“I am that I preach”:
Tyndale as Mediator in
*The Parable of
the Wicked Mammon*

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Résumé : *Cet article explore le climat discursif de The Parable of the Wicked Mammon de William Tyndale pour proposer que la théologie réformatrice de Tyndale lui imposait une confrontation avec les problèmes posés par la rhétorique et la médiation, lorsqu’il a composé ce qui semble être un traité polémique sur la justification par la foi. Tout en luttant contre les exigences de la polémique, Tyndale se transforme, par le moyen des stratégies d’effacement, en une voix qui amène les lecteurs, non pas forcément de juger de la disputation, mais de se retourner intérieurement vers la pénitence et la foi.*

In the history of the Reformation, William Tyndale (1494–1536) is best known as the first translator of scripture into English. But after his New Testament appeared in 1526, he added to his translation efforts a group of polemical writings which attacked the Church of Rome and propagated Martin Luther’s reformist notions in English. Tyndale’s first polemical work, published in 1528, is entitled *The Parable of the Wicked Mammon*. This treatise seeks to persuade the reader of the doctrinal truth of justification by faith and is squarely part of the new Reformation enterprise. It deals with *sola scriptura*, *sola fide*, the priesthood of all believers, and reform of worship and religious practice — four of the six “distinctive features” that James Tracy identifies as the essence of the Protestant movement.¹ Tyndale’s entry into such a doctrinal arena must have been motivated by his “wholehearted conversion to the Evangelical cause.”² And this conversion may have been the result of knowing Martin Luther in Wittenberg after Tyndale left England in 1524 to pursue his translation of the Bible on the continent. Indeed, roughly the first quarter of Tyndale’s treatise is based on Luther’s 1522 *Sermon von dem unrechten Mammon*.³ John A. R. Dick is

especially interested in showing links between Tyndale and Luther and believes that Tyndale, like other reformists who found themselves embracing *sola scriptura*, struggled with how scripture was to be read. For Dick, it is a matter of a writer and a reader “using a flexible, philologically informed approach that is responsive to context and to recurrent themes.”⁴ But such a generalization does not help us see what actually happens discursively in a text like *The Parable of the Wicked Mammon*, where a writer like Tyndale is trying to do something to his readers and part of that enterprise is helping them to read scripture a certain way. In terms of the politics of the Tyndalian discourse, what is happening in the text helps determine both the polemical agenda and the pastoral goals of the writer.

But as soon as we focus on the notion of a reformist “writer” interpreting scripture, we confront rhetoric and hermeneutics, both potentially problematic for a theology built on *sola scriptura* and *sola fide*, for both rhetoric and hermeneutics place an active *rhetor*, a mediator of sorts, between God and the believer. In this essay, I want to explore how Tyndale negotiates these two areas of human endeavor and where this negotiation finally leads him in *Parable*. Mary Jane Barnett, for one, has argued that there is a “tension” in Tyndale’s hermeneutical practice because of “Tyndale’s belief that Scripture should be disseminated as widely as possible and his desire to limit its interpretation.”⁵ Douglas Parker agrees, arguing that Tyndale acts “as a teacher intent on imposing a single coherent reading on the Bible” and thus functions as a mediator between the Christian and scripture, even as he maintains that scripture needs no mediation, since scripture is straightforward enough to be accessible to all.⁶

This notion of scripture as “straightforward” and “accessible” is a commonplace of Reformation scholarship. James McGoldrick, for example, writes that for Tyndale “the Scripture is clear to those who read it in faith, so the believing reader is spiritually equipped to use the Bible as his guide in discerning truth and falsehood.”⁷ It may be time to look beyond this generalization as well by observing how a writer like Tyndale functions within rhetorical and polemical conventions, as he undertakes to propagate, like all first generation reformers, the rudiments of new doctrine. In effect, Tyndale carries on the Lutheran struggle over who controls scriptural interpretation, and how he writes does not support the notion that scripture is straightforward and accessible. The textual performance, informed as it is by the notions of authority that Barnett and Parker discuss and which no Reformation writer could escape, is bound up finally with how an author like Tyndale sees himself or must come to see himself theologically. As I hope to show, this is as a teacher and a pastor. In a work like *The Parable of the Wicked Mammon*, where the author performs most obviously as a

polemicist, Tyndale must somehow move away from polemic toward pastoral in order to reveal his true intentions and attempt to resolve the hermeneutical dilemma Barrett and Parker explore.

In *Obedience of a Christian Man*, Tyndale's 1528 treatise on scripturally based political theory and the consequent obedience of subjects, Tyndale readily acknowledges his role as mediator and freely admits to standing between the Christian and scripture, but standing in a special way, as we shall see. *Parable* demonstrates that Tyndale did indeed seek to compensate for the tension Barnett notices, as he worked through what it truly meant to be a mediator in the Protestant polemical arena. He was well aware of the problem of mediation and of how he needed to accommodate or adjust his role as a teacher. Tyndale's performance, however, reaches beyond accommodation; it strives for more than mere interpretation and scriptural knowledge. His ultimate goal — something surprising in a polemical work like *Parable* — is to bring his reader to self-knowledge, and from self-knowledge to faith. Tyndale's textual performance both clarifies doctrine and encourages belief. Rhetorically and theologically, he had no other choice than to be what he preached, to become like the "voice" of John the Baptist, which Tyndale understood as saying, "I am that I preach."⁸ And what he preached became *Parable*'s goal, indeed the goal for all evangelicals: for the seeker to "know himself and his sin, and truly repent," so that "the Lord Christ should come."⁹

That Tyndale embraces the role of mediator is evident in any number of his tracts but is especially straightforward in an often overlooked passage from *Obedience*, where he plainly acknowledges the need for a teacher or a mediator in reading scripture. In *Obedience*, Tyndale criticizes the "madnes" of the Roman Church's position "that no man can understonde the scriptures without philautia that is to saye philosophy."¹⁰ Furthermore, "thorowe Philosophy and disceytfull vanytes and thorow the tradicions of men & ordinaunces after the worlde" (*Obedience*, p. 30), believers are spoiled. Then Tyndale reminds his readers that, despite his opposition to the papist position, he does not give complete freedom to readers of scripture to embrace whatever suits them, an oft-heard alarm from the Church of Rome. Here is Tyndale's curiously composed refutation of his opponents for misrepresenting his position: "By this meanes then thou wilt that no man teach a nother but that every man take the scripture & lerne by hym selfe. Naye verely so saye I not" (*Obedience*, p. 31; emphasis mine).¹¹

In the opening pages of *Obedience*, Tyndale does not embrace *claritas Scripturae* but acknowledges the need for a teacher who seeks an "increase of knowlege in oure lorde Jesus Christ" (*Obedience*, p. 1). "In so greate diversite of sprites," the student must be taught to "know who lyeth and who saith throuth," be equipped to "trye them & judge them" (*Obedience*, p. 28).

For this important work, Tyndale steps forward as teacher, but a particular kind of teacher: a master teaching his “prentyse” how to become a master, so that the authority of one is given, eventually, to another. The hermeneutical moment empowers the believer to read and understand scripture as the master does, in order, finally, to do without the master. That is, through the erasure of the master, one becomes a master. The priesthood of all believers is thus realized. In criticizing the Roman church, Tyndale explains his intention this way:

Never y^e lesse seinge that ye will not teach yf any man thyrste for the trueth & reade the scripture by hym selfe desyringe God to open y^e dore of knowlege unto him God for his truethes sake will & must teach hym. How be it my meaninge is y^t as a master teacheth his prentyse to knowe all y^e poyntes of the mete yarde first how many enches how many fote & the halfe yarde, y^e quarter & the naile & then teacheth him to mete other thinges therby: even so will I that ye teach the people Gods lawe & what obedience God requyreth of us unto father and mother master lorde kinge & all superiours and with what frendly love he commaundeth one to love a nother. (*Obedience*, p. 31)

Tyndale’s desire to serve as a teacher translates into a complicated mediating endeavor, as well as some shifting rhetorical positioning, which is worth tracing to see where the rhetorical journeying finally takes Tyndale. His role as teacher places him rhetorically (and problematically) at the center of the writing enterprise with power over his apprentice. This is what Parker and Barnett find disingenuous in Tyndale. In the polemical world of sixteenth-century religious disputation, what came to be emphasized textually were the disputants and a procedure whereby persuasion to one’s truth dominated the arena: to teach “who lyeth and who saith throuth,” as Tyndale writes. This teaching to persuade is obvious in *Parable*, even from a cursory examination of the text.

The parable of the shrewd, unjust steward who is urged to make friends with the wicked Mammon is found in the Gospel of Luke and speaks to the heart of Reformation theology. Jesus tells of a steward called to account before his master who cleverly (and dishonestly) falsifies records in order to take care of his own future. The master is impressed with the attitude, rather than the actions, of the steward. Jesus’ message through the parable — and according to Tyndale — is to examine how one should be preparing for eternity. The papists, who use the story “to draw the people from the true faith” (*Parable*, p. 45), emphasize the actions of the steward in falsifying the records — in other words, the works of the steward, which will determine the steward’s salvation. Tyndale argues that Jesus praises the steward for only one reason: he “wisely provided for himself” (*Parable*, p. 70). The steward’s diligence is the Christian’s model — not what he does, but how

he prepares for the future. For what one does does not guarantee one's future; rather it is one's diligence in examining one's heart and one's sin and in wisdom seeking repentance. The actions of the steward, viewed through a papist lens, are not going to bring self-knowledge and salvation, argues the reformer. One starts on the road to salvation through one's wisdom in turning inward with a transformed heart made good through faith. Tyndale's exhortation is not to undertake actions, but with righteousness to "be as diligent to provide for our souls, as he with unrighteousness provided for his body" (*ibid.*). The issue is providing for the future. The means is turning inward.¹²

The tension I see in the text, and perhaps in much Protestant theological writing, emerges when the pastoral exhortation to turn inward confronts the rhetorical need to place the author as polemicist and propagandist at the center of the disputational arena, so that the reader turns for guidance to the disputant, not to God. Teaching for self-knowledge did indeed prove problematic for Tyndale the polemicist. In the midst of polemic emerges the pastoral desire to empower the "prentyse" through a theological emptying-out of the polemical and rhetorical self.¹³ This need for self-emptying (foreign territory for most polemicists) is reflected in the early pages of *Obedience*, where Tyndale works toward erasure of the disputing self. Writing ought to reflect a loss of self which duplicates dying with Christ: "Lat us therfore loke dilligently where unto we are called that we disceave not oure selves. We are called not to dispute as the Popes disciples doo but to dye with Christe that we maye lyve with hym and to sofre with hym that we maye regne with hym" (*Obedience*, p. 9). Yet in *Parable*, Tyndale does dispute throughout, and dispute enthusiastically. This seeming contradiction may reflect Tyndale's ambivalence over being an author, an ambivalence explored by Kevin Dunn.¹⁴ But the contradiction may be explained another way. Whether Tyndale is a polemicist or a pastoral mediator, the very nature of the discourse puts Tyndale at center-stage, a position almost always noticeable in *Parable* (indeed, in all of Tyndale's polemical works), with its predictable systematic progression through scriptural interpretation in order to understand doctrine. Somehow he has to move off center-stage if he wants truly to affect the "prentyse." "To dye with Christe" by being absorbed within the text becomes especially urgent, since the theological doctrine of justification by faith requires erasure of mediation.

Those familiar with Tyndale's works know that he spends an inordinate amount of time and effort in disputing, and in such disputing one cannot escape noticing the disputant and the central position of that disputant.¹⁵ Moreover, Tyndale's goals are various. He certainly appears bent on a resounding victory in his controversy with the papists on how to interpret scripture and, following Luther, on what is to be believed about salvation.

He is also interested in an “increase of knowledge” on the part of his auditor. As David Daniell writes, Tyndale may have “had in mind that for some readers these pages could have been the first encounter with New Testament words in English, and a first exposition of the New Testament doctrine of faith before works.”¹⁶ We might see this increase of knowledge as pedagogical, but it is also a matter of persuasion, the goal of all rhetoric. Tyndale is also the pastoral master by the side of the “prentyse,” training the apprentice to become a master. Yet ultimately — and surprisingly — the tract seeks to inspire repentance of the heart. And this might appear for most readers a strange goal for such a polemically laden text, which seldom loses sight of those papist devils or the single and victorious disputing reformer. But it may be the case that through the call for self-knowledge on the part of the reader, Tyndale does his best to resolve the hermeneutical dilemma and disappear within the text.

The tract’s various tendencies are obvious when we describe the general drift of *Parable*. First, I would underscore that Tyndale does several things, and often does them simultaneously, in his role as mediator. Relentlessly, he explains scripture and urges his readers to study and to pray. He condemns the Church of Rome, complains about priests and false teachers, argues a doctrinal position, and encourages piety. Furthermore, he prepares his readers with scriptural and theological knowledge in order to empower them, in the rhetorical arena, as judges of religious controversy. But Tyndale is also hoping to move them to self-examination and to repentance, which is not the same as asking them to judge the disputation. There is also a sense, as Tyndale consistently focuses on the Holy Spirit within the believer, that his desire is to convince readers that the Spirit is, indeed, already within them. They should know, or feel, that their heart has been transformed by Christ’s spirit, that their justification has, as Patrick Collinson puts it, made them actually righteous¹⁷ — in short, that they are elect: “if thou feel lust in thine heart to the will of God, and bringest forth the fruits thereof, then hast thou confidence and hope; and thy deeds, and also the Spirit whence thy deeds spring, certify thine heart that thou shalt enter, yea, art already entered, into the kingdom of heaven” (*Parable*, p. 78).

Second, the tract is a well-organized essay,¹⁸ though a curious mixture of the polemical and the pastoral. At the beginning, Tyndale identifies the issue as justification by faith, next describes what true faith is. About a quarter into the essay, the parable begins to be explained in earnest, and then Tyndale polemically counters good-works readings of numerous biblical passages, including this parable. Midway through, Tyndale describes holy living and good works as the result of the life of faith. Near the end, he returns to the theme of faith and the work of the Holy Spirit within the believer’s

heart. The tract ends with comforting words to prompt faith, repentance, and assurance, but not before seizing final opportunities to condemn false teachers, as Tyndale has done from the beginning.

The organization and coherence of the essay do suggest that Tyndale's performance in *Parable* is a rhetorical performance in the classical sense. According to Aristotle, rhetoric is inevitable when individuals discuss statements, maintain a position, and attempt "to defend themselves and to attack others,"¹⁹ all in order to persuade. But one of my points is the difficulty of settling on only one of the roles Tyndale plays as author. To understand the polyvalence of Tyndale's text, it will be helpful to trace the politics of *Parable* in order to determine not so much what is being argued as what the *rhetor* is performing. This performance reveals Tyndale's struggle as a mediator and his paradoxical attempt to erase the role of *rhetor* or mediator in the hermeneutical enterprise.

We may begin this tracing by recalling that rhetoric is an exercise of power by a writer over an audience, a problematic exercise, I would argue, for any reformist theologian. The rhetorical function points in one direction to the nature of the *rhetor* and in another direction to the effect on the audience. This division is especially vivid in a work like *Parable*, which clearly demonstrates the adversarial nature of polemical writing and the argumentative edge of scriptural interpretation, where the *rhetor* seeks not merely power over the reader and opponent (who are seldom the same), but victory over the opponent. Tyndale's performance thus pulls the reader in two directions: toward what Tyndale does with himself as the wielder of rhetorical power and toward what he tries to do with that reader, the apprentice. But text reveals author, for Tyndale too is pulled in these two directions, toward himself and away from himself. Observing this tension helps us to understand his mediating presence and ultimately his theology.

With this tension in mind, we see that at the heart of Tyndale's tract is a fundamental contestation. Tyndale's performance in most of the tract points to "instruction of the faithful" and to persuasion on the matter of an essential reformist doctrine. Tyndale is seen, from this angle, as exercising power over his readers by means of a polemical performance which accents the vigor, language, and knowledge of the disputant. But at the very moment Tyndale pursues persuasion, two things should be happening: the apprentice should be learning to become the master and, perhaps more importantly, the believer should be led by Tyndale's scriptural analysis to understand that all power rests in God. As Tyndale keeps repeating: "if we cleave to his promises and not to our own fantasies and imaginations, he will put might and power into us" (*Parable*, p. 93). That is, Tyndale's performance empowers Tyndale, in varying degrees, at the same time that he searches for a figure

to disempower his “self.” The textual performance, illustrative of the hermeneutical methodology, also erases — or attempts to erase — the rhetorical self by moving readers to self-examination, self-knowledge, and repentance. Such self-examination, so reformists would argue, is accomplished partially by means of scripture’s direct, literal sense. In this way, a reader is prepared to move from “prentyse” to master.

It is not easy, however, to see Tyndale’s self-erasure because he is so busy doing the work of an author and because we selectively focus on certain aspects of the treatise. We can, for example, see Tyndale principally as one who explains a theological doctrine. Tyndale’s responsibility is straightforward: he explains the doctrine and persuades an audience of this theological truth. But as an Augustinian teacher, Tyndale is also an explicator of scripture, and he expects his readers to agree with him. This seems to be his purpose from the beginning of the tract, where he says, “I have taken in hand to expound this gospel, and certain other places in the new Testament; and . . . to bring the scripture unto the right sense” (*Parable*, p. 46). So often Tyndale’s emphasis is on the believer’s understanding, an understanding, as Parker would agree, always shaped by Tyndale the master. We cannot avoid the frequent Tyndalian formulas: “This say I,” or “This meaneth James in his epistle.” As a teacher, he does adopt an authoritarian voice and he does manipulate his audience: “After the same manner shalt thou interpret the scriptures which make mention of works” (*Parable*, p. 60). But this is not all that he does.

For John Dick, Tyndale’s work moves beyond “setting forth” reformed doctrine to a vicious attack on the ecclesiastical establishment.²⁰ With that addition, we see Tyndale’s position on the rhetorical stage from another angle, and we see the rhetorical stage as more crowded than before. Throughout *Parable*, Tyndale as a relentless, enthusiastic polemicist cannot avoid his authoritative positioning. He would not be an effective polemicist if he didn’t. After all, the goal of the attack is to persuade people to follow Tyndale and not the Church of Rome. Such rhetorical positioning, common in the disputational arena of the time, requires the reader to take sides and by its very nature emphasizes the power and authority of the *rhetor*, as well as the judgment of the spectator; judgment is assumed to be the auditor’s main response. In fact, most of the tract is taken up with Tyndale’s polemics, as he systematically counters a plethora of scriptural texts which appear to support justification by works. His explication of the parable of the wicked Mammon proceeds as an answer to a typically papist reading. His polemical style and self are deliberate and familiar: he duplicates the biblical text, interprets its true meaning, and answers the Roman reading. “Against which exposition I answer,” or “Thiswise answer I,” or “Hereby now seest thou”

are frequent introductory tags to long sections of polemical exegesis. The people, defined rhetorically as indifferent readers at the edge of the disputational arena, listen to one side, then to the other, and finally are asked to judge who has won the debate. It is a discourse, as Robert Weimann observes, "continually in conflict between sharply diverging positions,"²¹ defining auditors principally as judges. And as Aristotle remarks, "anyone is your judge whom you have to persuade."²² But, as we saw earlier, Tyndale as master/teacher transforms auditor into student, not judge.

The role of teacher in religious controversy is intimately related to the role of polemicist, although different rhetorical positionings proceed from each. The polemicist is less concerned with the reader and more concerned with his own ethos, demonstrating his knowledge in contrast to the bankruptcy of the opponent. And Tyndale, indeed, does celebrate his own clear reasoning and understanding in contrast to the confusions of the opponent. Throughout *Parable*, a sustained debate proceeds, as Tyndale expounds scripture in terms of reformist notions and against the interpretations of the Roman church. Once Tyndale enters the polemical arena, his role shifts beyond that of teacher and expounder to allow for the biting commentary, name-calling, and condemnation of the misguided papists. Tyndale, the polemicist, places spectators between himself and the Roman church, exhorting them to follow him rather than the other side. The rhetorical form requires this. The theology, however, requires something else.

For the pastoral role made demands on Tyndale of another kind. As Tyndale explicates the parable, he concludes: "So let thine eye be single, and look unto good living only, and take no thought for the reward, but be content" (*Parable*, p. 65). Such a sentiment suggests the work of the pastor, exhorting the people not necessarily to understand something or to judge a debate, nor even to believe something, but rather to live in a certain way. Tyndale wants believers to understand, through their justification, why they are able to live the moral life, called as they are to holy living and guided by the Holy Spirit. We see an entire section, near the end of the tract, devoted to a call to holy living, a section filled with commandments and social commentary, with, as its theme, "that I [and you] might be altogether like Christ" (*Parable*, p. 71).

Tyndale must have sensed the danger of taking center-stage, whether as one who explains or teaches or attacks or exhorts. Such elevation of the master, regardless of role and intention and authority, would compromise God's power through the justifying faith of the passive believer. *Sola fide*, after all, sweeps away any notion of mediating force between believer and God, any sense of persuader at center-stage, any "measure of man's mind,"²³ to argue that faith and a surrendered heart are the only responses which will

bring salvation. Surely, this was a faith which required Tyndale to be careful as to how he constructed himself and displayed his rhetorical “strength,” if he believed, as he writes in *Obedience*, that “my strength is made perfecte thorow wekenes. . . . As oure strength abateth so groweth the strength of Christ in us when we are clene emptied of oure awne strength then are we full of Christes strength” (*Obedience*, p. 12).

This sense of being full of Christ’s strength and clean emptied of one’s own strength — despite Tyndale’s demonstration of his own strength as a polemicist and teacher — is the key to understanding how Tyndale, among all his roles, sees his most effective work in *Parable*: not as one imposing a reading, but as one preparing for the presence of the Holy Spirit. If there is any mediating force within the reformist scheme, it is the power of the Holy Spirit.²⁴ Thus Wycliffe: “The New Testament is . . . open to the understanding of simple men, as to the points that be most needful to salvation. . . . *The Holy Ghost teaches* us the meaning of Scripture as Christ opened its sense to His Apostles.”²⁵ Thus, after all has been said, Tyndale must downplay his role of mediating teacher and elevate the power of the Holy Ghost. It is not so much a matter of acquiring knowledge, therefore, as of embracing — surrendering to — a reformist faith. In this call for faith, something not often heard amidst the polemical battles in *Parable*, Tyndale hopes to empower the people in their relationship with God, an empowerment in the reformist sense, which belies the very need for any mediating force or work. Preparing the apprentice to become a master, Tyndale writes: “If thou wilt therefore be at peace with God, and love him, thou must turn to the promises of God, and to the gospel, which is called . . . the ministration of righteousness, and of the Spirit” (*Parable*, p. 48). This turning to God is, of course, faith, and “faith bringeth pardon and forgiveness freely purchased by Christ’s blood, and bringeth also the Spirit” (*ibid.*). At the heart of Tyndale’s hermeneutic, as Parker has observed, is the work of the “Spirit.” But how does the Spirit come to the reader? And does the Spirit’s presence have anything to do with the polemical performance and the disputational orientation of the tract? The answer appears to be no.

In examining where his text was going, Tyndale sensed the conflict inherent in his disputation between a theology which erases the need for mediation and a rhetoric which places Tyndale between people and God, a rhetoric which inevitably defines the hearer as judge rather than as believer. As a result, Tyndale actually comes to problematize the intellectual activity which composes most of the tract. Disputation, after all, may be an activity to avoid! Tyndale hopes to lead believers in another direction, despite the fact that his rhetorical performance, which dominates the tract, assumes that the responsibility of his apprentices is to listen to the teacher who disputes,

surrender to that teacher, and embrace his truth. For example, in commenting on the figure of the unrighteous steward, Tyndale criticizes the "many [who] have busied themselves in studying what, or who, this unrighteous steward is" (*Parable*, p. 70). Yet few would deny that Tyndale also busies himself with such study. Tyndale, somehow, wants to withdraw himself from the disputational arena he so enthusiastically enters. In this withdrawal or erasure, Tyndale's only hope of resolving the tension between rhetoric and theology is to draw attention not to his own role as interpreter, teacher, and author, but to the role of the Holy Spirit. After all, "the scripture speaketh many things as the world speaketh; but they may not be worldly understood, but ghostly and spiritually: yea, the Spirit of God only understandeth them; and where he is not, there is not the understanding of the scripture, but unfruitful disputing and brawling about words" (*Parable*, p. 88). Uncomfortable with who he has become as a "disputing and brawling" polemicist, Tyndale shifts attention to a force in which he and his auditors, like their mentor Martin Luther, can lose the "self." Inevitably, this is where an evangelical must go.

It is when Tyndale speaks, in the midst of a polemical enterprise like this tract, of precisely what is required of the believer that the conflict between Tyndale's authorial pose and his need to disappear within the text is most evident. The rhetoric gave Tyndale no choice but to advertise his own "might and power," while his theology presumed that it was God who would "put might and power into us" (*Parable*, p. 93) in order to love the life of faith. How do truth and understanding work as the believer turns to a life of faith? First, it is not Tyndale's intellectual activity that brings understanding, so he says as a reformed Christian, but rather the power and efficacy of the Holy Spirit: "For without the Spirit it is impossible to understand" (*Parable*, p. 88), he boldly declares. What brings the Holy Spirit? Right understanding is not achieved through disputation but only through prayer: "Forasmuch then as the scripture is nothing else but that which the Spirit of God hath spoken . . . and cannot be understand but of the same Spirit; let every man pray to God to send him his Spirit, to loose him from his natural blindness and ignorance, and to give him understanding and feeling of the things of God, and of the speaking of the Spirit of God" (*Parable*, pp. 88–89). It is only through prayer, too, that faith and belief in God's promises come. Faith, then, results not from an intellectual endeavor such as this tract but rather from prayer: "Therefore, I say, we must despair of ourselves, and pray God . . . to give us faith, and to increase our faith" (*Parable*, p. 56). This Lutheran "despair of ourselves"²⁶ is a wonderful phrase for illuminating the problematic nature of theological debate, of rhetorical maneuvering, and of any mediating force such as one's intellec-

tion. Prayer is between God and the believer. Whether we sense it or not, one of Tyndale's goals is an invitation to prayer.

In other words, the reader of such a tract finally becomes not an intellect which judges truth from falsehood, which is what the rhetorical arena requires of auditors, but rather a vessel for God's activity. As Tyndale seeks "to lead" his apprentices "to the truth and promises of God," he hopes to "teach them to put their trust in the promises of God" rather than in any human voice, even such a one as his own. No matter how one looks at it, though — surrender to Tyndale, surrender to God, a change of heart — surrender is always a matter of putting one's trust in one place or another. As soon as he wrote or spoke, the issue could not be avoided. Mediation was inevitable. Indeed, such was the fundamental disagreement with his adversary, who taught the people "to put their trust in their own merits, and brought them in belief that they shall be justified . . . by the goodness of their own works" (*Parable*, pp. 45–46). In deciding who he ought to be in the disputational arena, Tyndale senses the tension between human teaching and prayerful surrender to God, especially when one of his pastoral goals is to convince believers of "God's Spirit" within them.²⁷ Since surrender to God is less a matter of the brain and more a matter of the heart, Tyndale needs to become not the authority for his followers but the instrument which prepares the people, all those apprentices, for surrender and faith.²⁸

To inspire self-knowledge, the prelude to repentance, Tyndale seeks a voice which calls people to initiate faith, and he finds that voice in John the Baptist. This we see most vividly near the end of the tract. Through the figure of the Baptist, Tyndale plays the role of evangelist, hoping to minimize his mediating presence and calling, like the Baptist, for a change of heart. This change is the "alteration" which "reneweth a man, and begetteth him afresh, altereth him, changeth him, and turneth him altogether into a new nature and conversation" (*Parable*, p. 53). This "alteration" is the work of true faith, and Tyndale finally — according to Tyndale himself — has little to do with it: "the right faith springeth not of man's fantasy, neither is it in any man's power to obtain it; but it is altogether the pure gift of God poured into us freely, without all manner doing of us, without deserving and merits, yea, and without seeking for of us" (*Parable*, p. 53). Faith, then, is the work of God, not of the *rhetor*. The believer does not hear the debater but rather prays in his closet. After all, scriptural disputation is useless, says Tyndale, unless the Holy Spirit is first present: "So then, if the Spirit be not in a man, he worketh not the will of God, neither understandeth it, though he babble never so much of the scriptures" (*Parable*, p. 78).²⁹

Influenced as he was by Luther, Tyndale sought to prepare the recipient for the Holy Spirit through a straightforward (and literal) scriptural message:

"he that believeth on Christ shall be safe" (*Parable*, p. 65). It is not as debater but as preacher that Tyndale finally seeks to construct himself, for "when the gospel is preached . . . we believe the mercy of God; and in believing we receive the Spirit of God" (*ibid.*). Interestingly, the role of preacher may not be a role we feel Tyndale performing in much of the tract. As John the Baptist, Tyndale's performance ought not to be principally a mediating performance but one that comes before faith to inspire faith. Tyndale explains how the scheme works more than a few times in the tract, and we can better understand the explanation now that we have observed where the text has been going: "A Christian therefore, when he beholdeth himself in the law, putteth off all manner righteousness, deservings and merits, and meekly and unfeignedly knowledgeth his sin and misery" (*Parable*, p. 75). From knowledge of one's sin comes repentance, and from repentance comes the Holy Spirit. Thus Tyndale's role, biblical in every way, is to bring people to a knowledge of their sin. The exhortation to self-knowledge is part of Tyndale's belief in the power of the literal sense of scripture. Note how repentance, preaching, and the straightforward scriptural message all come together in the opening of Luke 3: John came "preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins." Or Matthew 3: "John the Baptist came and preached in the wilderness of Jewry, saying: Repent, the kingdom of heaven is at hand." In considering the difference between what Tyndale does throughout *Parable* and what Tyndale says, I am not so sure we feel that self-knowledge is the goal of a polemical tract so relentlessly antipapal, inevitably elevating the disputant, who is always before the reader's eyes. Yet the reformist text struggles against the elevation of the *rhetor* as *rhetor*, desiring instead to be directed by the needs of would-be believers, as Tyndale "puts off" the power of the *rhetor*, seizing textual opportunities to erase himself.

Thus, Tyndale would become what he preached, not a person but a "voice" — "I am that I preach," the Tyndalian gloss on John's "I am the voice of a crier." Tyndale appropriates a voice or a self which is selfless, a voice which is not his but God's, adopting a strategy more theological than rhetorical, despite the fact that self-abnegation is a standard rhetorical ploy.³⁰ Tyndale views New Testament ethics as humble service when he states, "This term, myself, is not in the gospel" (*Parable*, p. 98). In finding the appropriate role so that he does not, in the final analysis, appear as rhetorical man, as a "myself," as the power of authority, Tyndale seizes upon the image of John the Baptist, the only genuine New Testament prophet, the perfect figure of the selfless vehicle for God's work. This erasure of "myself" is Tyndale's reformist attempt to make God the real and only author writing on the heart of the "prentyse." As he tries to demonstrate

textually, he is not in the final analysis “a teacher intent on imposing,” to use Parker’s phrase. God is the one who imposes, in Tyndale’s scheme; this is what Tyndale believed and worked for rhetorically.

Tyndale knew how appropriate the figure of John the Baptist was to his polemic. Disobedient and deceitful in the eyes of the religious establishment, John is described by Tyndale as one who “had testimony of Christ and of the gospel, that there never rose a greater among women’s children, with his fasting, watching, praying, raiment, and strait living” (*Parable*, p. 103). Absent from John’s virtues is any skill in debating and disputing. What Tyndale finally emphasizes about John the Baptist (and perhaps about himself) is that he was an outcast. The Baptist responds to what he is only by saying, “I am a voice of a crier” (*Parable*, p. 104).³¹ This self-casting as crier in the wilderness may not be perfectly descriptive of what we feel to be Tyndale’s chief role in *The Parable of the Wicked Mammon*. Yet, as he pushed forward as mediator in a polemical area, Tyndale found himself ultimately embracing what theology, not rhetoric, required of him.

In observing what happens in Tyndale’s writing, which is seldom straightforward, the figure of John the Baptist does fit perfectly with the direction in which *Parable* is leading the reader. John the Baptist is less busy teaching the people and more intent on proclaiming the way of salvation, preaching repentance, and bringing people to self-knowledge, which, as we have seen, is what Tyndale finally has to say he is interested in. Teaching for self-knowledge, then, is what the master is doing for the “prentyse.” As the tract closes, Tyndale’s voices are many — teacher, pastor, polemicist. The figure of John the Baptist is once again invoked: “For John Baptist went before Christ, and preached repentance; that is, he preached the law of God right, and brought the people into knowledge of themselves, and unto the fear of God, and then sent them unto Christ to be healed” (*Parable*, p. 121). Finally, we have to test this statement of purpose — the bringing of people into knowledge of themselves — against what the tract, or most of the tract, actually does: extensive scriptural exegesis and the exploration of a theological argument in the traditional arena of religious polemics. Never able entirely to abandon the mediative pose, Tyndale senses an imperative, other than rhetorical, to move beyond the declamations and disputations of the judicial to the pastoral, to move beyond the interpretative process which Parker and Barnett explore to self-knowledge and repentance. These moves translate into a Tyndalian concern for who he is or must be to affect his audience, so that both writer and reader ultimately become that which is preached.

Tyndale’s citation of Acts 10 at the end of the tract reenforces our understanding of the reader as something other than a judge of debate.

Although a multitude of voices closes the tract —and we hear especially the voice of the polemicist — all of these voices, particularly that of the *rhetor*, are undercut by the use of the story of Cornelius as the final example for the reader. Although Cornelius, as Luke describes him in Acts, is a good man, indeed a religious man, who worshiped God, helped the poor, and prayed constantly to God, it was not until God acted through a vision to Cornelius (and through a subsequent vision to Peter, who meets up with Cornelius in the next chapter of Acts) that the universality of the doctrine of justification by faith was understood and embraced by the apostles. Tyndale's final message to his readers through this scriptural intertext, which I think calls in question so much of Tyndale's performance in the tract, is to pray, to live well, and to expect God to act — an injunction to remove all mediating influences. We come, then, finally, textually and theologically, to a point where human action, rhetorical or otherwise, is inconsequential. What is paramount is the establishment of God's kingdom by God himself, that most fundamental of Reformation tenets.

Tyndale's *Parable of the Wicked Mammon* provides an opportunity to move beyond the intellectual message of a Reformation treatise to careful observation of an author's discursive performance. For Tyndale, informed as his discursive practice was by both rhetoric and theology, this performance reveals the mediative pose that he must embrace to help his auditors read scripture for their salvation. But there is more than polemics in the mediative pose, as Tyndale constructs himself finally as a pastor. A contemporary reader may learn much about how a Reformation text works and see the variety of authorial intentions the text reveals by paying attention to the roles the writer assumes and the language the writer uses. Through the work of scholars like Kevin Dunn and Catharine Randall Coats, we are beginning to see how problematic authorship was for the reformed Christian writer. I would argue that reformist writers, as they participated in the disputational arena (as most of the first generation of reformists did), had little choice but to use the received tools of rhetoric, while coming to see the inevitable clash between rhetoric and the very theology they were propounding. A close reading of Tyndale's performance in *Parable* indicates, at least to me, that Tyndale was aware of the problems inherent in rhetoric, the theological dangers of aggressive mediation, and the need in the hermeneutical enterprise to find a scriptural model for himself. That scriptural model reinforces the notion that erasure of self, especially the writerly self, was at the heart of Reformation theology.

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Notes

1. James D. Tracy, *Europe's Reformations 1450–1650* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999), p. 13. Tracy's other features include the holy community and the confessional state.
2. James Edward McGoldrick, *Luther's English Connection: The Reformation Thought of Robert Barnes and William Tyndale* (Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 1979), p. 43.
3. For discussions of Tyndale's use of Luther's sermon, see two essays which appeared in *Moreana* 27 (1991): John A. R. Dick, "'To Dig Again the Wells of Abraham': Philology, Theology and Scripture in Tyndale's *The Parable of the Wicked Mammon*" (pp. 39–52), and Richard H. Graham, "Tyndale's Source and Tyndale's Originality: A Reading of *The Parable of the Wicked Mammon*" (pp. 53–68).
4. Dick, "'To Dig Again the Wells of Abraham,'" p. 41.
5. Mary Jane Barnett, "From the Allegorical to the Literal (and Back Again): Tyndale and the Allure of Allegory," in *Word, Church, and State: Tyndale Quincentenary Essays*, ed. John T. Day, Eric Lund, and Anne M. O'Donnell (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1998), p. 63.
6. Douglas H. Parker, "Tyndale's Biblical Hermeneutics," in Day *et al.*, eds., p. 95.
7. McGoldrick, p. 76.
8. In the opening chapter of the Gospel of Saint John, Tyndale translates John's words as "I am the voice of a crier in the wilderness," and he provides the following gloss in the margin: "Voice: that is: I am that I preach" (*Tyndale's New Testament*, ed. David Daniell [New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989], p. 133). All subsequent scriptural references are to this translation.
9. "The Parable of the Wicked Mammon," in *Doctrinal Treatises and Introductions to Different Portions of The Holy Scriptures by William Tyndale*, ed. Henry Walter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1888), p. 104. Hereafter cited parenthetically as *Parable*.
10. Anne M. Richardson, ed., "A Critical Edition of William Tyndale's 'The Obedience of a Christian Man,'" 2 vols. (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1976), 1: 29. Hereafter cited parenthetically as *Obedience*; all citations refer to vol. 1, part 1.
11. It may not be entirely accurate, therefore, to state, as Robert Weimann and others have done, that Tyndale in both his theoretical and his practical work "strengthened a discursive practice according to which every Christian reader, to the best of his or her understanding, was called upon to arbitrate problems of textual meaning" (Robert Weimann, *Authority and Representation in Early Modern Discourse* [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996], p. 68). Tyndale is consistent in seeing himself as a teacher who left the Christian reader alone only when he or she was a new creature of faith.
12. With respect to turning inward, Heiko A. Oberman points to Luther's "Scripture-oriented meditation," which is not unlike Tyndale's, not as "speculation (*prudential-intellectus*), but [as] the affective state (*affectus*) which prepares man's intellectual powers" for sudden insights and break-throughs (*The Dawn of the Reformation: Essays in Late Medieval and Early Reformation Thought* [Edinburgh: Clark, 1986], p. 148).
13. See Thomas O. Sloane, *Donne, Milton, and the End of Humanist Rhetoric* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), for a discussion of the rhetorical self, which,

according to Sloane, was well aware "of its own artificial nature and instrumentality" (p. 128). Although, as *Parable* indicates, Tyndale knew that a rhetorical self "can be fashioned by the needs and possibilities of the speaking situation" (p. 128), he may not have been able to embrace the *artificium* of a rhetorical self because of the theologically felt imperative to empty that self as much as possible. This Tyndalian emptying of the self was not done by a Ciceronian construction of a speaking self staged merely for persuasive purposes, but rather done, and done deliberately, by moving away from ethos to pathos, all for the benefit of the reader rather than as part of his own role as *rhetor*.

14. Kevin Dunn writes about this authorial ambivalence in Luther and Calvin, for example, who, like Tyndale, must acknowledge God as the only author of any good. See his *Pretext of Authority: The Rhetoric of Authorship in the Renaissance Preface* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994). Although Dunn's observations regarding rhetoric, self, and author on the new literary terrain of the early modern period are useful in examining some reformist writings, the absence of autobiographical elements in Tyndale's writing does not easily enable us to sense any rhetoric of self-advocacy, personal authority, or self-authorization — the element that fascinates Dunn in a writer such as Martin Luther. See his chapter, "In Search of a Public Idiom: Pauline Authority and Lutheran Authorship," pp. 27–50. Also helpful in understanding "the Word of Self" in Reformation texts is the work of Catharine Randall Coats; see her *Subverting the System: D'Aubigné and Calvinism*, *Sixteenth Century Essays and Studies*, 14 (Kirkville, MO: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1990).
15. Recall that in *Parable* Tyndale for the first time writes under his own name. See John A. R. Dick, "Posthumous Revisions in Tyndale's *The Parable of the Wicked Mammon* and *The Practice of Prelates*," in Day *et al.*, eds., pp. 307–19.
16. David Daniell, *William Tyndale A Biography* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994), p. 160.
17. Patrick Collinson, "William Tyndale and the Course of the English Reformation," *Reformation* 1 (1996): 89.
18. In his biography of Tyndale, Daniell underscores how well-organized the essay is by outlining the three-part "scheme" of *Parable*: Faith comes first and alone justified; Mammon and the unrighteous steward; What are good works? See Appendix A, pp. 385–86.
19. Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, trans. W. Rhys Roberts (New York: Random House, 1954), p. 19.
20. Dick, "'To Dig Again the Wells of Abraham,'" pp. 39–52.
21. Weimann, p. 62.
22. Aristotle, p. 128.
23. Roland H. Bainton, *The Reformation of the Sixteenth Century* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1952), p. 35.
24. As Parker writes, "only those who possess a 'feeling faith' or the 'Spirit within' are enfranchised to read the Scripture as it was meant to be read" (p. 98).
25. John Wycliffe, quoted in William R. Estep, *Renaissance and Reformation* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1986), p. 65; emphasis mine.
26. Tracy summarizes Luther's *The Freedom of the Christian* with these words: "Only those who despair in the righteousness of their own deeds can grasp what faith in Christ

means and how it makes Christians free from the anxiety that oppresses all who place any trust whatsoever in their own righteousness" (p. 53).

27. As Tyndale writes, "So long as thou findest any consent in thine heart unto the law of God, that it is righteous and good, and also displeasure that thou canst not fulfil it, despair not; neither doubt but that God's Spirit is in thee, and that thou art chosen for Christ's sake to the inheritance of eternal life" (*Parable*, p. 49).
28. Yet we may prefer to see both education and exhortation as part of the rhetorical process of putting the hearers into the right frame of mind. This process, as Brian Vickers points out, inevitably works on the hearers' emotions; see Brian Vickers, *In Defence of Rhetoric* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), especially chap. 5, "Renaissance Reintegration." Vickers, whose work is indispensable in trying to come to grips with the use of rhetoric in the Renaissance, cites Cicero's *De Oratore* in a passage which underscores the conflict Tyndale may have felt in taking power to himself and in searching for ways to relinquish that power: "The orator who is fully able to master his audience's feelings can move them in any direction, arouse any emotion, achieve any goal he wishes. Of all the topics in the *laus eloquentiae* this was the one that most fascinated Cicero, and most affected the Renaissance, the promise of absolute power over the audience's mind and feelings" (p. 75).
29. As Parker writes, "Tyndale works to convince his readers that the understanding of Scripture is less a matter of profound theorizing and more an issue of spiritual attitude, especially faith" (pp. 92–93).
30. James Andrew Clarke has argued that Tyndale's play at self-abnegation is a sign of Tyndale as author: "I would like to suggest how his apparently self-effacing act, a disappearance into the *auctoritas* of scripture, actually gestured toward the new paradigm of individual authorial power" ("The Bible, History, and Authority in Tyndale's *The Practice of Prelates*," *Moreana* 28 [1991]: 113).
31. Tyndale continues: "My voice only pertaineth to you. . . . To you am I a voice only, and that which I preach. My preaching (if it be received into a penitent or repenting heart) shall teach you how to live and please God, according as God shall shed out his grace on every man." In her essay on Tyndale's Matthewan exposition, Anna M. O'Donnell observes that "although Tyndale uses the authorial 'I' many times in this exegetical-polemical work, his tone is usually that of a disembodied voice crying in the wilderness" ("Philology, Typology and Rhetoric in Tyndale's *Exposition upon the V. VI. VII Chapters of Matthew*," *Moreana* 28 [1991]: 161). Collinson remarks that Tyndale "was in the best sense too radical, the voice of one crying in the wilderness" (p. 84).