

The Burning Of Protestant Martyr Richard Bayfield

The Converted Monk of Bury

by Sylvia Lacoski

Tyndale's New Testament

Tyndale's New Testament was completed in 1525 and sent to England. The Roman Catholic authorities did all they could to suppress the book. It was publicly burned; it was denounced. All the arguments of Sir Thomas More to keep it out of the hands of the people only aroused their suspicions, for they concluded there must be something very different in the Book from the doctrines of Rome! Those caught circulating the Scriptures were punished. Sir Thomas More in later life flogged with his own hands those who sought liberty to trust in God's Word, even signing warrants for their burning!

Richard Bayfield's Conversion to God's Truth

Richard Bayfield was a monk in the abbey of Bury. One day when he was on duty as the chamberlain of the abbey some men entered and engaged him in conversation. Dr. Barnes of Cambridge was one of the men (he was later burned for his faith in 1540) and he was accompanied by two men from London, Maxwell and Stacy, who were brickmakers by trade. Every year they traveled through Essex and nearby counties to encourage believers in the Lord who were suffering persecution. As they spoke with Bayfield he was very impressed with their love of the Lord and knowledge of the Scriptures, and as a parting gift they gave him a New Testament and a copy of "The obedience of a Christian man."

Two years passed and Richard Bayfield, having imbibed the Word, found himself in the abbey prison, in stocks with a gag in his mouth, where he remained for several months until the intervention of Dr. Barnes who happened to know one of the monks. He was taken to Cambridge, and then later he went to London, sheltering with Maxwell and Stacy. After some time he was discovered and brought before Bishop Tunstall, who urged him to recant. Bayfield did recant, but later escaped and fled to the continent.

Bayfield and the Circulation of Prohibited Books

Once on the continent Bayfield proved to be of great help to Tyndale and others. Knowing the great risk, he secretly visited London and became very active in circulating the New Testament and other prohibited books. It was said that no fewer than fifty four works had been circulated by him, including the works of Luther, Zwingle, and Melanchthon. It was on one of these visits

that he was discovered at a bookbinders in Mark Lane and taken to the Lollard Tower, thence to the bishop of London's notorious coal-house in Paternoster Row, where he was chained upright to the walls of the dungeon in an effort to get him to name others, but he was constant and able to remain steadfast in the faith.

Bayfield's Testimony

Bayfield was accused of circulating New Testaments and works by Luther and others. When asked why, he replied, "It was to the intent that the gospel of Christ might be set forward, and God more glorified in this realm among Christian people." On the 20th November, 1531 he was condemned, and Stokeley, who had succeeded Bishop Tunstall, was so furious at Bayfield's refusal to name names that he struck him violently with his crosier, sending Bayfield crashing to the ground. Recovering, Bayfield thanked God he had been delivered from the church of the Anti-Christ, and had come into the true church of Jesus Christ;, "And I trust anon to be in heaven with Christ" he said.

Bayfield was taken to Smithfield and burned, on December 4, 1531, his sufferings very severe for the fire was not sufficient to consume him. His left arm burned and fell from his body before the remainder was consumed, but he continued in prayer until he died. Several others suffered at the stake during this period - Bilney, Tewkesbury, Hilton and Bainham. Patmore was condemned to perpetual imprisonment.

A correspondent of Erasmus remarked in a letter to him that "the price of wood in London was considerably advanced in consequence of the quantity used in the frequent execution of 'heretics' in Smithfield," which proves that these burnings occurred very often.

Bayfield and others were willing to give their lives for a free and open Bible; we ought to remember these things when the Roman Catholic church today seeks to show a very different picture of itself.
