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Scripture and/or the Church in the Debate of Sir Thomas More and William Tyndale

1. Introduction

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 opposite sides. Brad Gregory in his outstanding book *Salvation at Stake* mentions that during the sixteenth century some 5000 men and women were judicially executed across Europe for religious heterodoxy.¹ 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 1522).² In October 1526 Cuthbert Tunsall, 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 *Responsio ad Lutherum* (1523) under a pseudonym.³

When we turn to the subject „representing religious pluralism” in the controversy of More and Tyndale, we could say that from a historical point of view this collision was the beginning of the breaking down of the monopoly of

This paper was originally given as a lecture at an International Symposium on „Representing Religious Pluralization in Early Modern Europe” on 7-9 July 2005 at Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München. The final version of this paper will be published in the following volume: Andreas Höfele, Stephan Laqué, Enno Ruge, Gabriela Schmidt (eds.) *Representing Religious Pluralization in Early Modern Europe*. Münster et al.: Lit. Verlag. Series title: Pluralisierung & Autorität.

¹ Gregory 2000 and Gregory 2003, 191.

² Tyndale 2000a, xxi.

³ Tyndale 2000a, xxii.

the medieval church. It is not difficult to recognize that the demonopolization of one authority (i.e. the church) gives immediately way to the remonopolization of another (i.e. the word of God as manifested in Scripture). Both for More and Tyndale the question of primacy was at stake, whether the primary authority was the Church for More or Scripture for Tyndale.⁴

In the present paper I wish to concentrate, above all, on how More and Tyndale conceived the question of primacy in the relationship of church or scripture. I am especially interested in the metaphors 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.

The topic of „Scripture Versus Church in Tyndale's Answer Unto Sir Thomas More's Dialogue” has been 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 millenium and a half and often interprets scripture connotatively. In effect, Tyndale and More argue past each other.”⁵

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.⁶

2. Tyndale: The Begetting Power of the Word

Luther was the first who emphasized that the church is derivative as she is not a creator, maker, initiator but only a creature, namely, that of the word, a result of the impregnating effect of the word as the seed of God (*sperma dei*). He made it clear that *ecclesia est creatura verbi* and not *verbum est creatura ecclesiae*. 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

⁴ On the More-Tyndale debate See: Chambers (1952, 172-203), Lewis (1954, 157-221), Flesselman-van Leer (1959, 143-164), Flesselman-van Leer, 1960, 65-86), Marius, 1962), Pineas, (1963a), Pineas (1963b), Pineas (1964, 15-112), Clebsch (1964, 181-203, 286-317), Egan (1960), Hitchcock (1971, 448-66), Horacek (1978), Fox (1982, 147-166), Marius (1984, 386-406), Chuilleanain (1988, 382-411) O'Donnell (1991a, 119-30), Rockett (1999), Bagchi (1997, 261-281), Gregory (2003, 173-197).

⁵ O'Donnell 1991a, 122.

⁶ Gregory 2003.

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?"⁷

The same argument is given by William Tyndale in his *An Answer Vnto Sir Thomas Mores Dialoge* (1531) in the section "Whether the church were before the gospel or the gospel before the church": "Another doute there is / whether the church or congregacion be before the gospell or this Word 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 is 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 / therefore is the word is gospell before the congregacion."⁸

Now 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 a baby or a child. Luther says that the church is "born by the words of promise". Moreover, for Luther the church is "nourished" and "preserved" by the same word thus it is the word (!) that acts like a mother. The promises of the word are the "maker" of the church; the church is not the maker of the promises. The conclusion is, therefore, obvious: "the Word of God is incomparably superior to the church". The church is not a creator but a creature, not a maker but something that is made, therefore it "has nothing to decree, ordain, or make, but only to be decreed, ordained, and made". Luther understands priority as a biological evidence: therefore concludes with two rhetorical questions: "For who begets his own parent? Who first brings forth his own maker?"

Tyndale has probably (perhaps subconsciously) Luther's images on his mind though this is not noticed in the critical edition of *An Answer* - when he begins his argument with the sarcastic rhetorical question: "which question is as hard to solve, as whether the father be elder than the son, or the son elder than his father." He reiterates Luther's idea that the preaching of the gospel creates "believing hearts" i.e. congregation, or, church. For him the word of God is also a masculine begetting power as "we are begotten through the word." However, Tyndale, just as Luther, tends to forget that for the birth of a child a mother is also

⁷ Pelikan/Lehmann 1959. Vol. 36, 107.

⁸ Tyndale 2000a, 14.

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 reccaueth 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 geveth 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 and lyghteneth the hertes of the beleuers and maketh them true / and clenseth them from lies / as thou readest Ihon xv. ye be cleanse 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 therefore from consentinge to synne. And Ihon xvij. sanctifie them a father thorow thy trueth. And thy word is trueth. And thus thou seist that gods trueth dependeth not of man."⁹

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" i.e. the blind human heart and that the process is not reverse. However, Tyndale's analogy here also lacks perfection. No human heart exists independently, in abstraction: "no man is an island", each soul is a member of a "continent", a community of faith. 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 other, i.e. the community of believers. The rays of the sun are undoubtedly primary but they are mediated by others, through the faith of the church. It is indeed true that the word "cleans" 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 John 17, and he is partly right that "God's truth 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

⁹ Tyndale 2000a, 23-24.

one-sided emphasis which neglects the significance of the *congregatio sanctorum*, makes Tyndale's ecclesiology defective.

3. More's Position: The Primacy of Orality

3.1. More's Distinction of the Word Written and Unwritten

Thomas More first criticized Tyndale's views in his *A Dialogue Concerning Heresies* (1529) and proposed the distinction between the word written and unwritten in the twenty fifth chapter of the book (More 1981, 137-153). Tyndale's above-quoted and commented passage was from his *An Answer to Sir Thomas More's Dialogue* (1531). J. F. Mozely describes Tyndale's answer as "plain", "workmanlike", "terse", "direct" and "vigorous".¹⁰ More's *The Confutation of Tyndale's Answer* (1532-33) soon followed. This huge work of half million words was published in two parts: the first three books were published in 1532, the next six ones 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."¹¹ However, in his excellent work on More's ecclesiology Brian Gogan, while acknowledging the "largely indigestible" density of More's reply, notices the *Confutations'* merits too: "Nonetheless it is key importance in the exposition of More's thought on the church and related topics"¹² 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."¹³

Let us see how More responded to Tyndale's section: "Whyther the churche were before the gospel, or the gospel before the chyrche". He begins with great vehemence, sarcasm and anger saying that Tyndale wrestles alone and mocks only himself when he misinterprets his words. After More cools down, he makes it clear that in the *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 dyalogue that the churche was before the gospell was wryten, and that the fayth was taught and men were baptyesed, and masses sayd and the other sacraments mynstred

¹⁰ Mozley 1937, 221.

¹¹ Mozely 1937, 223.

¹² Gogan 1982, 174.

¹³ Marius 1973, 1349.

amonge crysten people, before any parte of the newe testament was put in wrytinge / and that this was done by the word of god vnwryten."¹⁴

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 sayde also there, and yet I saye here again that the ryght fayth whiche Adam had and suche as in the same fayth succeeded hym, longe ere wrytinge beganne, was taught by the worde of god unwryten / and soo went from man to man, fro the father to the sonne by mouth. And I sayed that thys worde of god vnwryten / is of as greate authoryte as is the worde of god wryten."¹⁵

For More it is ultimately God and his Holy Spirit that instructs human beings. The Spirit teaches both by the word written and unwritten even if there are people who believe only in the written word: „... the 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 wrytinge."¹⁶

More had made this distinction between God's „written word" and „unwritten word" in his *Responsio ad Lutherum* (1523). Paul, he says, delivered his teaching without writing. More was asking Luther: „Will you deny that the written and written word were equally true?"¹⁷ „Negabis utrumque ex aequo uerum, et scriptum uerbum et non scriptum: quum sit utrumque dei?"¹⁸ 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) is the rock upon which he is to build his church. God therefore spoke interiorly to him: „Or is something heard only when it is written? Or before the gospels were written, did the Christians not hear the apostles?"¹⁹ („An dumtaxat auditur: quod scribitur: An prius quam scripta sunt euangelia Christiani non audierunt apostolos?"²⁰)

In the *Confutation* More reaffirms this idea: such confession is the foundation of the church, and the church is united by a common confession of faith. (More 1973, 480-481.) More also reproves Tyndale for misinterpreting his words: he

¹⁴ More 1973, 225.

¹⁵ More 1973, 225-226.

¹⁶ More 1973, 226.

¹⁷ More 1969, 243.

¹⁸ More 1969, 242.

¹⁹ More 1969, 245.

²⁰ More 1969, 244.

never said that the church was before the gospel: he only said that the church was before the written word. Tyndale implies that More said that „the chyrch had bene byfore the gospell and the worde of god vnwritten wherof hymself knoweth well that I syed clene the contrarye.”²¹

As for the simile concerning light and darkness More says he never said the opposite and furiously adds 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 each sentence of 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?

3. 2. More the Philologist: the Theological Role of the Definite Article in John 5,34

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 trwer then Crystes.”²³

Here More the philologist, the Greek and Latin scholar, launches a sweeping attack on Tyndale – and not without cause. The issue is the proper interpretation and translation of John 5,34, which is about the nature 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, the witness of the Father. As we read it in the Authorized Version of 1611: „But I receive not testimony from man”.

However, Tyndale in his 1531 *An Answer* wrote: „I receyve no wytnesse of man”²⁴. More quotes both the Greek and Vulgate texts: „u para anthropu tén matúrian lambano” and „non ab homine testimonium accipio”. In the 1526 Worms New Testament he wrote: „I receave no recorde of man”²⁵. More correctly criticizes Tyndale for not taking into consideration the definite article “the” in the original Greek text, which has important implication for the translation. Tyndale did not do so out of ignorance, says More, but out of malevolence because thus,

²¹ More 1973, 227.

²² More 1973, 228.

²³ More 1973, 229. Tyndale 2000a, 24: And Christ also saith him selfe Ihon. v. I receaue no wittenesse of man. For if the multitude of manswittenesse might make ought true / then were the doctrine of Mahomete truer then Christes.

²⁴ Tyndale 2000a, 24.

²⁵ Tyndale 2000b, 205.

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 article the / but sholde at the leste wyse haue translated yt thus, I receyue not the recorde of man / where as with his translated yt thus, I receyue not the recorde of man / where as with his translating no record, yt article the, wheruppon the wayght of the sentence hangeth / he hath not onely lefte oute but clene excludet also. For yf he had translated yt, I receyue not recorde of man, though he lefte oute the: yet he might 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. But now that he hath translated yt, I receyue no recorde of man: he hathe excludet yt vtterly 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 vtterly refuseth and reiecteth all maner wytnesse of man, in testyfyacyon and wytnessynge of hym and his trowth. And this translacyon therefore deuyseth Tyndale / because he wold haue vs wene that Cryste wolde haue the wytnesse of all his chyrche vtterly serue of noughte.”²⁶

For More Tyndale’s improper grammatical solution is a sign of his purposeful heretical subversion of the Catholic church: “And thus appereth it not onely that Tindale (sic!) hath mysse translated and mysse construed these wordes of Cryste, I receyue no wytnesse of man, for the furnysshynge 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 byleung 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 byleynge heretykes.”²⁷

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 John 5,34 as follows: „I receive not the record of man”²⁸. This means two things. 1. Tyndale did change his version exactly the way More suggested. Would it be an evidence, let me ask, that Tyndale read the *Confutation*? Scholars, including Anne O’Donnell, have usually left this question open²⁹. 2. More was wrong that Tyndale’s version was made out

²⁶ More 1973, 234.

²⁷ More 1973, 241.

²⁸ Tyndale 1989, 140. The fact that Tyndale in 1534 did revise the English translation of John 5,34 the way More suggested, is not mentioned in the notes of the critical edition in More 1973, 1552.

²⁹ Tyndale 2000a, xxviii.

of malice and not out of ignorance. He was wrong to suggest Tyndale distorts the Bible in order to suggest that the church cannot bear witness to him.

3. 3. More's Church of the Unwritten and Written Word in the Heart of Men

Tyndale passionately defended his "scripture-principle" in his answer to More's third book. He would agree 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 development of dogma, e.g., that confession of sin to priest, confirmation, matrimony, holy orders, anointing of sick were sacraments instituted by Christ.³⁰ While in the *Dialogue* More said that "scripture itself maketh us not to believe the scripture but the church teacheth us to know the scripture" but Tyndale replies that "your church teacheth not to know the scripture, but hideth it in the Latin from the common people"³¹ 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.

In his *Confutation* More responds to Tyndale's question 'Whether the apostles left aught vnwritten that is of necessity to be bylieued'. 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 may call "grapholatry" just as Coleridge was criticizing the "bibliolatry" of his age.³² 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 miracle among heretics: "among all the false chyrche of fals heretikes there be no miracles at all".³³

Concerning Scripture he says that though it may be true in itself, yet "yt is not so playne"³⁴ and there are difficulties which must be taken into consideration. These parts are especially dangerous for the unlearned: "vnto the vnlearned yt shalbe likely full ofte, that in suche dysposycyons the false parte maye seme treweste"³⁵ On the other hand, however, the unwritten word of God "may stay all to gether" as the teaching of the church is written into the heart of men: "For I say that the treweyth of god vnwryten taught and byleued as the chyrche without

³⁰ I am grateful for this comment to Sr Anne O'Donnell.

³¹ Tyndale 1850, 136. More 1981, 254.

³² Coleridge, Samuel Taylor (1988): *Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 10.

³³ More 1973, 253. More 1973, 271.

³⁴ More 1973, 270.

³⁵ More 1973, 270.

any doute or question byleueth / may be so surely grauen in mannys harte, that though he neer haue redde nor herde neyther any scrypture in that poynte: yet presupposynge yt for an vndouted trouthe, he shall set at nought all the false wrested scripture of the false prophete, and all his false miracle to /and euer conster the scripture by the knowen article of the catholyque fayth, whych was taught and byleued before those textes of scrypture were wryten, and hath yet the same trouthe now that yt hadde then, not wythstandynge all the textes that seme to saye the contrary."³⁶

More's words echo the classic dictum of Vincent of Lérins' *Commonitorium* (5th century) concerning the true faith of church, which was believed "ubique, semper, omnibus" – everywhere, always, by all. These are the criteria of universality, apostolic antiquity and conciliar consent.³⁷ 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 trouthe therof, that neuer red nor herde the scrypture in theyr dayes / and wold in the same word vnwryten, wyth goddes grace haue wythstanden false myracles to, whych had yet bene vndoutedly the sorest pynche, sauynge for the mo and more meruelouse myracles that them selfe saw byleued done on the tother syde for the trouthe."³⁸

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 unanimity in the housefold of the faith."³⁹

3. 4. More's Jews and the "Scrutamini"-passage in John 5,39

More's new argument against *Sola Scriptura* concerns the Jews: they did believe in Scriptures but never recognized Christ: "...euery fole knoweth that all the worlde saue the Iewes in thyr turnynge to Crystes bylyefe, were not led by the scrypture but by the miracles / and byleued not Cryste for the scrypture, but byleued the scrypture for Cryste, & Cryste for the miracles. And the Iewes whyche people moste byleued the scrypture / of them I saye fewest byleued in Cryste."⁴⁰

³⁶ More 1973, 270.

³⁷ See Oden, Thomas C. (2003): *The Rebirth of Orthodoxy. Signs of New Life in Christianity*. Harper San Francisco: Harper Collins, 156-86.

³⁸ More 1973, 270.

³⁹ Marc'hadour, Germain/Lawler, Thomas M.C. 1981, 499.

⁴⁰ More 1973, 282.

More quotes both in the *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." (Tyndale 1526, 1534 and also the Authorized Version of 1611). The original text: *eraunate hai graphai* - in the Vulgate *Scrutamini scripturas* - can be interpreted both as an indicative or an imperative. Erasmus has retained the ambiguous double interpretation. The indicative has an ironic tone: the rabbies were scrutinizing the Scriptures but they did not recognize that Scripture bore testimony to Jesus. Marc'hadour and Lawler mention that in the *Dialogue* More could easily have exploited the ambiguity of this passage to expose and deprecate bibliolatry, but More did not do that. He affirmed the authority of the church over Scripture by suggesting that if Christ does not provide readers with the proper understanding of scripture: "so should the scripture stand them in as good stede as a payre of spectacles shold stande a blynde freer."⁴¹

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: "As the wordes of Criste: *Scrutamini scripturas, quoniam ipsae testimonium perhibent de me*. Loke you in the scriptures, for they bere witnesse of me. Which thing no man denieth / 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 witnesse of hym bysyde the scripture / & that hys father bare witnesse of hym bysyde the scripture / and that the holy ghost ar hys commynge bare witnesse of hym bysyde the scripture / and hys apostles (as hymselfe sayd they shold) bare witnesse of hym bysyde the scripture."⁴²

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

4.1. Scripture is more than Letters (Signs, Ceremonies and Sacraments)

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: "How did God continue his congregation from Adam to Noe, and from Noe to Abraham, and so to Moses, without writing, but with teaching from mouth to mouth?"⁴³

He sarcastically remarks that he will 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

⁴¹ More 1981, 117. See also Marc'hadour, Germain/Lawler, Thomas M.C. 1981, 512.

⁴² More 1973, 348.

⁴³ Tyndale 1850, 30.

was writynge in the world longe yet Abraham ye and yer Noe doo stories testifie. Notwithstandinge / though there had bene no writynge / the preachers were euer prophetes glorious in doynge of miracles / where with they confirmed their preachynge. 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 superstitious mahometric / 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 waye from vs / as he hath robbed vs of the true sens of all the scripture."⁴⁴

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 "semiotic hermeneutics": miracles, sacrifices, sacraments and signs were given by God so that they should be "read" by the people. The problem is that their old significations have been "taken away" by "the wicked pope", and thus "the true sense of all the scripture" was "robbed off". The rainbow and the rite of circumcision were given as testaments to the chosen people which "preached God's word unto them". We feel the echo of Alan of Lille's "*Omnis mundi creatura, quasi liber et pictura*"⁴⁵ or Duke Senior's words in Shakespeare's comedy: "tongues in trees, books in the running books, / Sermons in stones" (*As You Like It* 2,1,16-7) Writing was given only after Moses.⁴⁶ In the New Testament only two sacraments are given: baptism and the Lord's Supper.

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 sacraments and haue them taken for bare simple sygnes."⁴⁷ More also says that God never really explained verbally 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 offeryne of Cryste vppon the crosse."⁴⁸

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 "semiotic hermeneutics".

⁴⁴ Tyndale 2000a, 25.

⁴⁵ Migne, J.-P. ed. (1844-1890): *Patrologia Latina* Paris, 210, 579a.

⁴⁶ Tyndale 1850, 27-28.

⁴⁷ More 1973, 278.

⁴⁸ More 1973, 278.

4. 2. Tyndale's Response to Augustine's Embarassing Statement

A key text in the debate over the primacy of the church or scripture is Augustine's frequently quoted sentence: „Ego vero Evangelico non crederem, nisi me catholicae Ecclesiae commoveret” („I would not believe the Gospel unless the catholic church moved so”⁴⁹ Luther, Tyndale and More also referred 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.”⁵⁰

Luther makes it clear that the discernment of the difference does not belong to the judgment of the soul or any human authority but that 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”.⁵¹ Therefore it is not we, whether popes, priests or council, that judge but we are all judged by the “mind of the Spirit” who judges all things (I Corinthians 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 also in More's *Responsio ad Lutherum* in 1523⁵² as well as in his *Dialogue Against Heresies* in 1529.⁵³ Tyndale's response to the quotation of Augustine is straightforward: Augustine was not converted by the authority of the church as he was a pagan philosopher who would never accept such an authority but by the „living spirituality” of believers whose lives lived up 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 gospel / excepte the auctorite of the church had moued me. I answer / as they abuse that sayinge 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 wisdome vn to whom the preachinge of christen is but folishnesse / saith paul .j. Corin.j And he disputed with blynd reasons of wordly wisdome

⁴⁹ Migne, J.-P. ed. (1844-1890) *Contra Epistolam Manichae. Patrologia Latina* 42, Paris, 176.

⁵⁰ Pelikan/Lehmann eds. 1959-, Vol.36.107.

⁵¹ Pelikan/Lehmann eds. 1959-, Vol. 36. 107.

⁵² More 1969, 605-607. 735.

⁵³ More 1981, 181. More 1981, 249. More 1981, 555. More 1973, 676.

agenst the christen. Neuerthesse the earnest liuinge of the christen acordinge vn to their doctrine and the constant soferinge of persecicion and aduersite for their doctrines sakes moed him and stered him to beleue that it was no wayne doctrine / but that it must nedes be of god / in that it had soch powetr with it. For it happeneth that they which will not heare the worde at the begynninge / are aftir warde moued by the holy conuersation of them that beleue.”⁵⁴

Tyndale uses a domestic simile concerning a Christian wife and a heathen husband in order to illumine what he means by St Augustine's conversion⁵⁵. 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 is telling you that you would burn your finger when you put it into 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 truth and honesty of the teller, or of the common fame and consent of many”,⁵⁶ while “And a felynge faith is as iff a man were there present whan it was wonne and their were wounded and had there lost all that he had and were taken prisoner there also. That man shuld so beleue that all the world coude not turne him from his faith... So now with a historically faith I maye beleue that the scripture is Gods by the teachynge 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 therefore abideth euer frutelesse and fauleth a waye / iff a moare gloriouse reason be made vnto me or iff the preacher lieu contrarye.”⁵⁷

More in his *Confutation* repeats that “yf I beleue not the chyrche, then can I not byleue the gospel, syth I beleue the gospel for the chyrche”⁵⁸ and adds that “Tyndale vntruely gloseth”⁵⁹ 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 workynge of goddess holy spyryte”.⁶⁰

⁵⁴ Tyndale 2000a, 47-48.

⁵⁵ Tyndale 1850, 3.: “as Peter warneth christian wives that had heathen husbands, that would not hear the truth preached, to live so godly that they might win their heathen husbands with holy conversation. And Paul saith, „How knowest thou, christian wife, whether thou shalt win thine heathen husband?” With holy conversation, meant he: for many are won with godly living, which at the first either will not hear, or cannot believe. And that is the authority that St Augustine meant. But if we shall not believe till the living of the spirituality convert us, we be like to bide long enough in unbelief.”

⁵⁶ Tyndale 1850, 51.

⁵⁷ Tyndale 2000a, 48-49.

⁵⁸ More 1973, 738.

⁵⁹ More 1973, 738.

4.3. Tyndale's "Double Interpretation" of the Church – The Context of an Idea

Tyndale appeals to Paul's distinction between the carnal sons of Abraham and the sons of promise (Romans 9,7-8) to make a distinction between appearance and reality, between those who "believe with their mouths" and the ones who "repent and feel that the law is good" and the law of God is written in their hearts. One is the "carnal Israel" the other is the "spiritual". The other *locus classicus* is Galatians 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 carnal always persecute the spiritual. Tyndale considers More's faith and the pope's faith identical with the Devil's faith. The faith of the elect are written into their hearts by the spirit of God. "And he that hath not that written in his heart, is popish, and of the spirituality; which understandeth nothing save his own honour, his own profit, and what is good for himself only, thinketh that all the world is as it should be."⁶¹

The "great multitude" always persecutes the "little flock": Abraham's fleshly seed the spiritual: "And the fleshlye shall persecute the spirituall / as Caim (sic) did Abel and Ishmaell Isaac & soforth / and the greate multitude the small little 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 heretike and soch like."⁶²

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 as this reality, it claims, again, was revealed to the faithful who are thus not misled by the deception of Satan. Tyndale complains that Master More "will not understand" this vision of the double church and of the double faith, namely that the term "church" is sometimes used for the elect only, which have the law of God written in their hearts⁶³ and sometimes for the "common rascal of all that believe..carnally without the spirit".

If we are to investigate the origins of the Reformation idea of duplicity concerning the true and false we have to say that this vision comes from apocalyptic literature. Reformation biblical scholars have rediscovered the apocalyptic idea of dualism inherent in the genre of Jewish and Christian

⁶⁰ More 748.

⁶¹ Tyndale 1850, 56. Tyndale 2000a, 55.: And he that hath not that written in his heret is popish and of the spiritualite which 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.

⁶² Tyndale 2000a, 105.

⁶³ Tyndale 1850, 113. Tyndale 2000a, 112.

apocalyptic literature. The idea of a double vision: juxtaposition of Christ and Antichrist, the lamb and the beast, the bride and the whore as applied to the true and the false church has been an old hermeneutical tradition. Anti-Catholic polemic such as the little German tract *Passional Christi und Antichristi* illustrated by twenty six woodcuts from Lucas Cranach (1521)⁶⁴ or Thomas Becon's *The Actes of Christe and of Antichrist*⁶⁵ usually contrasted the lives and doctrines of the two figures in several ways.

The idea goes back to the *Liber Regularum* of the 4th century Donatist Tyconius. According to Tyconius the double nature of the church was prefigured by the fighting of the twins Esau and Jacob in the womb of Rebekkah. The „two in one body“ („*duo in uno corpore*“) are a „figure of the double line of Abraham's descendants“. „Two peoples wrestling in the one womb of their mother, the church. The one, chosen on the basis of foreknowledge, is loved, the other by the choice of its own will, is evil.“ Tyconius then emphasizes that Jacob himself is again bipartite: he is both a deceiver and a loved one. We can raise now the question whether Tyconius's idea of the „bipartite body“ (*corpus bipartitus*) has anything to do with Augustine's idea of the two cities (*civitates duas*) in conceiving the nature of the church. Tyconius's ecclesiology maintains the reality of the „body“. Augustine in *De Civitate Dei* also gives a figurative, ecclesiological meaning to the stories of enemy brothers: Cain and Abel (Book XV.v.) and Esau and Jacob (Book XVI.xxxv.) However, Augustine uses a somewhat simplistic and dualistic typology. The elder brother represents the body, the devil. i.e. the *civitas diaboli*, while the younger one the spirit, the heavenly inclination, i.e. the *civitas dei*. Moreover, Augustine goes further than that: the mystical prophecy Rebecca received „two nations are in your womb...the elder shall serve the younger“ (*due gentes in tero tuo sunt et duo populi...et maior serviet minori*) is applied to the relationship of the Jews and Christians. Now as Cain was the symbol of the Jews who slew Christ (XV.v) the elder brother Esau serving the younger one likewise prefigures the relationship of the Jews and Christians. Similarly, Jacob's „crossed blessing“ of Joseph's two sons Manasseh and Ephraim (Gen.48.18) is given the same meaning: the elder again typifies the Jews and the younger the Christians. It is sufficient to quote these examples; the dangers of the simplistic antijudaistic typology and Christian triumphalism seem to be evident.

Luther in his Genesis-Commentary as well as his other work on ecclesiology *Against Hanswurst* echoed St Augustine's Cain and Abel typology of the church: "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

⁶⁴ Lucas Cranach (1972): *Passional Christi und Antichristi*. Ed. Hildegard Schnabel, Berlin: Union Verlag Berlin.

⁶⁵ Thomas Becon (1844): *Prayers and Other Pieces*. Ed. Ayre, John, Cambridge: The Parker Society, 498-539.

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."⁶⁶ "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."⁶⁷

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 sinagogue 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 entitled 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."⁶⁸

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."⁶⁹ More also reverses the pattern of persecution saying that wherever heretics appeared the Catholic church had suffered persecution.⁷⁰

5. What, then, is the Church?

5.1. Church Inclusive (Mystical Body), or, Exclusive (Congregation of the Elect)?

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

⁶⁶ Pelikan/Lehmann eds. 1959-, Vol. 1. 254.

⁶⁷ Pelikan/Lehmann eds. 1959-, Vol. 4I. 194.

⁶⁸ John Bale (1849): *The Image of Both Churches* (London, 1545), in: *The Select Works of John Bale* ed. Christmas, Henry, The Parker Society, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

⁶⁹ Marius 1973, 1286.

⁷⁰ More 1973, 832.

the parable of the net: "The chyrche therefore must nedys be the comen knowen multitude 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 corne and cocle / tyll it shall at the day of dome be purifyed / and all the bad caste out / and onely good remayne."⁷¹

Tyndale's response in *The Answer* begins with a long section in which he enumerates at least four different significations of the church: (1) place or house; (2) the multitude of clergy, (3) a congregation at a location and (4) the congregation of the elect. This last definition is the closest to Tyndale's heart: "...it is sometimes taken generally for all them that embrace the name of Christ, though their faiths be naught, or though they have no faith at all. And sometimes it is taken specially for the elect only; in whose hearts God hath written his law with his holy Spirit, and given them a feeling faith of the mercy that is in Christ Jesu our Lord."⁷²

Tyndale cannot tolerate More's image of the mystical body of Christ from which the heretics have fallen out. Tyndale mocks the word both of the "mystical sense" and of the "mystical body" with a pun: "And in the end, when he [More] saith that the heretics be fallen out of Christ's mystical body, which is the pope and his; I answer, that ye be a mystical body, and walk in the mist and will not come at the light; and the heretics be departed out of your mist, and walk in the clear light of God's word."⁷³

Here is Tyndale's more exclusive definition of the church of the elect: "Christes electe church the the hole multitude of all repentyng synners that beleue in Christ and put all their trust and confidence in the mercye of god / felynge in their hertes / that god for Christes sake loueth them and wilbe or rather is mercifull vn to them and forgeueth them their synnes of which they repent / and that he forgeueth them also all the mocions vn to synne of which they fear lest they should therby be draewen int o synne agayne. And this faith they haue with out all respecte of their awne deseruynges / yee and for no nother cause then that the mercifull trueth of god the father which can not lye / hath so promised an so sworne."⁷⁴

Tyndale's view of the "elect church" focuses on the faith of individuals. They are a "multitude of repenting sinners". 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 fall into sin again. There is an element of anxiety in this definition: this is "at work" in feeling and fearing. However close this definition may seem to pietism and evangelicalism of

⁷¹ More 1981, 205.

⁷² Tyndale 1850, 11-13.

⁷³ Tyndale 1850, 115. Tyndale 2000a, 114. and 110.

⁷⁴ Tyndale 2000a, 28.

modernity, nevertheless it avoids the pitfalls of the somewhat narcissistic and anthropocentric modern Protestantism by the theocentric emphasis on clinging to God the Father and his promises: "none other cause than that the merciful truth of God the Father."

5. 2. Church as a Mother

Tyndale was not happy with the metaphor of the church as a mother. He believed in the responsibility of the individual's 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 Luke 22, 31-32: "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, "that I prayed for thee, that my mother's faith shall not fail".⁷⁵

Concerning the identity of the church, More criticized not only Tyndale but his fellow-reformer Dr Robert Barnes (1495-1540), chaplain of Henry VIII⁷⁶. In *A supplicacyon unto kinge henrye the eyght* published in Antwerp in 1530 he wanted to convert the King to Protestant faith. Barnes, although a Protestant, used the image of the "holy mother" who receives her holiness from her husband: "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."⁷⁷

Barnes, in accordance with Luther⁷⁸, has noticed "tokens of the church" (*notae ecclesiae*); but while Luther mentions seven marks, Barnes recognizes only two: the preaching of word and good works as consequences of this preaching. Though not as a separate "token", Barnes also considers the cross and suffering as part of the life of the church: "Our holy mother the churche throw out all the

⁷⁵ Tyndale 1850, 39. Tyndale 2000a, 37. See Commentary on page 266 concerning Panormitanus' belief that "Mary preserved the faith of church when Peter fell."

⁷⁶ On Barnes see Lusardi 1973, 1365-1415.

⁷⁷ Tjernagel 1963, 43. In More 1973, 1044: But oure holy mother ye churche hathe a nother hollynes / yt cometh from god the father thorow ye sweat bloud of his blessed sonne Iesus Christ / in whome is alle hys confidens & trust. Vn to whome she stycketh only by stedfast faith / by whose purenes she ys also puer in that yt she dothe confesse hyr vncleannes / for she beleueth stedfastly yt she hathe an aduocate for hyr synne to the father of heuen / which is christe Iesus. And he is the statisfaccion for hyr synnes. And he of his martyre & not of hyr merytes hathe chossen hyr for to be his / and by cause she ys hys / therfore must she be clene so longe as she abyde in hym.

⁷⁸ Pelikan/Lehmann eds. 1959-, Vol. 41, 143-78.

world scatered far and longe / in hyr trew hed Cryste Iesus taught / hath lerned not to fere the contumeley of the crosse nor yet of deth, but more and more is she strengthed, not in reystynge but in sufferynge."⁷⁹

More devoted Book VIII of his *Confutation* to refuting Barnes's idea of the church. Here, with the wheel coming full circle, we should notice a further development of the sexual metaphor. While Luther and Tyndale spoke about the word as "begetting" the church, for More church is the mother who "engenderes us to God": "For holy chyrch is our mother, as ye her call your self / and / therefore is she whych engendreth vs to god, & which both with mylke and strenger mete, must fede vs & foster vs vp / & none other nuryce is ther by whom we can be truly & faythfully brought vp. And therfore 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."⁸⁰

From More's inclusive idea of the church only the heretics are excluded: "The common knowen catholyke people, clergy, lay folke, and all / whych what so euer ther lyuyng be (amonge whom vndoubtedly there are of bothe sortes many ryght good and vertuose) do stande to gether and agre in the confessyon of one trew catholyke faythe, 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 wyclyffe, zuinglius, Hutten, Huse, and Tyndale, & all rable of such erroneous heretykes."⁸¹

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 goode and badde is the catholyke chyrche of Cryste, whyche is in thys worlde very sikely, & hath many sore membres/as hath somtyme the naturall body of a man, and some sore astonyed, and for a tyme colde and dede/whyche yet catheth hete and lyfe agayne, yf it be not precyded and cut of from the body."⁸²

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 mysticall body is the whole knowen catholyke chyrche/in whych for all the cure done vppon yt in the baptyisme, yet are there many sykke members by many great synnes (...) of those sortes ordynaryly doth and shall our sauour (the sore cancred members that wyll not in concusyon be cured, left vnto the rotte and shaken into the fyre) brynge for the and make perfyte his gloryouse chyrche, and present yt to his father bryghte and smothe, wythoute any spot or wryncle to lyue

⁷⁹ More 1973, 875.

⁸⁰ More 1973, 892.

⁸¹ More 1973, 480-481.

⁸² More 1973, 398.

and endure in heuen / but neuer shall his chyrche be clerly without spot or wryncle, whyle yt wandereth in this wretched worlde."⁸³

We cannot but close 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 betwene Tyndale and me no thyng e llys in effecte, but to fynde out whyche churche is the very churche."⁸⁴

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 almost exactly 470 years ago today. William Tyndale suffered martyrdom for his belief in Scripture as the faith-begetting word of God near Brussels exactly 15 months later than More on October 6, 1536.

In life the former held the latter heretic, and the latter held the former 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 rabble of (...) erroneous heretykes"⁸⁵ while Tyndale complained that "the prelates had sett vpp such a rabble of ceremonies."⁸⁶ More associated heresy with beastliness, disease, pestilence, single virus, newfangliness⁸⁷, seditious violence, filthiness, barking and biting. At the beginning of the *Confutation* More made it clear that his ambition was no less than stripping off the mask ("visor") of heretics in order to reveal their ugly faces: "That ye maye the more clerly perceyue the malycyouse mynde of these men, and that theyr pestilent bokes be bothe odyouse to god and deadly contagyouse to men / and so muche the more perylouse in that theyr false heresy wylyly walke forth vnder the counterfayt visage of the trew crysten faith: thys is the cause and purpose of my present labour / wherby god wylling I shall so pull theyr gaye paynted vysours, that euery man lysting to loke theron, shall playnely perceyue and byholde the bare vgly gargyle facys of theyr abominable heresy."⁸⁸

⁸³ More 1973, 855.

⁸⁴ More 1973, 480.

⁸⁵ More 1973, 480-481.

⁸⁶ Tyndale 2000a, 74.

⁸⁷ It means: "fond of novelty". See Bagchi 1997, 274, 281. He pointed out that More used this expression in the *Dialogue* (More 1981, 125., 191, 269, 338, 423.)

⁸⁸ More 1973, 34. Quoted also in modern spelling by Bagchi 1997, 267.

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 have "fallen from the faith", who have "lost the significance" of the meaning of God's word and thus became 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 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, Pharisees, and high priests were the right church; and Christ, and his apostles and disciples, heretics, and a damnable sect!"⁸⁹

Luther, Tyndale and other reformers, unlike his adversaries, claimed to have conceived of the captivity of the church of Christ due to their prophetic insights inspired, they believed, by the Spirit of God through his revealed word. Within their typological imagination they saw that the pope and the clergy were hypocrites just as the Pharisees in Jesus' day. No wonder, therefore, that Christ warned his disciples to beware the leaven of the Pharisees: "And in another place he rebuked the scribes and Pharisees, saying: "Wo be to them," because they had taken away the key of knowledge, and had shut up the kingdom of heaven, and neither would enter in themselves nor suffer them that would. How had they shut it up? Verily with their traditions and false glosses; which they had sewed to the scripture in plain places; and in the taking away the meaning of the ceremonies and sacrifices, and teaching to believe in the work."⁹⁰

In the *An Exposition Upon 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."⁹¹

⁸⁹ Tyndale 1850, 42. Tyndale 2000a, 40: And Christ and his apostles came out of them and departed from them and left them. Wherefore the scribes pharases and hie prestes were the right church / and Christ and his apostles and disciples heretikies and a damnable secte.

⁹⁰ Tyndale 1850, 43. Tyndale 2000, 41.: And in a nother place he rebuked the scribes and the pharases 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 tradicions and false gloses which they had sowded 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.

7. Conclusion: Tragic Necessity and Reconciliation in Death

The visions of the hypocrite concerning the heretic and the heretic concerning the hypocrite were mutually irreconcilable. Brad Gregory in his article commented 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."⁹²

The antagonism between Scripture and church was not to be reconciled in the early sixteenth century. Tyndale's "Scripture-principle", some argue, is a paradigmatic phenomenon of the new print-culture in the sense it is criticized by McLuhan's *Gutenberg-galaxy*. For print-culture truth is written and claims certitude which the modern individual wants to cling to.⁹³ Oral-culture, oral communication for this paradigm is of no truth-value.

In a retrospect of almost five hundred years we may conclude that Tyndale was, in his own expression, "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 has fallen captive to the newly emerging Gutenberg-galaxy by entirely rejecting orality.⁹⁴ Thomas More the great humanist, man of letters and a 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"⁹⁵. He has underestimated the power of the word animated by the Spirit, as the wind which 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 witnesses" (Hebrews 12,1), martyrs of the common Christian faith in an age when the two sides of the same truth were seen as irreconcilable. Today this is seen differently even by theologians who speak about "the tragic necessity" of the Reformation affirming both the Scripture-principle and the church-principle. The American Lutheran theologian Carl E. Braaten writes in 1996: "Scripture principle exists

⁹¹ Tyndale 1849, 17.

⁹² Gregory 2003, 197.

⁹³ Hitchcock 1971, 456.

⁹⁴ Tyndale made a pun on More's „unwritten verities“ by calling them „unwritten vanities“. Quoted by Hitchcock 1971, 459.

⁹⁵ Marius 1973, 271.

only on account of the church and for the sake of the church. (...) The Scripture principle of Reformation theology and its hermeneutical principles make 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."⁹⁶

A petrified, monolithic view of truth had to be exploded in the earthquake of the Renaissance and the Reformation. After almost 500 years, however, it is our task, if not calling, to try to fit the pieces of the common faith, then fallen apart, once again, together. It is indeed a "symbolic" task, in accordance with the original meaning of the word. More and Tyndale were antagonists in their lives but for us they are reconciled and united in their deaths. And it is more than a utopian vision, perhaps.

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⁹⁶ Braaten, Carl E. (1996): „The Problem of Authority in the Church“, in: Braaten Carl E. and Jenson, Robert W. *The Catholicity of the Reformation*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 61-62.

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Kérdések a nyulakszigeti domonkos apácakolostor alapítása körül

A csekélyszámú középkori magyar apácakolostor közül a legismertebb, leghíresebb bizonyosan a Szűz Mária tiszteletére emelt nyulakszigeti domonkos apácakolostor volt. Királyi alapítású kolostorként kezdettől fogva hatalmas birtok- és egyéb adományok célpontja volt, rövid időn belül pedig az ország egyik legnagyobb birtokosa lett. Itt folyt le Árpád-házi Szent Margit életének nagyobbik része is. Első pillantásra mi sem egyértelműbb, mint hogy a kolostor – a veszprémi vel együtt – kezdettől fogva a domonkos rendhez tartozott. Ha viszont közelebbi pillantást vetünk a domonkos férfirend és az apácakolostorok viszonyára, akkor korántsem ennyire világos a helyzet. A domonkos rend ugyanis csak több évtizedes, a pápákkal is folytatott küzdelem után (1267-ben) volt hajlandó véglegesen bekebelezni, azaz inkorporálni a hozzá csatlakozni kívánó női kolostorokat. Mivel a nyulakszigeti kolostor alapítása éppen arra az időszakra tehető, amikor ez a harc a legintenzívebb volt, felmerül a kérdés, hogyan tartozott a szigeti kolostor a prédikátorok rendjéhez. A következőkben ezt a problémát a rendtörténet és ezen belül a domonkosok és a *cura mulierum* viszonyának keretében vizsgálom. Hogyan alakult tehát a *cura monialium* kérdése a prédikátorok rendje történetének első fél évszázadában?

A prédikátorok rendje és a cura mulierum

Herbert Grundmann protestáns történésznek sikerült először a koldulórendek női ágainak kutatását a szorosan hagiográfiai megközelítésből kiemelni. Az addigi bevett felfogás szerint „Szent Domonkos, a domonkos másodrend alapítója” volt, s ezzel együtt a domonkos rend női ágán valami gyökeresen új dolgot is értek. Grundmann ezzel szemben a 12-13. századi vallási mozgalmak, vallási megújulás és a női vallásosság új formái kialakulásának kontextusában helyezi el a női kolostorok (nem annyira női ágak!) kialakulását és inkorporációját, helyet biztosítva a pápaság tevékenységének az értékelésére. Nagymértékben a 13. század első felének pápáin múlott ugyanis a nőkről való lelkipásztori gondosko-

- Tringer László (1939) orvos, ideg- és elmegyógyász, egyetemi tanár, a Sapientia Szerzetesi Hittudományi Főiskola tanára
 Tuba Iván (1944) piarista szerzetes, a Sapientia Szerzetesi Hittudományi Főiskolán és a Veszprémi Érseki Hittudományi Főiskolán a Morálteológiai Tanszék vezetője
 Tüskés Tibor (1930) irodalomtörténész, kritikus
 Urbán József (1964) piarista szerzetes, a Piarista Rend Magyarországi Tartományának tartományfőnöke
 Válóczy József (1965) katolikus pap, az esztergomi Érseki Papnevelő Intézet tanára
 Varga Kapisztrán (1961) ferences szerzetes, a szécsényi ferences kolostor házfőnöke, a Sapientia Szerzetesi Hittudományi Főiskola tanára
 Várszegi Asztrik (1946) bencés szerzetes, püspök, pannonhalmi főapát
 Vasadi Péter (1926) költő, író, esszéista
 Vörös István (1964) költő, kritikus, műfordító
 Wojtilla Gyula (1945) orientalista, ókortörténész, az SZTE BTK Ókortörténeti Tanszék vezetője
 Zlinszky János (1928) jogász, az MTA doktora, ny. egyetemi tanár
 Zulehner, Paul M. (1939) vallásszociológus, a bécsi egyetem pasztorálteológia professzora

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DVD-melléklet:
Portréfilm Lukács László piarista tanárról

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www.mtv.hu

MTV 2005

Kiadja: Vigilia Kiadó, Budapest, 2006
Felelős kiadó: Lukács László
Tipográfus: Kálmán Ildikó
Nyomdai munkák: Kaloprint Nyomda Kft.

Látó szívvel

Magyar Piarista Rendtartomány
Sapientia Szerzetesi Hittudományi Főiskola
Vigilia Kiadó

Budapest, 2006