

WILLIAM TYNDALE AND MORE'S 1529 *DIALOGUE*.

From a letter dated New York, August 6, 1982.

Dear Germain,

I have read *CW6* (*A Dialogue Concerning Heresies*) with great interest, and, as I have said elsewhere, I found it a monumentally splendid piece of work. I wonder, however, if I might be permitted to suggest a few qualifications.

While it is stated that « Luther and Tyndale were reluctant to confess their debt to Erasmus » (p. 484), the fact remains that Tyndale employed the authority of Erasmus against More, as well as generally, whenever he possibly could, so much so that his appeals to Erasmus' authority are second in number only to his appeals to the authority of the Scriptures. Tyndale did this not only because of Erasmus' international reputation as a scholar, but also because he was aware that the Dutch humanist was revered especially in England -- and by those very men most active in opposing the Reformers, such as Tunstal, who had commissioned More to write against heresy, and by More himself, Erasmus' alter ego.¹

And so it is with a special relish that Tyndale opposes More's opinions with what he claims are the contrary opinions of More's « darling » Erasmus. In answer to More's criticism of certain translations in his English New Testament, Tyndale replies : « But how happeth it that *M. More* hath not contended in likewise against hys derelyng *Erasmus* all this longe while ? Doth not he chaunge this word *Ecclesia* into congregation and that not seldome in the new Testament ? »² This thrust is all the keener because it was well known that, in fact, More had defended Erasmus' translation³.

I am quite aware that More made a perfectly good answer to Tyndale's point, but my concern here is not the rightness of the matter, but rather Tyndale's deliberate use of Erasmus against More, as well as Tyndale's use of Erasmus' authority generally. In the preface to the 1534 edition of his New Testament, Tyndale again appeals to the authority of Erasmus to support his translation of the Vulgate's *conuerti* by « to turne or be conuerted » instead of « to do penance » (sig. ★ ★ 1). Tyndale also uses Erasmus' New Testament annotations to lend authority to the advocacy of his own theological views. So far as the intercessory power of Mary is concerned, Tyndale tells his readers, look at Erasmus' annotations on Matthew chapter 12, II Corinthians chapter 5, John chapter 2, and Luke chapter 2 (*Ww*, p. 172), and also see what Erasmus has to say about the correct interpretation of Matthew 16:18 : « Tu es Petrus, et super hanc petram aedificabo Ecclesiam meam. »⁴ Tyndale also adduces Erasmus against More in support of the contention that the early Fathers did not advocate auricular confession (*Ww*, p. 339), while implying very strongly that Erasmus and he are in agreement on many theological points. It is Erasmus, claims Tyndale, who has exposed the clergy's attempt to pass off as genuine « many false bookes ...

fayned and put forth in the name of *S. Hierom, Augustine, Ciprian, Dionise* and of other » which supported their position (*Ww*, p. 304).

I think More would be very pleased to see his *Dialogue Concerning Heresies* described as a « spontaneous » work (p. 503), for that is obviously how he wished it to be perceived, but the fact is that in this case, as happens so often, the effect of artlessness (or spontaneity) has been achieved through the exercise of great art. The *Dialogue* is the most carefully constructed -- and easily the best -- of his English works of religious controversy. It was the last time More was to have the leisure to be so careful.

Finally, I must take issue with the note which says, « More suffered the fate, after publishing his *Utopia* in 1516, of many men who have written a witty work : some people could not take him seriously afterward. See, for example, Tyndale ... » (p. 619). Tyndale and other Reformers took More seriously, all right, but they perceived what must to them have seemed like a heaven-sent opportunity of belaboring More with his own book, that is, of *pretending* for good polemical reasons that anyone who could invent a place such as Utopia might be equally relied upon, for instance, to invent a place such as purgatory.

Each of the direct or indirect references to the *Utopia* made by Reformers I have been able to find is polemical, the usual point being that since More has once passed off fiction as truth, he is quite capable of continuing to do so -- especially in religious controversy. Tyndale uses More's authorship of the *Utopia* as a weapon of attack. For instance, he very conveniently dismisses an entire chapter of More's *Dialogue Concerning Heresies* by saying that it « is as true as his story of Utopia & all his other Poetrie » (*Ww*, p. 330). Here the reference serves as shorthand : it saves Tyndale from the necessity of entering into extended argument. The same tactic is used to deal with More's discussion of the Hunne case. Instead of attempting to refute More's account of the trial, Tyndale once again economically disposes of the matter by claiming that More « iesteth out Hunnes death with his Poetrie were with he built Utopia » (*Ww*, p. 318). There are many other references in the same vein by Tyndale, as well as John Frith, William Roy, John Foxe -- as well as the anonymous author of the *Image of Ipcrissy*.

But, as I said, the edition as a whole is superb.

Rainer PINEAS

1. See R.W. Chambers, *Thomas More* (London, 1935), p. 175.
2. *The Whole workes of W. Tyndall, Iohn Frith, and Doct. Barnes* (London, 1573), p. 251. Hereafter cited as *Ww*.
3. See his epistles to Edward Lee and to a monk in *The Correspondence of Sir Thomas More*, ed. Elizabeth F. Rogers (Princeton, 1947).
4. New Testament (Cologne, 1525), sigs. G2^v-G3.