7 and 11–17.

⁹⁴ More 1973, vol. 1, 480/24–27.

⁹⁵ More 1973, vol. 1, 481/5.

⁹⁶ Tyndale 2000a, 74/26.

⁹⁷ Meaning 'fond of novelty'. See Bagchi 1997, 274, 281, where he points out that More used this expression in the *Dialogue* (More 1981, vol. 1, 125, 269, 338, 423).

beginning of the *Confutation*, More made it clear that his ambition was nothing less than stripping off the mask ('visor') of heretics in order to reveal their ugly faces:

[T]hat ye maye the more clerely perceyue the malycouse mynde of these men, and that theyr pestylent bokes be bothe odyouse to god and dedely contagouse to men/and so myche the more perylouse in that theyr false heresyces wylyly walke forth vnder the counterfayt vysage of the trew crysten fayth: thys is the cause and purpose of my present labour /wherby god wylling I shall so pull theyr gaye paynted vysours, y' euery man lysting to loke theron, shall playnely perceyue and byholde the bare vgly gargyle facys of theyr abomynable heresyce.⁹⁸

Tyndale on the other hand, on behalf on the "little flock", saw More and his church as members of "the great multitude" of the false church of hypocrites who had "fallen from the faith", who had "lost the significance" of the meaning of God's word and had thus become as idolatrous as the heathens. Like most Reformation thinkers, Tyndale saw More, the Pope and Catholic hypocrites as the heirs of the scribes, the pharisees and the high priests, while he saw himself as the heir of the prophets and of Christ who, just like them, was 'stirred up' by God. Jesus, while on earth, was also seen as a heretic and his apostles as a sect:

And Christ and his apostles came out of them and departed from them and left them. Wherefore the scribes phareses and hie prestes were the right church/and Christ and his appostles and disciples heretikes and a damnable secte.⁹⁹

Luther, Tyndale and other reformers, unlike their adversaries, claimed to have conceived of the captivity of the Church of Christ, due to their prophetic insight (inspired, they believed, by the Spirit of God through his revealed word). Within their typological concept they saw the Pope and the clergy as hypocrites comparable to the pharisees in Jesus' day. No wonder, therefore, that Christ warned his disciples to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees:

And in a nother place he rebuked the scribes and the phareses sayenge: wo be to them/because they had taken away the keye of knowledge and shutt vpp the kingdome of heven and neyther wold entre in them selues ner sofre them that wolde. How had they shutt it vpp? Verily with their

⁹⁸ More 1973, vol. 1, 34/8-16; also quoted in modern spelling by Bagchi 1997, 267.

⁹⁹ Tyndale 2000a, 40/13-16.

traditions and false gloses which they had sowed to the scriptures in playne places and in the takyng a waye the meaninge of the ceremonies and sacrifices and teachinge to beleue in the worke.¹⁰⁰

In the *Exposition Uppon the V. VI. VII. Chapters of Matthew*, which is his commentary on the Sermon on the Mount, Tyndale calls Christ "the spiritual Isaac" who "diggeth [...] the well of Abraham", "which are the scriptures" as they were shut up, locked up by the hypocrite Pharisees. The sin of these hypocrites is "covetousness"; they are the "rich in spirit", the opposite of what Jesus blessed in the first beatitude:

Covetousness is not only, above all other lusts, those thorns that choke the word of God in them that possess it; but it is also a deadly enemy to all that interpret God's word truly [...]. Take heed to thy preacher therefore, and be sure, if he be covetous and gape for promotion, that he is a false prophet, and leaveneth the scripture, for all his crying, 'fathers, fathers,' 'holy church,' and 'fifteen hundred years,' and for all his other holy pretences.¹⁰¹

After more than five hundred years, our impression is that both More and Tyndale were passionate captives of their own closed theological systems or paradigms. Without their respective *furor theologicus*, they probably would not have been able to carry out what they both understood to be the mission assigned to them by God.

7 Conclusion: Tragic Necessity and Reconciliation in Death

The views of the 'hypocrite' in regards to the 'heretic' and of the 'heretic' in regards to the 'hypocrite' were mutually irreconcilable. Brad Gregory, commenting in an article on what he considered to be the "epic quality" of the conflict between More and Tyndale, wrote as follows: "I doubt whether we can grasp very much about the making of the modern world without understanding those conflicts, the people who made them, the issue at stake and the consequences of persistent religious disagreement in early modern Europe."¹⁰² The antagonism between Scripture and Church was not to be reconciled in the early 16th century. Tyndale's 'Scripture principle', some argue, is a paradigmatic phenomenon of the new print culture, in the sense in which this culture is criticized in McLuhan's study *The Gutenberg*

¹⁰⁰ Tyndale 2000a, 41/15-22.

¹⁰¹ Tyndale 1849, 17.

¹⁰² Gregory 2003, 197.

Galaxy.¹⁰³ For the print culture, truth is written and claims a certitude which the modern individual wants to cling to.¹⁰⁴ For this paradigm, oral culture, oral communication has no truth-value.

In retrospect, after almost five hundred years, we may conclude that Tyndale was, as he expressed it, 'stirred up' by the power of the divine Word, liberated from what he saw as the oppressive authority of the institutional Church. His discovery, however, led to an unfortunate one-sidedness in underestimating the significance of the faith-community of the Church and fell captive to the newly emerging 'Gutenberg galaxy' by entirely rejecting orality.¹⁰⁵ Thomas More, the great humanist, man of letters and faithful member of his Church, passionately defended the mystical body of Christ, the holy mother as her "valiant knight rushing with untiring ardor against the barbarians".¹⁰⁶ He underestimated the power of the word animated by the Spirit that could blow where it wanted, even outside the institutional Church. He tragically misunderstood that movement by militantly believing that its spirit was moving against and not for the Church.

For us, however, both More and Tyndale are among the "clouds of witness" (Heb 12:1), martyrs of the common Christian faith, in an age when the two sides of the same truth were considered irreconcilable. Today this is seen differently, even by theologians who speak about "the tragic necessity" of the Reformation, who affirm both the Scripture-principle and the Church-principle. The American Lutheran theologian Carl E. Braaten observed in 1996:

The Scripture principle exists only on account of the church and for the sake of the church [...]. The Scripture principle of Reformation theology and its hermeneutical principles makes sense only in and with the church [...]. The authority of Scripture functions not in separation from the church but only in conjunction with the Spirit-generated fruits in the life of the church, its apostolic confession of faith and its life-giving sacraments of baptism, absolution and the Lord's Supper.¹⁰⁷

A petrified, monolithic view of truth had to be shattered in the earthquake of the Renaissance and the Reformation. After almost 500 years, it is, however, our task, if not our calling, to try to fit the pieces of the common faith, then fallen apart, once again together. It is indeed a 'symbolic' task, in

¹⁰³ Cf. McLuhan 1968.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Hitchcock 1971, 456.

¹⁰⁵ Tyndale made a pun on More's "unwritten verities" by calling them "unwritten vanities", quoted by Hitchcock 1971, 459.

¹⁰⁶ Marius 1973, 271.

¹⁰⁷ Braaten 1996, 61 f.

accordance with the original meaning of the word. More and Tyndale were antagonists in their lives,¹⁰⁸ but for us they are reconciled and united in their deaths. And perhaps this is more than just a utopian vision.

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¹⁰⁸ For further reading cf. Doernberg 1961; Tjernagel 1965; Scarisbrick 1968; Chambers⁵ 1973; Hitchcock 1975; Milward 1980; Clark 1984; Smeeton 1986; Dickens² 1989; Martz 1990; O'Donnell 1991b; Richardson 1991; Haigh 1993; Daniell 1994; Trueman 1994a; Trueman 1994b; Barnett 1998; Cummings 1998; Parker 1998; Richardson 2000; Arblaster et al. 2002; Cummings 2002; O'Donnell 2003.

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