

## **Tyndale as Media Theorist: Collaboration and Authority in Early Modern England**

Recent scholarship on media and religion has explored the ways that emerging media have empowered users, which has both allowed individuals to form unique religious identities and also shifted authority away from traditional sources. This study looks back to the work of William Tyndale and argues that print media, the emerging media of the Protestant Reformation, caused a similar crisis of authority. Thanks to John Foxe's *Actes and Monuments* (1583), Tyndale's legacy has been largely defined by his apocryphal claim that he would make plowboys more familiar with the Bible than the learned men of the Church of Rome. He is remembered as a noteworthy English adherent to the doctrine of sola scriptura, a prolific translator, and a fierce defender of vernacular Bibles. While it is certainly true that Tyndale worked to make the Bible available to ordinary people, this study argues that the paratexts to his translations show that he came to exert a measure of authority over his readers. His incomplete 1525 New Testament and his completed 1526 New Testament each invite readers to engage with the text by correcting it and teaching it. However, his 1530 Pentateuch laments that he had authorized such interactions, and his 1534 New Testament goes to great lengths to condemn revisions made by a man named George Joye. Tyndale, it seems, did not approve of the contributions and corrections he received. The paratexts to both his 1530 Pentateuch and his 1534 New Testament claim authority over the text in a way that would appear to foreclose the kind of interactions with the text that the paratexts to the 1525 and 1526 New Testaments had invited. Even though Tyndale's goal was to allow ordinary people to have individual interactions with the Bible, the story of his biblical paratexts shows that, much to his dismay, Tyndale found it necessary to exert more authority over his readers than he would have liked and to offer more directive guidance than he had initially thought necessary. In other words, Tyndale's texts were initially intended to challenge the authority of the Church of Rome and to enable individuals to have private religious experiences, but they too came to exert authority over their readers.