THE PNEUMATOLOGY OF WILLIAM TYNDALE

by Donald Dean Smeeton

William Tyndale is frequently treated in the histories of translation but seldom, if ever, in the histories of theology. Tyndale is rightly honored as the first person to prepare a printed English New Testament and his idiom dominated all English translation until the twentieth century. Because Tyndale’s work has often been studied by linguists and historians of translation, Tyndale, the translator, has overshadowed Tyndale, the theologian.

Tyndale’s theology, like the woman with the issue of blood, has suffered much at the hands of many doctors. Philip Hughes said Tyndale’s theology was neither significant nor original.¹ Tyndale’s

contemporary protagonist, Thomas More, presented Tyndale as a Luther disciple.¹ The Luther-Tyndale association has been stressed so much that Tyndale often appears little more than English mouthpiece for Luther’s words.² Others, however, claim Tyndale borrowed increasingly from the Swiss reformation.³ Spalding and Clebsch see Tyndale’s theology as the seed from which puritanism would later grow.⁴ Spitz presents Tyndale as primarily a Christian humanist.⁵ Yost, stressing Tyndale’s affinities to Erasmus rather than to Luther, finds Tyndale to be the founder of the Anglican “Via Media.”⁶

Without attempting to judge the validity of any of these classifications, an inquiry into Tyndale’s pneumatology might illustrate his independence in this one area as well as isolate some of his contributions to evangelical thought.

Tyndale was not a systematic theologian in the sense of Aquinas or Calvin. He makes no attempt to be exhaustive. He prepares theological treatises as a military officer in the midst of battle aims a cannon: he does not attempt to demonstrate all aspects of the field piece, but he centers on a specific target. In pneumatology, Tyndale’s target is man’s salvation.


