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# LUTHER IN THE BRITISH ISLES

Martin Luther's Martyrs for Christ:  
William Tyndale and Patrick Hamilton

MARTIN  
LUTHER

A hammer and several nails are arranged on a dark wooden surface. The hammer is positioned vertically, with its head at the top. The nails are scattered around the base of the hammer handle.

REDISCOVERING THE GOSPEL TRUTH

“ Virtually the whole of the scriptures and the understanding of the whole of theology – the entire Christian life, even – depends upon the true understanding of the Law and the Gospel – **MARTIN LUTHER**

“ The Law and the Gospel are two keys. The Law is the key that shutteth up all men under condemnation, and the Gospel is the key which opens the door and lets them out – **WILLIAM TYNDALE**

“ The Law showeth us our sin. The Gospel showeth us the remedy for it ... The Law saith pay thy debt. The Gospel saith Christ hath paid it – **PATRICK HAMILTON**

## FOREWORD

1

When researching for the ‘Luther 500’ project one story stood out – Luther’s influence on Christianity in the British Isles. It is all the more remarkable as it was a place where neither he nor his colleague Philip Melanchthon ever visited.

It seems the success of the reformed Churches in England and Scotland in the centuries that followed has eclipsed Luther’s early influence on the region. The names of such as **William Tyndale** and **Patrick Hamilton** are well-known by those familiar with Church history. They are viewed as central to the reformations in England and Scotland, and it was their interconnectedness to each other, and to Luther himself, that has captured my attention..

Both Tyndale and Hamilton died young for their faith – Hamilton burned in Scotland in 1528 aged just 24, and Tyndale burned at the stake in Belgium in 1536 aged 42. The reformation was at an early stage, with many seminal moments to come. Martin Luther’s influence in the British Isles is interlinked with the account of their lives and ministries. Although they deserve a much more thorough examination than this short booklet, it is hoped the contents impact you intellectually, spiritually and practically in your life.

In 2013 Melvyn Bragg presented a wonderful BBC documentary on William Tyndale entitled, *‘The Most Dangerous Man in Tudor England’*. The wider story of the ‘threefold cord’ between England’s Tyndale, Scotland’s Hamilton and Germany’s Martin Luther deserves the same, time, care, investment and professionalism.



## “THE INFECTIOUS REEK OF THE REFORMATION”

### LUTHER IN THE BRITISH ISLES

“Open the king of England’s eyes” – were these the desperate words of a dying man or a final act of defiance? At another burning stake, eight years earlier in Scotland, the question was asked of the victim, “Do you still believe in what you are dying for?” Three fingers of a partially burned hand were lifted up and held there till life slipped away.

At the age of 24 and 42, **Patrick Hamilton** and **William Tyndale** were brutally burned for their faith. England and Scotland lost two great and Godly intellectuals, hounded to death by the religious leaders of their own nations. Yet the above prayer of William Tyndale was answered, while the “reek of Master Patrick Hamilton infected as many as it blew upon.” Death was swallowed up in victory and being dead yet speaketh (1 Corinthians 15:54; Hebrews 11:4).

### THE EUROPE OF THE 1500S

Europe experienced enormous changes both politically and within Christendom. Martin Luther’s ‘95 Theses’ in 1517 was a seismic event that heralded a return to the simplicity of the gospel which rapidly spread all over the continent. Luther neither created a new church, nor new doctrine. Rather he returned to the authority of Scripture and its emphasis on ‘justification by faith alone.’ The imperfect Martin Luther exhorted the world to look to Jesus. Their only hope was in the crucified and exalted, the sinless and perfect Saviour.

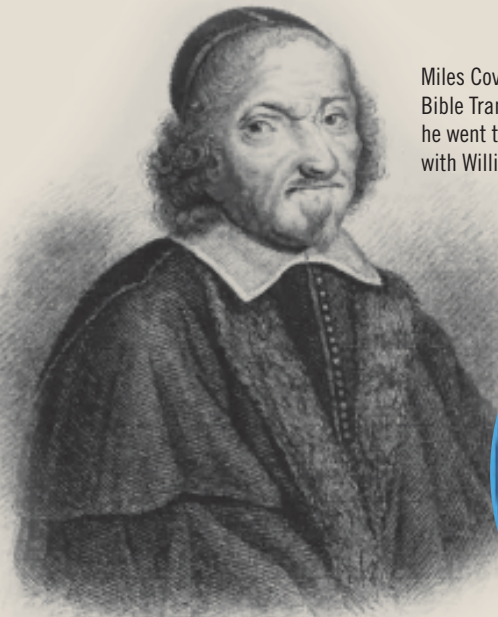
The gospel had once burned brightly within the British Isles. In the 1300s **John Wycliffe** was of huge importance in England and even by the time of Luther his underground Lollard preachers still clandestinely did their work as far north as Ayrshire in Scotland. The painstaking handwritten copies of his Bible also still circulated. These were however dim lights fighting against an insidious darkness.

It may be easy to consider the reformation as it occurred within specific nations – such as the German reformation, the Swiss reformation, the English reformation or the Scottish reformation. The reality is that just as no nation exists in a vacuum, the reformations were not individual to countries, but rather a series of interconnected reformations with each nation having unique aspects. There were distinctive leaders, specific challenges and different doctrinal emphases, but across the nations their commonality was clear in their focus on the same central themes: Scripture, justification and the structure of the church.



**WILLIAM TYNDALE**  
(1494–1536)

**PATRICK HAMILTON**  
(1504–1528)



Miles Coverdale, (1488–1569)  
Bible Translator and Bishop Of Exeter,  
he went to the continent where he worked  
with William Tyndale and John Knox



A blue plaque marks the site of the  
White Horse Inn, at Chetwynd Court, Cambridge

The leaders did not operate alone. This is illustrated by reports of personal encounters, writings that circulated and in collaborative work. Some of the connections are startling, with the same people turning up over and over again.

For instance, Englishman **Miles Coverdale** helped fellow Englishman **William Tyndale** with his New Testament; later when back in England Coverdale worked on the *Bishop's Bible*; then when exiled again in Geneva in Switzerland he worked along with Scotsman **John Knox** on what became known as the *Geneva Bible*. Further, a list of the men associated with the '**White Horse Inn meetings**' in Cambridge reads like a directory for Bible translators and English reformers. John Knox is known as the great Scottish reformer but he also had a huge effect on England, on Geneva when a refugee and on the world via the *Geneva Bible* which he helped translate.

These are just a few examples of a deeply interwoven community of valiant reformers across the British Isles and the continent 500 years ago – an era long before the easy travel and instant communications we now take for granted.

## LUTHER, TYNDALE, HAMILTON – REFORMERS IN THE BRITISH ISLES

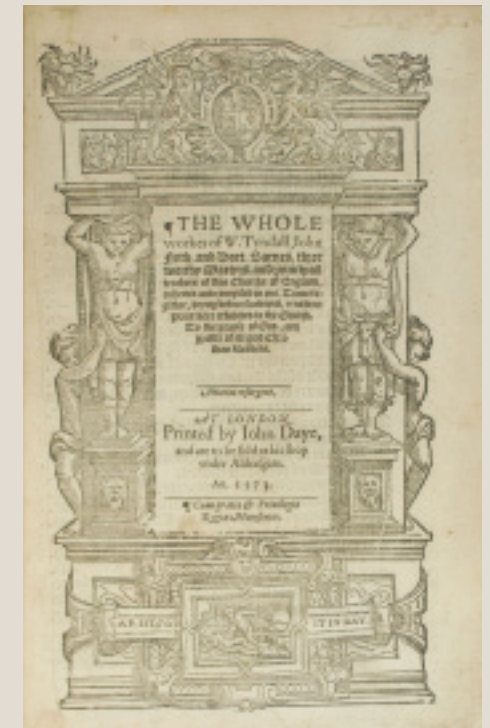
# 3

Less than twenty years separated the births of Martin Luther (1483), William Tyndale (1490) and Patrick Hamilton (1504). Therefore it is unsurprising that their stories overlap and interconnect. The ministry of 'brother,' then 'father,' then 'professor' Martin Luther was not curtailed to Germany. It also shone brightly into the spiritually gloomy British Isles.

The secret place of prayer and Bible study had brought the truths of the gospel into Luther's public places of pulpit, lecture hall and to his writings. The ink of the printing press was the fuel. Merchants willingly carried this contraband near and far and the ports of England and Scotland welcomed the little paper missionaries as they slipped into these Kingdoms. So the gospel started to make rapid progress within the British Isles.



Memorial to William Tyndale, Vilvoorde, Belgium,  
built in 1913



*The Whole Workes of W. Tyndall, John Frith and  
Doct. Barnes, three worthy Martyrs* (London, 1573)

### 3.1 RURAL ENGLAND AND ROYAL SCOTLAND

#### RURAL ENGLAND

We know that William Tyndale came from the English border with Wales – possibly from one of the villages near **Dursley, Gloucestershire**. His humble origins did not deter him from becoming a linguistic and literary genius. He was educated at **Magdalen College, Oxford**, earned a BA in 1512 and became a sub deacon the same year. In July 1515 he obtained his MA.

A few months later he was ordained into the priesthood as his MA allowed him to study theology. Amazingly this was a course that did not include the study of Scripture. Tyndale's education led to his development as a gifted linguist, fluent in French, Greek, Hebrew, German, Italian, Latin and Spanish in addition to his native English.<sup>1</sup> This outstanding talent would be hugely important when translating the Bible.

Tyndale also went to **Cambridge**, and it is possible that he gathered with other like-minded men at the **'White Horse Inn'** to discuss theological ideas. The place was so influenced by ideas flowing in from the continent that it became known as Little Germany.

"We know that other reformers were Cambridge men, and that they were said to meet at the White Horse Inn: Hugh Latimer, Thomas Cranmer, Thomas Bilney and others whom we know that Tyndale met later – Robert Barnes, Miles Coverdale and John Frith. Perhaps Tyndale joined in their talks at the White Horse Inn; perhaps not."<sup>2</sup> The names mentioned are an inimitable 'Who's Who' of English reformers, Bible translators and Protestant martyrs.

#### ROYAL SCOTLAND

Patrick Hamilton was born near **Glasgow** in 1504. He was in the privileged position of being a great-grandson of the late **King James II of Scotland** through both his mother and father. Sir Patrick Hamilton, his father, was the son of the Lord of Hamilton and Princess Mary, daughter of King James II of Scotland. His mother, Catherine Stewart was daughter of the Duke of Albany, the second son of King James II. These connections provided the young Hamilton with advantage and opportunity.



A portrait of Patrick Hamilton

1. Tremlett, 2011, Sermon given at Matins on Sunday 27 November 2011

2. Moynahan, 2003, *William Tyndale: If God spare my life*, p. 4

### 3.2 TYNDALE'S EARLY WORK

William Tyndale became chaplain and tutor in the house of Sir John Walsh at **Little Sodbury** around 1521. This was an area of Lollard activity so it is highly likely that Tyndale would have come into contact with the underground Lollards. His beliefs led him into conflict with fellow clergymen, so much so that around 1522 he was summoned before the Chancellor of the Diocese of Worcester on a charge of heresy.

John Foxe in his *Book of Martyrs* describes an argument with a "learned" but "blasphemous" clergyman who had asserted to Tyndale, "We had better be without God's laws than the Pope's." In a swelling of emotion, Tyndale responded: "I defy the Pope, and all his laws; and if God spares my life, I will cause the boy that drives the plough to know more of the Scriptures than the Pope himself!"

Tyndale's burning ambition was to ensure that ordinary people had access to the Bible in their own language. In 1523 he travelled to London and approached **Cuthbert Tunstall, the Bishop of London**, for permission to start work on making his vision a reality. Tunstall had previously collaborated with Dutch scholar **Erasmus** on his Latin and Greek New Testament translations, and it may have seemed reasonable that Tunstall would give Tyndale the go-ahead. However Tunstall viewed Tyndale with suspicion and was uncomfortable with the idea of the Bible in the vernacular, the peoples' language. Undeterred, Tyndale continued working at his book. He was supported financially by **Humphrey Monmouth**, a cloth merchant.

Over the years Lollardy had been politicised by some of its adherents, so much so that in **Lambeth Palace** there was a Lollard Tower, a prison to hold Lollards. The aura of sedition accompanying Lollardy was a useful tool for those opposed to it specifically and the gospel generally. So the request to translate a vernacular Bible would have sounded dangerously close to Lollardy in Tunstall's ears.

It was at this stage that the interconnected nature of the Reformation and its leaders was starting to become clear. We have already mentioned **John Frith** being at 'the White Horse Inn.' Frith was from Westerham, the son of a Kent innkeeper who had attended Eton and studied at King's College, Cambridge. Frith met Tyndale in London in 1524 where, "they supposedly talked of the need for the Scriptures to be turned into the vulgar speech that the people may also read and see the simple plea and word of God."<sup>3</sup> This means both men had the same ambition – an English Bible that ordinary people could read and understand.

"Tyndale was advancing in his work when John Frith, the mathematician of King's College, Cambridge, arrived in London. It is probable that Tyndale, feeling the want of an associate, had invited him. United like Luther and Melancthon, the two friends held many precious conversations together. "I will consecrate my life wholly to the church of Jesus Christ," said Frith. "To be a good man, you must give a great part of yourself to your parents, the greater part to your country; but the greatest part of all to the Church of the Lord." They united said "the interpretation of the Gospel, without the intervention of councils or popes, is sufficient to create a saving faith in the heart." They shut themselves in the little room in Monmouth's house, and translated chapter after chapter from the Greek into plain English. The Bishop of London knew nothing of the work going on a few yards from him, and everything was succeeding to Tyndale's wishes when it was interrupted by an unforeseen circumstance."<sup>4</sup>

3. Moynahan, William Tyndale: If God spare my life, p277

4. d'Aubigne, The Reformation in England (Volume 1), p. 195

Under threat of persecution, in 1524 Tyndale slipped out of England for **Hamburg** using a pseudonym. From here on Tyndale's life would resemble a spy novel, living in the shadows, using false names, keeping on the move and constantly working at his book. Smugglers would transport it to England and Scotland where it was illegally spread throughout the Kingdoms. His English translation of the Bible would make him an outlaw in the king of England's eyes, and eventually cost him his life.

### 3.3 HAMILTON'S EARLY WORK

Patrick Hamilton did not have to flee to the continent. Instead, with a sense of excitement he opted to travel there to sit under some of Europe's greatest minds to have his intellect challenged and expanded. In 1517 he arrived in **Paris** to study at the College of Montaigu. (A couple of years later another visitor arrived in Paris for in 1519 Martin Luther, via his writings, quietly slipped into the city!)

"In that year a great many copies were brought to Paris of the Leipzig Disputation between Luther and Eck, twenty of which Magister John Nicolas, quaestor of the Gallic nation, purchased on the 20th of January, by appointment of the nation, for the use of those who were deputed by the university to examine the book, and of any others who might wish to report their opinion thereon to the university"<sup>5</sup>. However by April 1521 Luther's written presence was no longer welcome. The university condemned Luther as a heretic and that his works should be burned.

Hamilton moved from Paris to the Dutch **University of Louvain**. Here he most likely studied under **Erasmus**. No one had a greater influence upon the reformation than Erasmus, for his Greek New Testament dragged the church back to Scripture making the original language accessible. However Erasmus was not a reformer or part of the reformation and in fact he eventually wrote forcefully against it. This provoked Luther to write his famous *The Bondage of The Will* in direct response to Erasmus.

Hamilton was back in Scotland by June 1523. He now became a member of St Andrews University, joining the faculty of arts in 1524. As in Paris Luther slipped into Scotland and so by the end of 1524 Martin Luther's writings were turning up in places like **Aberdeen, St Andrew's** and **Linlithgow**. Swift action was taken with legislation coming before parliament on 17 July, 1525. The fourteen year old King James V, under pressure from the clergy enacted the following law:

"Forasmuch as the damnable opinions of heresy are spread in divers countries by the heretic Luther and his disciples, therefore, that no manner of person, stranger, that happens to arrive with the ships within any part of this realm, bring with them any books or works of said Luther's, his disciples or servants - dispute or rehearse his heresies or opinions, unless it be to the confusion thereof, under pain of escheating of their ships and goods, and putting of their persons in prison. And that this act will be published and proclaimed throughout this realm at all ports and burghs of the same, so that they may allege no ignorance thereof."<sup>6</sup>

5. Dallmann, (1918) *Patrick Hamilton: The First Lutheran Preacher and Martyr in Scotland*, p. 3

6. Dallmann, p. 6

In early 1525 a new visitor started to slip quietly in to Scotland. Merchants from **Leith, Dundee,** and **Montrose** were trading with the markets of Flanders and Holland where they bought copies of Tyndale's English New Testament. They brought this book back to Scotland where it would be sold in Edinburgh, but mostly in Patrick Hamilton's town of St. Andrew's.

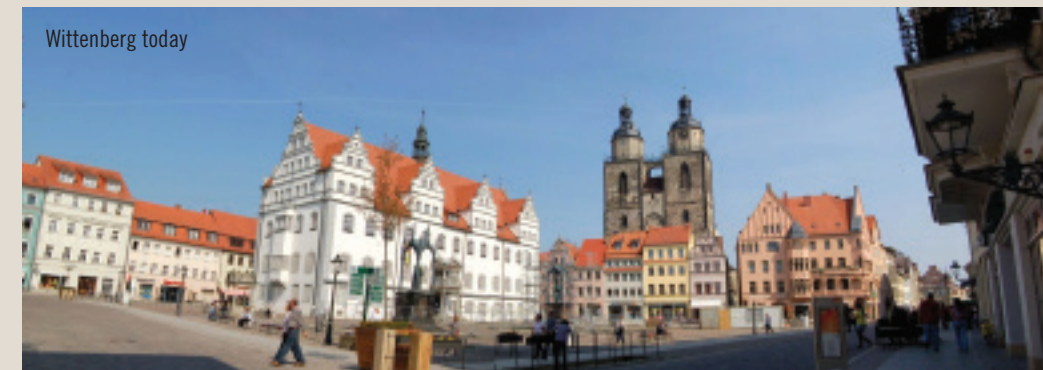
### 3.4 TYNDALE AT LUTHER'S WITTENBERG, 1524-25

William Tyndale had set about an extremely dangerous task. His theological writing, religious convictions and efforts at translation of the Bible made him an enemy of church and state. He lived as a fugitive, constantly on the run whilst working as a translator, and seeking to get his book published. Like many other Protestant refugees he found himself in Wittenberg, Germany.

"It is not possible from the evidence available to be completely certain about Tyndale's changes of residence during the period 1524-25. In all probability he and his assistant moved from Hamburg to Wittenberg in the late spring of 1524, and remained there until the spring of 1525. That Tyndale came into direct contact with Luther at Wittenberg is tolerably certain."<sup>7</sup>

Brian Moynihan points out that a "Gillelmus Daltici ex Anglia matriculated" from the university of Wittenberg. J. F. Mozley, suggests that "reversing the syllables in Tindal makes Daltin, which our overworked copyist could render as Daltici; and that this Gillelmus is indeed our William."<sup>8</sup>

This indicates that the English reformer and the German reformer were in the same place for a year. So not only was there definite contact through Luther's published material but it is highly probable that there was also personal contact. During Tyndale's life he never had his portrait painted so no one could recognise him, he covered his tracks and little is known of where he was or who he was with. So this piece of evidence placing him in Wittenberg is significant.



Wittenberg today

7. d'Aubigne, *The Reformation in England* (Volume 1), 1977, pp. 219-220

8. Moynahan, p. 55

### 3.5 HAMILTON AT LUTHER'S WITTENBERG, 1527

Hamilton was a changed man who now possessed Lutheran convictions and started to express them! In a small country like Scotland such views would not remain secret. **Archbishop Beaton** got a whiff of this during the lent of 1527. The sweet smell of the gospel was a stench in his nostrils. He needed to find out if 'Luther' was being preached and to his horror he realised that Patrick Hamilton was "...inflamed with heresy, disputing, holding, and maintaining divers heresies of Martin Luther and his followers, repugnant to the faith."<sup>9</sup>

In April 1527, Hamilton and some of his friends made their way to Germany. John Knox tells us,

"He passed to the schools in Germany, for then the fame of Wittenberg was greatly divulged in all countries; where, by God's providence, he became familiar with those lights and notable servants of Jesus Christ at that time, Martin Luther, Philip Melanchthon, and Francis Lambert."<sup>10</sup>

Only a decade after a local pastoral dispute in Wittenberg regarding the sale of indulgences, Patrick Hamilton, the most sincere, capable and godly of young Scotsmen was journeying to Wittenberg. No longer would he be reliant upon the odd smuggled book or pamphlet. Rather he would now see and hear Martin Luther for himself.

"According to Lorimer, at Wittenberg the young Scotch abbot found the monasteries deserted, and Luther, once a monk, living happily in a few rooms of the empty Augustinian cloister, with his new-married wife, a converted and fugitive nun, Catharina von Bora. He saw the churches of the city purged of the old superstitions. He heard the Gospel-hymns of Luther sung in loud and fervent chorus by crowded congregations. He saw the excellent pastor, John Bugenhagen —Pomeranus -. — standing in the pulpit of the ancient parish church, and preaching the Word of Life to the zealous burghers. He listened with admiration to the eloquence of Luther, poured forth upon select congregations of courtiers and academics from the pulpit of the Castle Church. In both churches he saw the Sacrament of the Lord's body and blood administered to the communicants in both kinds. Luther's New Testament was read everywhere. The little city was crowded to inconvenience with the multitude of students who flocked from all parts of Europe to sit at the feet of Luther and Melanchthon."<sup>11</sup>

Pestilence forced Hamilton to move from Wittenberg to **Marburg**. Here **Francis Lambert** was the theology professor. This former French monk had also studied at Wittenberg and been converted through reading Luther's writings.

9. Dallmann, p 8

10. Knox, *The Reformation in Scotland*, p 4

11. Dallmann, p 9-13

### 3.6 PATRICK HAMILTON'S 18 PROPOSITIONS –

'PATRICK'S PLACES' – BORN IN LUTHER'S GERMANY, PUBLISHED BY FRITH IN ENGLAND.

Patrick Hamilton was "the first man after the erection of the University in Marburg who put forth a series of theses to be publicly defended." Thus Hamilton produced what became known as *Patrick's Places*, the earliest theological document of the Scottish reformation. This disputation was translated by William Tyndale's friend John Frith from Latin to English. It was written in 1526 and became "a corner-stone of Protestant theology both in Scotland and England."<sup>12</sup>

### 3.7 MARBURG

It was in Marburg, Germany that the reformation in the British Isles came together. It is amazing to think that Patrick Hamilton, William Tyndale and John Frith were all in the same place at the same time engaged in their respective works of reformation. To quote from Joe Carvalho:

"It is curious to note the presence of two English reformers, William Tyndale and John Frith in Marburg in the same year that Patrick Hamilton had gone there. Tyndale and Frith were profoundly engaged in the translation of the Old Testament in the English. Tyndale was also writing some of his famous treatises about the Reformation, in addition to other treatises, with the main intention of benefiting England with the truth of God. The result of this was that Tyndale and Frith could not have had permanent homes because they were always fleeing from one place to another with the aim of finishing the translation. Now they had asked for the help of Philip of Hess to receive and aid them in bringing some peace while they developed their important work. The young Patrick Hamilton, who was then 23 years old, saw the venerated Lambert (then 41 years old) and Tyndale (then 33 years old) as the fathers of the faith. Frith (22 years old), by way of being practically the same age as Patrick became like a beloved brother to the young Scotsman. Patrick saw something promising in the work of Tyndale and Frith, something that would bring great blessing, not only to his beloved Scotland, but also for Tyndale's England."<sup>13</sup>

### 3.8 HAMILTON'S RETURN TO ST ANDREW'S AND MARTYRDOM

Arriving in St Andrews in the middle of January 1528 Hamilton was invited to a month of private meetings with Cardinal Beaton. Hamilton also taught in the university, dealing with doctrines and practices that needed to change in the church. When Beaton believed he had enough evidence Hamilton was summoned and charged with heresy. Friends encouraged Hamilton to flee but he refused. Sir James Hamilton, his brother, gathered a strong force to rescue Patrick but a storm stopped him reaching St. Andrews in time.

12. Dallmann, p 17

13. Carvalho, 2009, *Patrick Hamilton: The Stephen of Scotland. The First Preacher and Martyr of the Scottish Reformation*, pp. 71-72)

## ALEXANDER ALESIUS

One of Patrick Hamilton's accusers was **Canon Alexander Alane** or **Alesius**. However, instead of shaking Hamilton's faith, Alane embraced the reformed doctrines through Hamilton's witness to Jesus Christ. For this he nearly suffered the same fate as Hamilton. However Alane escaped to the continent where he befriended Luther and Melancthon. They changed his surname to Alesius, meaning 'pilgrim'. He spent the rest of his life as a Lutheran theologian and wrote the first biography of Hamilton. In 1533 Alesius was accused of translating Luther's works into the Scots language for distribution in that country. '**Alexander Alesius Strasse**' – a street in **Leipzig**, Germany – is named after him.

Amazingly in 1535 he was sent by Melancthon, "...with a present of books to Cranmer and Henry VIII of England...the King made him a teacher of theology at Queen's College, Cambridge; but he was too Lutheran, his life was in danger, and he left to practise medicine in London."<sup>14</sup> He served as a professor in the universities of **Wittenberg, Cambridge** and by far the longest at **Leipzig**.

## HENRY VIII

Henry VIII has been accused by some and credited by others for bringing the reformation to England. Henry did change the church drastically in England because of the 'Kings Issue.'<sup>15</sup> But his changes were to do with structure and headship. Henry wanted to create English Catholicism as opposed to Roman Catholicism, with himself at the head instead of the Pope.

King Henry earned for English monarchs the title "defender of the faith", a title gained through Henry's relationship with Luther. During his reign England was flooded with Luther's books. When Leo X issued a Papal Bull against Luther's writings, **Cardinal Wolsey** followed it up by issuing an English Bull against Luther on 14 May, 1521: "For every book of Martin Luther's found in your possession within 15 days of this injunction you will incur the greater excommunication." Wolsey had Luther's books burned outside **St Paul's** and a few weeks later at **Cambridge University**.



John Frith was burned in London in 1533, five years after Hamilton and three years before Tyndale

14. Dallmann, p. 33

15. The 'King's Issue' was Henry seeking a divorce from Catherine of Aragon

## 3.9 HAMILTON CONDEMNED AND BURNED

On the last day of February 1528 a council of theologians judged Hamilton's preaching heretical. One of the accusations against Hamilton was that he encouraged people to read the New Testament. We have already noted that William Tyndale's New Testaments had come into Scotland and part of Hamilton's condemnation was that he encouraged people to read the Scriptures:

"...We have found the same Magister Patrick many ways inflamed with heresy, disputing, holding, and maintaining divers heresies of Martin Luther and his followers. We have found also that he hath affirmed, published, and taught divers opinions of Luther and wicked heresies after that he was summoned to appear before us and our council, and therefore do judge and pronounce him to be delivered over to the secular power to be punished, and his goods to be confiscate."<sup>16</sup>

As soon as Hamilton was condemned the executioners started to make preparation. He was to die at the front gate of St Salvator's College. At noon he was taken to the stake and given the opportunity to recant. He replied:

"As to my confession, I will not deny it for awe of your fire, for my confession and belief is in Christ Jesus. Therefore I will not deny it; and I will rather be content that my body burn in this fire for confession of my faith in Christ than my soul should burn in the fire of hell for denying the same. But as to the sentence pronounced against me this day by the bishops and doctors, I here, in the presence of you all, appeal contrary the said sentence and judgment given against me, and take me to the mercy of God."<sup>17</sup>

Hamilton's execution was particularly gruesome. Being a windy day the fire of wood, coal and powder had to be lit three times. Hamilton even asked from the stake if they had dry wood and more powder! He was asked if he still believed what he was dying for. In response he lifted three fingers from a partly burned hand, which he kept lifted until he died. The execution in all took six hours. He was only 24 years old. After Hamilton's death his wife gave birth to a girl, their only child. The martyrdom was watched by Alane and by at least one of the **Wedderburn brothers** of Dundee, who had begun to rewrite popular Scottish folk songs with new Lutheran and reformed lyrics in an effort to help spread the gospel.

Hamilton's last words were a cry for the Kingdom of Scotland – "How long. Lord, shall darkness overwhelm this kingdom? How long wilt Thou suffer this tyranny of men? Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!"



**PATRICK HAMILTON'S TRIAL**  
 WAS RE-ENACTED AT  
 THE BYRE THEATRE OF  
 ST ANDREWS UNIVERSITY  
 ON 6 MAY 2016 IN A PLAY  
 ENTITLED '**TALKING LAW**'

16. Dallmann, p. 36

17. Dallmann, p. 38



### 3.10 TYNDALE BETRAYED AND BURNED

Tyndale was eventually betrayed to the authorities in 1535 at **Antwerp** (near Brussels) by **Henry Phillips**, a spy of Henry VIII:

“The Reformer was completely deceived by [Phillip’s] friendly manner and fair speech, so invited him to his lodging, where he entertained him to dinner. As Phillips was leaving the house, Tyndale was seized by two officers...Tyndale...was led off to the castle jail, while his books were then seized and afterwards destroyed. For the next eighteen months the Reformer was left to languish in this horrible place, where he suffered greatly”<sup>18</sup>

He was tried on a charge of heresy in 1536 and condemned despite Thomas Cromwell’s intercession on his behalf. He “was strangled to death while tied at the stake, and then his dead body was burned”. The traditional date of commemoration is 6 October, 1536 but records of Tyndale’s imprisonment suggest the date might have been some weeks earlier.

Tyndale’s final words spoken “at the stake with a fervent zeal, and a loud voice”, were a cry for the Kingdom of England – “Lord! Open the King of England’s eyes.” Within four years, four English translations of the Bible all based on Tyndale’s work, were published in England.



The execution of William Tyndale, from *Foxe’s Book of Martyrs*

18. Neilson, p. 41

## LEGACY OF WILLIAM TYNDALE AND PATRICK HAMILTON

# 4

**It is hard to grasp just how influential these two men have been to the reformation in the British Isles. They laid the foundation upon which others have built.**

Tyndale’s place in the English-speaking church is momentous. As the Scriptures are read Tyndale’s voice is heard. So much of his original work survives in subsequent translations of the Bible into English. Tyndale even had to create new words. ‘Substitutionary atonement’ is hugely important theologically but without William Tyndale we would not have the English word, “atonement.” As he translated the Bible Tyndale helped to create the English language. Tyndale’s influence on the church is ever-present. His dying prayer that the king of England’s eyes would be opened was answered as Tyndale closed his eyes in death.

Patrick Hamilton is referred to as the Proto-martyr of the Scottish reformation, thus placing him as a heroic figure who would not kowtow to Cardinal Beaton. In the introduction to *Scottish Theology in Relation to Church History* John Macleod sets out what he described as “an unrealised possibility”. The following (rather long) quotation illustrates what could have been.

“There was a possibility that the Scottish Reformation might take on Lutheran or Anglican complexion. The work and influence of Knox decided that this should not be so. The earlier leaders of the movement, such as Patrick Hamilton and Alexander Alane, laid stress upon the Lutheran articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae. Hamilton as a student on the continent sat at the feet of Francis Lambert at Marburg, while Lambert was still a Lutheran, for it was only after the death of Hamilton that the Marburg conference took place, as the result of which Lambert took the side of the Swiss reformers on the sacramental question that was at issue between Wittenberg and Zürich. The question of justification was the main problem in those early days of the new era. If Hamilton’s life had been prolonged it is possible that he might have developed along the lines of the Lutheran rather than the Swiss theology. In his days, however, the Lutheran doctrine of grace was thoroughly Augustinian.

His literary contribution to his country’s enlightenment is found in *Patrick’s Places*, as his theses were called. They are preserved in Knox’s *History* and in Fox’s *Acts and Monuments*. In the theses he deals with Law and Gospel and gives a vigorous statement of the doctrine of free justification by faith alone. The other contribution that he made by his courageous martyrdom did more to impress on his countrymen the meaning of his teaching than that teaching itself, fruitful though it was, availed to do. Hamilton was cut off while he was yet a youth, and, as we have said, the great issue of those days was the doctrine of justification by faith.”<sup>19</sup>

19. Macleod, 1995, *Scottish theology in relation to church history since the reformation*, pp 13-14

#### 4.1 JOHN KNOX ON PATRICK HAMILTON

McLeod goes on to deal with difficulties that arose after Hamilton's (and Luther's) death within Lutheran theology, brought to the fore by John Knox. He was born around 1504, so wrote as a Scotsman who was a contemporary of these events. He wrote *The History of the Reformation of Religion within the Realm of Scotland* between 1559 and 1571, beginning just 31 years after Hamilton's death in 1528.

John Knox first came to the fore long after Patrick Hamilton's death, initially whilst acting as **George Wishart's** 'body guard' and travelling companion. Knox carried a large claymore sword illustrating his strength and fearlessness. Theologically Wishart had been influenced by men like **Zwingli** and **Calvin**, and consequently Knox's influences were the same. Yet on a very practical and theological level Patrick Hamilton loomed large over Scotland and the reformation. his Luther-influenced *Places* and death had a huge effect on building Knox's character.

Knox recounting Hamilton's martyrdom wrote:

"when these cruel wolves had, as they supposed, clean devoured the prey, they found themselves in the worse case than before. Within St Andrews, yea, almost within the whole realm, there were none found hearing of that fact [the martyrdom of Patrick Hamilton], who began not to inquire, whereof was Master Patrick burned? And when his Articles of Accusation were rehearsed, question was holden, if such Articles were necessary, to be believed under pain of damnation.

So, within short space, many began to call into doubt, that which before they held for a certain verity. Insomuch the University of St Andrews – St Leonard's College, principally – by the labourers of Master Gavin Logie principal of St Leonard's, and the novices of the Abbey, by the sub prior, John Winram, began to smell somewhat of the Verity, and to espy the vanity of the received superstition. Yea, within a few years thereafter, we both Black and Greyfriars publicly to preach against the prey and able life of the bishops, and against the abuses of the whole ecclesiastical estate."<sup>20</sup>

While we do not know exactly who Knox spoke of, he was the right age and moved in the right circles to be influenced by Hamilton. If the reek of Master Patrick infected most of the realm surely Knox was also infected. Was Knox one of those, who in a short space of time had started questioning what they believe to be 'verity', that is 'truth'? We know next to nothing about Knox before he burst onto the scene with Wishart. But there is something in his words to give at the least the possibility that Patrick Hamilton's theology, confession of faith and martyrs death had profoundly affected him personally.

20. Macleod, 1995, *Scottish theology in relation to church history since the reformation*, pp 13-14

#### 4.2 FROM SCOTLAND TO ULSTER AND AMERICA

If this is the case, then the connection from Luther to Hamilton to Knox to Ireland is direct. We must remember that John Knox's grandson **Josias Welsh** of Templepatrick was instrumental during the Sixmilewater Revival. The events of the 1620s and 1630s established Presbyterianism in Ulster and it was the same Presbyterians who would travel to the new world and establish Presbyterianism in what would become the United States of America.

Josias Welsh's grave at Castle Upton, Templepatrick, County Antrim





Parting of Patrick Hamilton from his friends at the stake



John Bunyan in Bedford Jail, 1667

## CONCLUSION

# 5

We have only been able to give the briefest outline of the events and some of the characters. The earnestness and godly sincerity of Patrick Hamilton and William Tyndale is evidenced by their martyrdom. In their own right their memories should live on. Yet as we remember Martin Luther and the events of 1517 it is profitable to see how much he influenced the British Isles.

### 5.1 AFTER LUTHER

The successes of later Scottish Presbyterianism, Anglicanism and nonconformists have eclipsed what went before. Every generation of earnest Christians enter into the labours of those who went before. Many Christian thinkers and preachers have been greatly influenced by Martin Luther so we will look at just a few of the best known.

#### JOHN BUNYAN (1628–1688)

The most famous Christian book written by an Englishman is *Pilgrim's Progress*. In allegorical form John Bunyan guides “Christian” from the “city of destruction” through the “wicket gate” and all the way to the “celestial city”. Bunyan was born during the reign of Charles I, served as a Parliamentarian soldier during the Civil War and spent 12 years, then a further 2 years in jail for his non-conformist preaching. Yet he was a man deeply affected by Martin Luther. We learn from Robert Oliver in his essay, *Grace Abounding – Imputed Righteousness in the Life and Work of John Bunyan*:

“[John Bunyan] tells that early in God’s dealings with him he came to realize that he needed a righteousness better than anything he could produce. He writes,

I observed, though I was such a great sinner before conversion, yet God never much charged the guilt of my sins of ignorance upon me; only he showed me, I was lost if I had not Christ, because I had been a sinner; I saw that I wanted a perfect righteousness to present me without fault before God, and this righteousness was nowhere to be found but in the person of Jesus Christ. In his concern to understand Scripture his greatest help at this stage came from Martin Luther. He wrote,

*I did greatly long to see some ancient godly man’s experience, who had lived some hundreds of years before I was born: well, after many such longings in my mind, the God, in whose hands are all my days did cast into my hand, one day, a book of Martin*

*Luther's; it was his comment on the Galatians; it was so old, that it was ready to fall from piece to piece, if I did but turn it over. Now I was pleased much that such an old book had fallen into my hands; the which when I had but a little way perused, I found my condition in his experience, so largely and profoundly handled as if his book had been written out of my heart. This made me marvel; for thus thought I, this man could not know anything of the state of Christians now, but must needs speak and write the experience of former days.*

Bunyan went on to declare,

'I do prefer this book of Martin Luther upon the Galatians (excepting the Holy Bible) before all the books that ever I have seen, as most fit for a wounded conscience'.

Bunyan's study of Martin Luther took place at the same time as he was attending the Bedford Independent Church then under the pastorate of John Gifford to whose preaching and counsel he pays the highest tribute. Bunyan's spiritual progress was not easy and he records many temptations and assaults from the Evil One as he was brought to an assurance of faith. It was, however, this great doctrine of imputed righteousness that was to bring him liberty."

Martin Luther was of foundational importance in the Christian life and ministry of John Bunyan. Just as Luther's writing influenced Bunyan, in due course Bunyan's writing has influenced countless individuals over the centuries.

### JOHN WESLEY (1703-1791)

Martin Luther is instrumental (under God) in the salvation of John Wesley. It was on 24 May, 1734 that the Lord worked in his life:

"In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society [of Moravians] in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther's preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for my salvation: and an assurance was given me, that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death."

Leo C. Cox tells us,

"It was through Martin Luther that they (the Wesley brothers) had come to know about the experience of Justification by Faith and the joy of this experience made them into new men...Though Wesley's contact with the Moravians was of short duration, it must be remembered that they were the ones who led him to his experience that integrated his life...during the summer of 1738 Wesley made a journey to Europe and visited the Moravians in Germany. He had many problems in his own mind, and he took the occasion of this journey to study this "new doctrine" as it appeared in the experiences of people. Here in Germany, he met and heard able preachers; he heard testimonies of living witness; he breathed the air of this

Reformation teaching. In all he was highly impressed, and returned to England to declare in his own country the glad tidings of salvation."

Theological difference with Luther would later arise in Wesley's ministry. However the central tenant of justification by faith alone and how God used the long-dead Martin Luther in his conversion were always to the fore.

### THE PRINCE OF PREACHERS ON MARTIN LUTHER (1834-1892)

In the 1800s **Charles H Spurgeon** was 'the prince of preachers'. Wherever he spoke large crowds flocked to hear him. In the summer of 1858 an estimated 40,000 gathered in Belfast's Botanic Gardens to listen to him at an open air meeting. While preaching in his own church, the Metropolitan Tabernacle, on Sunday 11 November, 1883 he said of Martin Luther:

"Luther can sing a Psalm in spite of the devil, but he could not have done so if he had not been a man of faith. He could defy emperors, kings, popes and bishops while he took firm hold upon the strength of God, but only then! Faith is the life of life and makes life worth living. It puts joy into the soul to believe in the great Father and His everlasting love; in the efficacious Atonement of the Son and in the indwelling of the Spirit; in resurrection and eternal glory! Without these we were, of all men, most miserable. To believe these glorious truths is to live—"The just shall live by his faith." Life also means strength. We say of a certain man, "What life he has in him! He is full of life! He seems always alive." Yes, the just obtain energy, force, vivacity, vigor, power, might and life by faith."

He later continued:

"Luther's voice, through 400 years, still sounds in the ears of men and quickens our pulses like the beat of drum in martial music—he lives! He lives because he was a man of faith. I would sum up and illustrate this teaching by mentioning certain incidents of Luther's life. Upon the great Reformer, Gospel Light broke by slow degrees. It was in the monastery that, in turning over the old Bible that was chained to a pillar, he came upon this passage—"The just shall live by his faith." This heavenly sentence stuck to him..."



John Wesley



Charles Spurgeon



Lloyd Jones

### THE DOCTOR ON DOCTOR MARTIN (1899-1981)

In 1967 whilst marking the 450th Anniversary of Martin Luther's '95 Theses' **Dr Martyn Lloyd Jones** preached on the subject, 'Luther and His Message for Today'. Having extensively recounted the events and why they took place Dr Lloyd Jones brought his hearers, and us, to three great and contemporarily relevant questions.

To quote his words:

"What does all this teach us? It's good, I say, to read history. It is good, I say, to study the lives of these men whom God has raised in the church from time to time. But

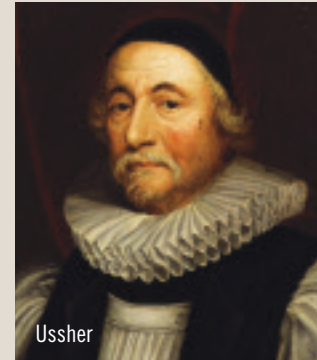
not as a mere antiquarian essay, not merely because of our historical interest but in order that we may learn certain great spiritual lessons. What are the lessons then that we draw from Luther and the Reformation?

...Martin Luther, how did he start? How did he become the man he was? What led to the Protestant Reformation? Do you know the answer? Here's the first question and here is the first question that the Christian Church, so called, needs to ask today, what is a Christian? That's the question, what is the Christian? ...Luther, I feel is thundering down the ages...and he's saying to us, ask that question. What is a Christian? Don't start about organisations and institutions. Don't start about territorial churches, on getting altogether. Ask the great question which the Scriptures raise, what is a Christian?

And then the second. And oh how vital it was to Luther, how does one become a Christian? How does one become a Christian? How does one get forgiveness of sins? Is it because I'm christened as an infant? Is it because I am born in a particular country? What makes me a Christian? How do I become a Christian? Do I get pardon and forgiveness by paying or by doing good works? How does one become a Christian and get this assurance of being reconciled to God? That led to the Protestant Reformation. It was this intense personal experience of salvation. And these are still the fundamental questions and they lead to the next - what is a church? Is she but an organisation or is she the gathering of those who have this experience of salvation and sins forgiven and who know God; who are born again and have the Spirit witnessing within them? What is the church?"<sup>21</sup>

What is a Christian? How do you become a Christian? What is a church? These three questions are as important today as they were in 1967 or 1517.

21. Lloyd-Jones, *Luther and His Message for Today*, 1967



Ussher

### 5.2 BEFORE LUTHER

It is also true of Luther that he built upon the labours of others because there already had been **Augustine of Hippo** (354–430) and **Bernard of Clairvaux** (1090–1153). Yet they along with Luther, Tyndale, Hamilton and all the other reformers built upon the foundation of the Holy Scriptures.

**Archbishop James Ussher** (1581–1656) at Wansted on 20 June, 1624 preached before the King. His subject was, "A brief declaration of the universality of the church of Christ and the unity of the catholic faith professed therein." During the course of this sermon he said:

"[A] question, so rife in the mouths of our adversaries, is: Where was your Church before Luther? Whereunto an answer may be returned from the grounds of the solution of the former question; that our Church was even there where now it is. In all places of the world, where the ancient foundations were retained, and these common principles of faith, upon the profession whereof men have ever been wont to be admitted, by baptism, into the Church of Christ: there we doubt not but our Lord had his subjects, and we our fellow-servants. For we bring in no new faith, nor no new church.

That which in the time of the ancient fathers was accounted to be truly and properly Catholic, namely, that which was believed every where, always, and by all: that in the succeeding ages hath evermore been preserved, and is at this day entirely professed in our Church.

And it is well observed by a learned man, who hath written a full discourse of this argument, that, "whatsoever the father of lies either hath attempted or shall attempt, yet neither hath he hitherto effected, nor shall ever bring it to pass hereafter, that this catholic doctrine, ratified by the common consent of Christians always and every where, should be abolished; but that in the thickest mist rather of the most perplexed troubles, it still obtained victory, both in the minds and in the open confession of all Christians, no ways overturned in the foundation thereof: and that in this verity that one Church of Christ was preserved, in the midst of the tempests of the most cruel winter, or in the thickest darkness of her wanings."

Ussher did not view the reformation as the creation of a new church but as a return to the true church. He points to "the thickest mist" and "perplexing times" yet Christ's church survived. "The most cruel winter" ended as the glorious light of the gospel once again began to shine into the darkness.

### 5.3 CHRIST-CENTRED, NOT MAN-CENTRED

The reformation was a revival of true religion. There was a return to the simplicity and Christ centredness of the New Testament Church. The continual theme of the Bible and consequently the reformers was redemption. How can a sinner find peace with God and know their sins forgiven? From the 'proto-evangel' in Genesis 3:15, "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel", the application of this prophecy finds its fulfillment in the crucified and risen Lord Jesus Christ.

The 'who,' 'where,' 'when,' 'how' and 'what' of the reformation can make for a more thrilling story than the 'why.' However if our constant question is why did these events take place we will invariably be led back to the gospel.

For it is to Jesus Christ alone that Martin Luther, William Tyndale and Patrick Hamilton sought to point men and women. We may embrace them as heroes of the faith or culturally as our forbearers. Yet for them there was and is only One True Hero for every Protestant - the Lord Jesus Christ who lived, died, rose again, now reigns at the right hand of the Father, and condescends to make intercession for us sinners.



The location of Patrick Hamilton's martyrdom in St Andrews, with the famous 'PH' cobblestone monogram

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On 31 October 1517, Martin Luther took a hammer and nailed his '95 Theses' to the church door in Wittenberg, Germany. His stand for the Gospel was the beginning of the Protestant Reformation.

Five centuries have passed since Martin Luther became famous for his '95 theses'. Though he never set foot in the British Isles Luther's legacy remains. In this booklet we consider the connection between William Tyndale, Patrick Hamilton and Martin Luther.

We also see Luther's influence on subsequent generations of British evangelicals. From these people and events we can learn many lessons that are still applicable. We can also gain much encouragement for the cause of Christ today.

**FOUR OTHER BOOKLETS ARE ALSO AVAILABLE**



The Luther 1517 project has been jointly published by the Imperial Grand Black Chapter and the Grand Orange Lodge of Ireland. It is our desire that this project will reaffirm for our members how central faith is to our two Institutions, will stir up faith within our memberships, and will be a Gospel witness to wider society.