

THE TRANSLATORS

THE LESSON: THE WORD OF GOD IS LIVING AND ACTIVE

*“Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Saviour.”
(Ephesians 5:23)*

In the early days of the Christian faith the churches had local leadership and looked to the teaching of the apostles for guidance. But as Christianity spread and persecution subsided, greater power and wealth came to reside in the hands of its leaders. There began to be clashes over church jurisdiction, and arguments over which bishop (if any) should be regarded as the universal “father” of the Church. These clashes played a significant role in the rift between the Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches, and went on to create crisis within the western Church when rival nations began to throw their weight behind different factions (and vice versa).

By the sixteenth century the Church had experienced a wide range of leaders; some were humble men of integrity while others were duplicitous and scheming. There were many efforts over the years to bring about reform, and to call the Church back to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. But faithful Christians struggled to discern how they could best serve God in the times in which they lived, much as we do today.

*“For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword...
discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”
(Hebrews 4:12)*

Those seeking reform during this period had numerous concerns, some of which were doctrinal and others political. But many of them believed that the key to reform lay in empowering believers to read scripture for themselves so that they could hold to account those who sought to speak for the faith. Now the Church had used a Latin translation of the scriptures since the fourth century, and though many common people had learned to read, most could not understand Latin. Therefore reformers sought to provide translations of scripture in the “vernacular” – the language of the people.

John Wycliffe, a priest and theologian in England in the 14th century, was a forerunner of the Reformation, completing his translation of the scriptures into English in 1382. Though Wycliffe’s work got him into plenty of trouble with the Church hierarchy, he died naturally of a stroke while saying the Mass in 1384. More than a century later, William Tyndale also produced a translation of scripture into English. For this, and for his reformation views, he was captured, convicted of heresy, and executed in 1536.

*“No prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation.”
(2 Peter 1:20)*

Though there were many believers in many different places seeking to bring reform to the Church, the incident that set the movement ablaze happened in Germany in 1517. Martin Luther, a monk and university professor, authored a document that he called “95 Theses” – a list of areas in which he believed the Church had veered into error – and he posted this publicly. Luther’s dissension occurred close to the time of the invention of the printing press, which made it possible for his vernacular writings to be reproduced and spread quickly.

In 1521 Luther stood trial for heresy because of what he had written. He was called upon to take back what he’d said. This is how he responded:

“Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures and by clear reason (for I do not trust either in the pope or in councils alone, since it is well known that they have often erred and contradicted themselves), I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not recant anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. May God help me” (Brecht, *Luther*).

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Luther was excommunicated for his refusal to take back what he'd written. Shortly afterwards he translated the New Testament into German, working to complete and refine his translation of scripture throughout his life.

One of the key doctrines emphasized during the Protestant Reformation was *sola scriptura* – “the scriptures alone” – the belief that only scripture had authority in matters of Christian faith and practice. Anglicanism, which traces its roots to the reformation period, embraces the authority of scripture as the revealed Word of God, while understanding it to be illuminated by the Christian tradition and by reason.

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AT-HOME CHALLENGE

Each morning and evening, follow your own rule of prayer.

(IF YOU DON'T HAVE ONE, TRY SAYING THE MORNING AND EVENING PRAYERS FROM THE “FORMS OF PRAYER TO BE USED IN FAMILIES”, WHICH BEGINS ON PAGE 728 OF THE BCP. IF YOU DON'T HAVE A COPY, YOU CAN LOOK IT UP HERE: [HTTP://PRAYERBOOK.CA/RESOURCES/BCPONLINE/FAMILY-PRAYER](http://PRAYERBOOK.CA/RESOURCES/BCPONLINE/FAMILY-PRAYER).)

Review today's lesson. Choose a line of scripture or a phrase from the story of the scripture translators that you find edifying, inspiring or instructive:

Throughout this week, spend some time prayerfully reflecting on the phrase you've chosen. Decide on one concrete action you can take this week based on your reflections, *and* come back next week prepared to share a bit about your reflections and the action you took.

- AND/OR -

Take some time to pray through the following prayer.

O God, who by thy Holy Spirit hast given unto one man a word of wisdom, and to another a word of knowledge, and to another the gift of tongues: We praise thy Name for the gifts of grace manifested in the translators of scripture, and we pray that thy Church may never be destitute of the same; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (SUPPLEMENTARY COLLECT OF A DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH, POET, OR SCHOLAR, P. 317)