CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-83081-2 — The Origins of the Bible and Early Modern Political Thought
Travis DeCook
Excerpt
More Information

1

The Primordial Bible

William Tyndale's Social Vision and the Limits of Disenchantment

The writings of the early English reformer and Bible translator William Tyndale are distinctive for how their treatments of Scripture conspicuously bypass the human activity and historical and material processes through which it was shaped. This has been noticed by several commentators. Allan Jenkins and Patrick Preston observe that Tyndale "passed over the actual historical development of the New Testament."[1] In Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin's words, for Tyndale the Bible is "independent of the taints of human authorship, it is dissociated from anything we know about the author or any curiosity we might have about him," and it is "divorced from and transcending, time, history, and the human speaker."[2] Indeed, not only does Tyndale emphasize the Bible's divinity as exclusive of any non-divine influences, but at times he goes so far in advancing Scripture's supremely autonomous status that he appears to conflate Scripture with God.

This chapter critically explores how these various moments in Tyndale's writings appear to exemplify a process of disenchantment that modern scholars have associated with the Reformation. This particular idea of disenchantment is expressed in Peter Berger's discussion of the consequences of the Reformation's emphasis on divine transcendence. He writes that

> Protestantism may be described in terms of an immense shrinkage in the scope of the sacred in reality, as compared with its Catholic adversary. The sacramental

[1] Jenkins and Preston, *Biblical Scholarship and the Church*, 127.
[2] Ní Chuilleanáin, "The Debate between Thomas More and William Tyndale," 399, 409.

© in this web service Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE
Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-83081-2 — The Origins of the Bible and Early Modern Political Thought
Travis DeCook
Excerpt
More Information

apparatus is reduced to a minimum and, even there, divested of its more numinous qualities . . . The Protestant believer no longer lives in a world ongoingly penetrated by sacred beings and forces. Reality is polarized between a radically transcendent divinity and a radically "fallen" humanity that, *ipso facto*, is devoid of sacred qualities . . . In other words, the radical transcendence of God confronts a universe of radical immanence, of "closedness" to the sacred.[3]

This account resembles Max Weber's argument about the disenchanting consequence of the emphasis on God's "absolute transcendentality," developing out of the Reformation, which excluded all human forms of participation in salvation.[4]

As was discussed in the Introduction, such sweeping characterizations of the Reformation have been challenged in several ways. However, this chapter will examine how in key respects Tyndale's treatment of Scripture, which so notably strips from human activity and historical process any role in scriptural revelation, features an analogous structure of transcendence to what Weber and Berger describe. This chapter proceeds, though, to address how Tyndale's account of Scripture is situated within a broader, teleological narrative in which all concern with the Bible is shown to be ultimately oriented to the Christian's entering into a redemptive, affective, and personal relationship with God, a relationship that achieves fulfillment in the transformation of the human community. This chapter argues that Tyndale's ostensibly disenchanting portrayal of the Bible paradoxically founds an argument directed away from disenchantment, toward a view of God's intrinsic connection to the human relationships constituting society.

For all of Tyndale's characteristic expunging of the Bible's human and historical elements, then, his conception of the Bible cannot be reduced to the fetishization modern theorists have associated with extreme elevations of Scripture's divine origin. Crucially, Tyndale emphasizes not only where the Bible comes from but also where it leads: to transformed relationships between individual and God, and among people in community. Considering the transformed community as a telos of his account of the Bible thus challenges a widely circulated portrait of Tyndale in which he isolates the Bible and the individual Christian in a stark subject–object dualism, and thereby erodes the forms of communal participation in the sacred central to earlier religion. This chapter concludes by arguing that

[3] Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (1967) (New York: Anchor, 1990), 111–12.
[4] Weber, *Protestant Ethic*, 61.

© in this web service Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE
Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-83081-2 — The Origins of the Bible and Early Modern Political Thought
Travis DeCook
Excerpt
More Information

the absolute transcendence of history so distinctive in Tyndale's account of Scripture helps ascribe to the saving message a fundamental priority in the phenomenology of Christian life, a primordial status that serves to ground all human relationships in the individual's eminently personal relationship with God.

In advancing this argument, this chapter contributes to a growing exploration into continuities linking pre-Reformation theology and spiritual forms with Reformation and ostensibly proto-Reformation ones. Important examples include Christopher Ocker's investigation into how sixteenth-century Protestants emerge out of late medieval biblical exegesis, which conceived the literal sense as primary and as encompassing the spiritual senses.[5] A similar continuity is uncovered in Ryan McDermott's study of the tropological sense of Scripture across the medieval and Reformation divide.[6] He shows how figures including Tyndale share with their medieval predecessors an emphasis on how reading Scripture coheres with action in the world, both of which were experienced as participation in the story of salvation history.[7]

Finally, this chapter shares features with Ian Christopher Levy's work on the fourteenth-century theologian and reformer John Wyclif.[8] Commonly viewed as the "morning star of the Reformation," Wyclif's disparagement of the church's wealth and of certain forms of ecclesiastical power was highly controversial in his time; moreover, his exegetical method prompted opposition by several of his contemporaries, and modern scholars have viewed him as a proponent of a reductive *sola scriptura* position anticipating the Reformation. Levy counters these views with an argument about Wyclif's conservatism, portraying him as a traditional theologian who, despite his criticisms of ecclesiastical authorities, retained the view of the church's role as interpreter of Scripture and of the fundamental coherence of church and Scripture,

[5] Ocker, *Biblical Poetics*. [6] McDermott, *Tropologies*.

[7] McDermott also provides an important reevaluation of the medieval–Reformation divide through a study of Nicholas of Lyra's biblical exegesis in his essay, "Henri de Lubac's Genealogy of Modern Exegesis and Nicholas of Lyra's Literal Sense of Scripture," *Modern Theology* 29.1 (2013): 124–56. This essay critiques the common view that the elevation of the literal sense of Scripture, beginning in the late middle ages and central to the Reformation, is necessarily at the expense of the spiritual sense, or that it necessarily sets the stage for the separation of biblical studies from theology.

[8] Ian Christopher Levy, *John Wyclif's Theology of the Eucharist in Its Medieval Context* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2015); *Holy Scripture and the Quest for Authority at the End of the Middle Ages* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012), 54–91.

© in this web service Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE
Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-83081-2 — The Origins of the Bible and Early Modern Political Thought
Travis DeCook
Excerpt
More Information

advanced a form of exegesis which was in key respects deeply traditional, and relied on church fathers and doctors to aid him in biblical interpretation.[9] Levy encourages us to see not only the differences between Wyclif and his contemporaries, but also what his thought shares with his own time and with the past. The current chapter similarly questions the view of Tyndale as a figure of rupture, aiming to both acknowledge Tyndale's departures but also his continuities. As with Wyclif, viewing him solely according to the portrait painted by his opponents obscures connections between Tyndale's thought and past Christian tradition.

In considering together the apparently disenchanting elements in Tyndale's thought with the devotional and communally oriented elements, this chapter bridges two areas of focus in Tyndale scholarship that have typically remained cut off from each other, and whose proponents have tended to fail to engage each other.[10] In investigating these two aspects together this chapter reveals that the case of Tyndale complicates widespread contemporary arguments that too straightforwardly and unequivocally identify early modern emphasis on Scripture's transcendence with disenchantment and, in consequence, with some of the roots of secularization. Moreover, it also challenges, more broadly, the discourse around the concept of disenchantment itself, which typically deploys it as an undeviatingly unidirectional process oriented away from a mediated and participatory account of the sacred and toward the horizon of the secular. By contrast, this chapter will advance the notion of disenchantment not as a sweeping historical force but as something more localized, and at times put to the service of its opposite: the advancement of a vision in which human life participates in the divine.

[9] Moreover, Wyclif was concerned with upholding the veracity and fundamentally authoritative character of Scripture in the face of certain scholastic questions that threatened to undermine the trustworthiness of the extant scriptural texts, and in the face of expressions of ecclesiastical authority and theological speculation that seemed to threaten Scripture's fundamental authority and sufficiency (Levy, *Holy Scripture*, 57–58, 81–91).

[10] Examples of the former include the treatment of Tyndale in Bossy, *Christianity in the West, 1400–1700*; James Kearney, *The Incarnate Text: Imagining the Book in Reformation England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009); Ní Chuilleanáin, "The Debate between Thomas More and William Tyndale"; James Simpson, *Burning to Read: English Fundamentalism and Its Reformation Opponents* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Harvard, 2007). Examples of the latter include Michael McGiffert, "William Tyndale's Conception of Covenant," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 32 (1981): 167–84; Ralph S. Werrell, *The Theology of William Tyndale* (Cambridge: James Clarke, 2006); Rowan Williams, "William Tyndale (c. 1494–1536): The Christian Society," in *Anglican Identities* (London: Darton, Longman, and Todd, 2004), 9–23.

© in this web service Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-83081-2 — The Origins of the Bible and Early Modern Political Thought
Travis DeCook
Excerpt
More Information

SCRIPTURE AND HISTORY

To grasp the significance of Tyndale's emphasis on the Bible's transcendence of history and human activity, we begin by considering the account of revelation laid out by his most dogged polemical opponent, Thomas More. The latter described God's mode of communication with humanity as follows: "And from time to time as it liketh his majesty to have things known or done in his church, so is it no doubt but he tempereth his revelations, and in such ways doth insinuate and inspire them into the breasts of his Christian people."[11] This remark, made in his *Dialogue concerning Heresies* (1529), is highly characteristic of More's polemical writings against the reformers.[12] Throughout these writings he seeks to undermine claims, most prominently made by Luther and Tyndale, about the primacy of Scripture with respect to the authority of the Roman Catholic Church. On the contrary, declares More: it is God's unwritten word, whose vehicle is the Catholic Church, that is the source of truth, and this unwritten word is only imperfectly reflected in the sacred writings. Crucially, More emphasizes the temporal character of God's providential guidance of the Church to truth.[13] His account of divine revelation, drawing on fourth-century Cappadocian Father St. Gregory of Nazianzus, entails the sense of an ongoing development of doctrine within the Church – indeed, of a progressive unfolding of truth.[14] For More, the developing interpretations and beliefs within the Church are not the result of human accretions distorting a pristine original revelation, but instead reflect God's providential tempering of

[11] Thomas More, *Dialogue concerning Heresies*, ed. Thomas Lawler and Germain Marc'hadour, *Complete Works of St. Thomas More*, vol. 6 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1981), 146. I have modernized the spelling of all quotations from this edition.

[12] See also Thomas More, *Confutation of Tyndale's Answer*, ed. Louis A. Schuster et al., *Complete Works of St. Thomas More*, vol. 8 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1973), 248–49.

[13] The idea of gradual providential guidance within the Church is also deployed by More's Catholic contemporaries, the Paris theologians Josse Clichtove and Noël Beda. See Josse Clichtove, *Antilutherus* (Paris: Simon de Colines, 1524), XXVIIIr–v; Noël Beda, *Annotationum Natalis Bede* (Cologne: Peter Quentell, 1526), aa2v.

[14] For Gregory's depiction of revelation as a gradual, continuing process, as an accommodation of God to humanity, see *On God and Christ: The Five Theological Orations and Two Letters to Cledonius*, trans. Frederick Williams and Lionel Wickham (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's, 2002), 136–37. For More's references to Gregory, see *Responsio ad Lutherum*, ed. John M. Headley, *Complete Works of St. Thomas More*, vol. 5 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1969), 103; *Dialogue concerning Heresies*, 333–34.

© in this web service Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-83081-2 — The Origins of the Bible and Early Modern Political Thought
Travis DeCook
Excerpt
More Information

revelation across time, a process that may include both the disclosure of previously hidden meanings in Scripture and even new revelations beyond those recorded in the Bible.[15]

If for More the Bible is subject to the Church's temporally developing interpretive authority, Tyndale by contrast stresses the Bible's separateness from the Roman Catholic Church's traditions and history. For Tyndale this separation is nothing less than the separation between God's Word and the fallen world. He is at pains to show just how entangled the Catholic Church's practices and traditions are with this world,[16] and he draws extensively on non-scriptural history as a means of demonstrating what he sees as the erroneous nature of the Catholic Church, a strategy particularly evident in his *Practice of Prelates* (1530).[17]

Tyndale's opposition of Scripture and history is an obvious leitmotif in his works, and it takes multiple forms. For example, the essentially ahistorical character of the Bible can be seen in his treatment of the covenants, which it is Scripture's fundamental role to communicate (covenants being the divinely instituted promises which he understands to govern God's relationship to humanity). Echoing Luther's *Bondage of the Will* (1525), in *The Obedience of a Christian Man* (1528) Tyndale in fact rhetorically reduces Scripture to the communication of these covenants: "All the scripture is either the promises and testament of God in Christ and stories pertaining hereunto, to strengthen thy faith."[18] In Tyndale's

[15] More, *Confutation*, 284, 337.

[16] For Tyndale's comments on disagreements amongst popes see *The Obedience of the Christian Man*, ed. David Daniell (London: Penguin, 2000), 176 and *An Answere Vnto Sir Thomas Mores Dialoge*, ed. Anne M. O'Donnell and Jared Wicks (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2000), 97–98. He also points out contradictions and errors amongst church doctors and fathers (*Obedience*, 19–20).

[17] For Tyndale's engagement with history, see David Weil Baker, "The Historical Faith of William Tyndale: Non-Salvific Reading of Scripture at the Outset of the English Reformation," *Renaissance Quarterly* 62.3 (2009): 661–92.

[18] Tyndale, *Obedience*, 162. See *Luther's Works* 33, ed. Philip S. Watson (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972), 150. In his prologue to his 1534 edition of the New Testament, Tyndale states that the general covenant, in which all others are comprehended, is that "If we meek ourselves to God, to keep his laws, after the example of Christ: then God hath bound himself unto us to keep and make good all the mercies promised in Christ, throughout all the Scripture ("W.T. Unto the Reader," in *Tyndale's New Testament*, ed. David Daniell [New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989], 4). While Tyndale's understanding of the relationship between humanity and God being ordered through covenant receives new emphasis and an original centrality in his later works, it is reflected throughout his writings. See Patrick Collinson, "William Tyndale and the Course of the English Reformation," *Reformation* 1 (1996), n.p.; McGiffert, "William Tyndale's Conception of Covenant," 169; Werrell, *The Theology of William Tyndale*, 24.

© in this web service Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-83081-2 — The Origins of the Bible and Early Modern Political Thought
Travis DeCook
Excerpt
More Information

presentation, James Simpson argues, the covenants transmitted by Scripture stand outside any process of historical development and transcend cultural differences, and are anterior to the supposedly merely human additions constituting much church practice and belief.[19] Tyndale tends to present covenants as timelessly repeating a Law–Gospel dialectic, in which human sinfulness is conveyed along with a promise of salvation through faith in Christ and the obedient good works which flow out of this faith. Consequently, as Simpson points out, Tyndale stresses a kind of "legibility" for covenant which transcends any particular historical moment, and notes that for Tyndale "The entire drama of salvation is enacted in the reading of any given covenantal statement."[20]

On the basis of this understanding of covenant, in his Prologue to the Book of Exodus, published as part of his translation of the Pentateuch in 1530, Tyndale writes, "The new testament is those everlasting promises which are made us in Christ the Lord throughout all the scripture. And that testament is built on faith and not on works ... The new testament was ever, even from the beginning of the world."[21] This is a characteristic moment for Tyndale in its portrayal of Scripture solely in terms of the transcendent substance it contains, and in its sidestepping of Scripture's material, historical, and human forms.

Tyndale's striking formulation here has historical antecedents, perhaps most prominently in the writing of John Wyclif, who articulated a concept of Scripture centered on the divine law it contains, which transcends history and materiality.[22] Yet Wyclif clearly distinguishes Scripture in this ultimate sense from the perishable and corruptible material forms in which God's Word is transmitted; indeed, he registered concern that too much attention could be given to philological and textual matters, substituting a concern with lower things for higher ones. He went so far as to express the idea that the faith would remain even if all manuscripts

[19] Simpson, *Burning to Read*, 201. [20] Ibid., 116. See also ibid., 202–203.

[21] Tyndale, "A Prologue into the Second Book of Moses Called Exodus," in *Tyndale's Old Testament*, ed. David Daniell (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), 87–88.

[22] While Wyclif and his followers have been viewed as an important inspiration to Tyndale by some scholars (Donald Dean Smeeton, *Lollard Themes in the Reformation Theology of William Tyndale* [Kirksville, MO: Sixteenth Century Journal, 1986]; Werrell, *The Theology of William Tyndale and The Roots of William Tyndale's Theology* [Cambridge: James Clarke, 2013]), others have disputed that we can legitimately affirm direct lines of influence (Richard Rex, "New Light on Tyndale and Lollardy," *Reformation* 8.1 [2003]; Collinson, "William Tyndale and the Course of the English Reformation"). Tyndale refers to Wyclif a handful of times in his writings, primarily in relation to Wyclif's criticisms of the Roman Catholic Church (Smeeton, *Lollard Themes*, 75).

© in this web service Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-83081-2 — The Origins of the Bible and Early Modern Political Thought
Travis DeCook
Excerpt
More Information

containing Scripture were destroyed. Wyclif is emphatic that Scripture in this highest sense transcends all material forms, and is indestructible.[23] Ian Christopher Levy contends that despite the distinctiveness of Wyclif's mode of expression, he is merely conveying the traditional point that the faith of the church cannot fail.[24] In this light, we might see that Tyndale's statement that the New Testament always exists simply conveys the traditional Christian idea that the divine law is eternal. At the same time, Tyndale's mode of expression is significant in its contrast with Wyclif, who explicitly contrasts Scripture in the ultimate sense as the divine Word with the manuscripts that circulate it. Despite living in an era with an even more heightened attention to the material forms of Scripture's transmission, Tyndale consistently evades this distinction. Any acknowledgment of the material forms is conspicuously absent in Tyndale.

This ahistorical presentation of the nature of Scripture corresponds with Tyndale's characteristic portrayal of divine revelation generally: it is depicted as timeless rather than temporally unfolding, standing above history rather than unfolding within and through it. To be sure, there are exceptions to this tendency. For example, in his Prologue to Leviticus, he registers a sense of the development of revelation in time. Tyndale notes that the ceremonies of the ancient Hebrews "were unto them as an A.B.C. to learn to spell and read" since, living before Christ, they lived "in the infancy and childhood of the world."[25] Here he gives voice to a sense that the form in which sacred truths are communicated develops gradually within history, and advances a typological interpretation by stating that these ancient ceremonies gave a hint or glimpse of Christ, what he calls a "starlight of Christ," rather than full knowledge.[26] However, in keeping with a traditional understanding that

[23] Wyclif, *On the Truth of Holy Scripture*, trans. Ian Christopher Levy (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2001), 97–100. For discussions of Wyclif's account of Scripture's transcendence, see Levy, *John Wyclif's Theology of the Eucharist*, 85–87 and *Holy Scripture*, 58–59; Beryl Smalley, "The Bible and Eternity: John Wyclif's Dilemma," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 27 (1964): 83; A. J. Minnis, "'Authorial Intention' and 'Literal Sense' in the Exegetical Theories of Richard Fitzralph and John Wyclif: An Essay in the Medieval History of Biblical Hermeneutics," *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* 75 (1975): 13–15. This idea that Scripture as God's Word precedes its being written down was also advanced a few decades later by the fifteenth-century theologian John Bury (Levy, *Holy Scripture*, 229). Reflecting a critique leveled against Tyndale, Minnis argues that Wyclif's view of Scripture blinds him to the human agents involved in its production ("'Authorial Intention' and 'Literal Sense,'" 13–15).

[24] Levy, *Holy Scripture*, 60.

[25] Tyndale, "Prologue to Leviticus," in *Tyndale's Old Testament*, 145.

[26] Ibid., 146.

© in this web service Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-83081-2 — The Origins of the Bible and Early Modern Political Thought
Travis DeCook
Excerpt
More Information

Christ fully appeared to the original recipients of the Old Testament theophanies, Tyndale proceeds to express the idea that for a select few the revelation of Christ was fully known, and not merely glimpsed through shadowy types.[27] One of these select few recipients was Moses: Tyndale affirms that "God had shewed Moses the secrets of Christ and the very manner of his death beforehand."[28]

Tyndale's emphasis on revelation's transcendence of history has also been perceived in his hermeneutical method, which tends to sideline how words in Scripture take on particular connotations owing to historical and cultural changes.[29] A similar tendency has been noted by Jamie Ferguson in the way Tyndale's practice of biblical translation typically ignores both customary uses of language and the historical associations that words have acquired. When dealing with the words constituting Scripture – both in original languages and in their English renderings – Tyndale characteristically assumes a transparent relationship between word and referent unmediated by historical process and cultural variation.[30]

Finally, Tyndale's ahistorical conception of Scripture can be observed in yet another way in his *Answer to Sir Thomas More's Dialogue* (1531). Here, when arguing for the priority of Scripture over church, Tyndale writes that even if there was no writing before Noah, at this early point in human history God still "wrote His testament" in the form of sacraments and sacrifices. "And in them," he goes on, people living at this time "read the Word of God as we do in books."[31] In the 1573 edition of Tyndale's works compiled by John Foxe, this passage is glossed with a statement that picks up not only on the ahistorical but also the dematerializing

[27] On this traditional idea, see Hans Boersma, *Seeing God: The Beatific Vision in Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2018), 103–104.

[28] Tyndale, "Prologue to Leviticus," 146. See Simpson, *Burning to Read*, 214. The ahistorical nature of faith in Christ is also stressed in Tyndale's exposition on the will of William Tracy, a prominent evangelical, which was published in 1535. In this exposition Tyndale refers to Abraham's faith in Christ (*An Answer to Sir Thomas More's Dialogue, The Supper of the Lord After the True Meaning of John VI. and I Cor. XI, and Wm. Tracy's Testament Expounded*, ed. Henry Walter [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1850], 275).

[29] Matthew DeCoursey, "Erasmus and Tyndale on Bible-Reading," *Reformation* 1 (1996), n.p. However, as DeCoursey points out, in his *Brief Declaration of the Sacraments*, Tyndale discusses a "specialized type of metaphor" specific to the Hebrews.

[30] Jamie Ferguson, "Faith in the Language: Biblical Authority and the Meaning of English in the More–Tyndale Polemics," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 43 (2012): 1001–1003.

[31] Tyndale, *Answere*, 25.

© in this web service Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-83081-2 — The Origins of the Bible and Early Modern Political Thought
Travis DeCook
Excerpt
More Information

thrust of Tyndale's rhetoric: "writing hath been from the beginning."[32] Indeed, in Tyndale's presentation, the particularity of material form is transcended via the unitary conception of "Scripture," which is indifferently encountered in writing or in other visual and ceremonial forms.

The centrality of the Bible's transcendent, ahistorical nature in Tyndale's writing is highlighted when we consider it alongside one of the distinctive strategies Thomas More uses to promote his countervailing understanding of the scriptural texts. As was common among Catholic apologists throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, More emphasized their historical and material nature, and their susceptibility to corruption; in consequence, these apologists contended that Protestant appeals to Scripture's priority to the Church were based on a faulty conception of Scripture, and that in the face of scriptural contingency the Church was necessary as a divinely instituted guide into truth.[33]

Frequently, More portrays historical reconstructions of the biblical writings' original moments of production, and of the history of their subsequent transmission. When arguing for the Church's primacy with respect to Scripture in his first work of religious polemic, the *Responsio ad Lutherum* (1523), More writes, "If the church did not say that the gospel of John is John's, you would not know that it is John's. For you were not sitting by him as he wrote it."[34] More makes the traditional point here that Scripture is recognized as such by the Church, and does so by imagining a scene of biblical production. Here, St. John's writing of his gospel is a concrete event located in

[32] *The Whole Workes of W. Tyndall, Iohn Frith, and Doct. Barnes*, ed. John Foxe (London: John Daye, 1573), 255.

[33] For example, see More, *Responsio*, 99; Robert Bellarmine, *Disputationes de Controversiis Christianae Fidei adversus hujus temporis Haereticos* (Ingolstadt, 1581), 1.4.4; Henry Holden, *Analysis of Divine Faith* (Paris, 1658), 73–74; William Rushworth, *Rushworth's Dialogues* (Paris: Jean Billaine, 1654), 92–97; Richard Simon, *A Critical History of the Old Testament* (London: Walter Davis, 1682), I.7; III.160, 164, 166; *A Critical History of the New Testament* (London: R. Taylor, 1689), I. 32. In the seventeenth century the Protestant textual scholar Louis Cappel's work was mobilized within Catholic polemic by Jean Morin, who argued that the extant text was so corrupt as to confirm the necessity of the Catholic Church as upholder of the traditions and interpretative authority through which revelation was accessed (Jean Morin, *Exercitationes biblicae* [Paris, 1633], 198, cited in Legaspi, *Death of Scripture*, 21).

[34] More, *Responsio*, 91. This argument is also found in Henry VIII, *Assertio Septem Sacramentorum, or Defence of the Seven Sacraments*, ed. Louis O'Donovan (New York: Benzinger Brothers, 1908), 366. More offered some suggestions to Henry on this book before it was published (John M. Headley, Introduction to *Responsio*, 721).

© in this web service Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org