



PRESBYTERIAN HERITAGE

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Luther's Bible

*Luther, Melancthon, and
Pomeranus translating the Bible,
1846 lithograph*

In October 2017, Presbyterians will celebrate the 500th anniversary of a pre-digital tweet storm: Martin Luther's 95 Theses. The theses, which criticized the sale of indulgences by church officials, are considered the opening salvo in the Protestant Reformation, a movement that emphasized individual relationships with God and salvation through faith alone.

Luther was an early adapter of the printing press—the social media of the sixteenth century—and the most widely shared writer of his time. After

the 95 Theses, which legend has it he nailed to the doors of Wittenberg's All Saints Church in 1517, Luther's translation of the Bible into German is his most consequential work. He began the translation in 1521, encouraged by Philipp Melancthon, a professor of Greek and theology at the University of Wittenberg where Luther also taught. A vernacular Bible translation was central to Luther's radically democratic theology, which emphasized the primacy of Scripture and called for its availability in common languages.

(continued on page 4)

THE BATTLE OF PASRUR

Delegations from the Synod of the United Presbyterian Church of Pakistan attended the UPCUSA general assemblies that prepared and finalized the Confession of 1967. Among the attendees was K. L. Nasir, a teacher at Gujranwala Theological Seminary and adherent of Carl McIntire, a habitual protester at the assemblies and critic of the Confession.

In June 1967, a Nasir-led faction of Gujranwala faculty boycotted the synod meeting, believing the assembly-sanctioned Confession heterodox. Styling itself the true church, the group sued the synod in thirteen different jurisdictions for control of the Pakistani church.



Village church, Pakistan, before 1966

The 1968 meeting at the Presbyterian School in Pasrur began despite what mission worker R. Park Johnson called “continued vociferous objections” from the Nasir faction. Men gathered in the main aisle, shouting and elbowing each other. “Suddenly fists began to fly, the Secretary was manhandled, chairs were thrown back and forth across the aisle. Panic ensued.” Three-fourths of the commissioners returned to their seats, but Nasir’s followers withdrew to the lawn behind the auditorium. The synod later excommunicated nine ringleaders of the violence.

Nasir’s group continues today as the United Presbyterian Church of Pakistan. The synod merged with the Lahore Christian Council in 1992, creating the Presbyterian Church of Pakistan, a mission partner of the PC(USA) and member of the World Council of Churches.

The “Battle of Pasrur” is just one story contained in the India-Pakistan records (Record Group 500) that PHS staff processed last year, a new gem in our collections. See the guide at www.history.pcusa.org/IndiaPakistanRecords

JOURNAL PREVIEW

In the Fall/Winter 2017 issue of *The Journal of Presbyterian History*, Dr. Kenneth G. Appold reviews the history of Lutheran-Reformed relations to mark the 500th anniversary of Martin Luther’s 95 Theses. In the second featured article, Dr. Rick Nutt analyzes Presbyterian’s fierce opposition to U.S. diplomatic relations with the Vatican in the mid-twentieth century. Call 215.928.3865 to receive *The Journal* or visit www.history.pcusa.org/journal

Martin Luther



John Calvin



Reformation Bibles

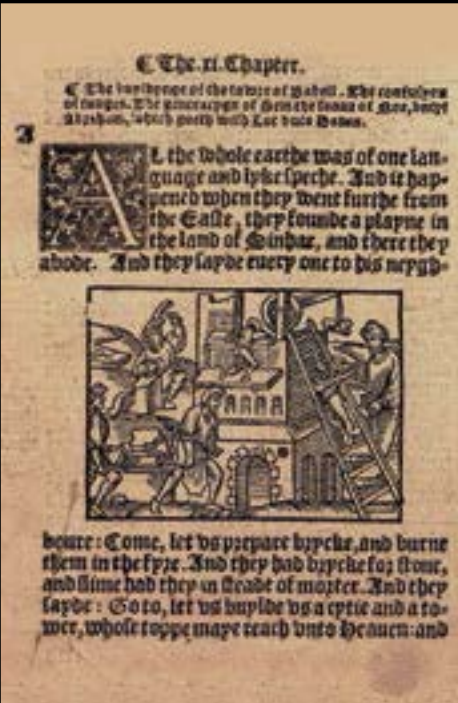
AT THE PRESBYTERIAN HISTORICAL SOCIETY



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03



04

- 01 Erasmus's Bible
Languages: Greek, Latin
Printed: Basel, 1516
- 02 Luther's New Testament
Language: German
Printed: Frankfurt, 1582
- 03 The Great Bible
Language: English
Printed: Paris & London, ca. 1540
- 04 The Geneva Bible
Language: English
Printed: Geneva, 1569

LUTHER'S BIBLE *(continued from page 1)*

German translations of the New Testament existed prior to Luther's version, but those referenced the Latin Vulgate—the official Bible of the Catholic Church which Luther criticized in his Theses. Desiderius Erasmus had published a 1516 New Testament in Greek and Latin, a work Luther used to translate his New Testament into German. First printed in September 1522, the "September Testament" does not include Luther's name on the title page, an elision meant to limit church reprisals. A year earlier, after being condemned by Holy Roman Emperor Charles V and excommunicated by Pope Leo X, Luther had taken refuge in Germany's Wartburg Castle.

Translating the Old Testament from Hebrew proved far more difficult than Luther's work with the New Testament. Wars, illness, and a lack of expertise in Hebrew slowed his progress to a virtual crawl, as did his insistence that the translation be relatable to all Germans. In his 1530 "Letter on Translating," Luther contended that the German translator "must not be led by the Hebrew words; he should make sure that he really understands the sense and ask himself: 'What would the German say in such-and-such an instance?'"

Luther was an experiential researcher, visiting local marketplaces in disguise to learn how ordinary Germans spoke. The application of his editorial philosophy led to some inventive interpolations. In the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible, he replaced the word "chameleon," which would have been unknown to sixteenth century Germans, with "weasel."

It took Luther and a team of fellow scholars—including Melancthon and Matthäus Aurogallus, a professor of Hebrew—twelve years to translate and publish the entire Old Testament. An abiding struggle was making the Old Testament prophets

sound German. As Luther wrote, "We have often spent a fortnight, or even three or four weeks, over a single word....Now that it is finished anybody can read it easily and smoothly....Little does [the reader] realize how we sweated and strained to remove those obstacles." The Pentateuch appeared in September 1523, and publication of the prophet books soon followed. Luther lectured at the University of Wittenberg based on his translations. German printers published many of his lectures.

The first complete Luther Bible was printed in 1534, including the Old and New Testaments and the Apocrypha. Luther did not think the Bible's books equally important—those that emphasized Jesus Christ he deemed authentic scripture; others (such as Revelations) he subordinated. While some criticized Luther for his textual relegations, others attacked him for editing passages to fit his preferred theology. Despite such criticisms, many German readers regarded his Bible as a work of literary genius, the way English readers would come to revere the King James Bible in the seventeenth century. Luther's Testaments had a lasting impact on German letters, popularizing the Saxon dialect as a standard regional vernacular.

As with the 95 Theses, the printing press helped to make Luther's Bible a popular success; a single Wittenberg publisher created 100,000 copies between 1534 and 1574. Luther's work went on to inspire other Biblical translations across Europe, including those in English by William Tyndale ("The Great Bible") and Myles Coverdale ("The Geneva Bible"), the latter of which the Puritans would bring to America.

PHS holds editions of these Reformation Bibles, shown on page 3. Find more images about the Protestant Reformation using our online archives:

www.history.pcusa.org/pearl

Luther's Bible,
1582

PEARL ONLINE ARCHIVES UPDATE

Over the past year, PHS has made thousands of collection items available online through our digital archives, Pearl. We've also been developing new ways for remote researchers to find and use these digitized items—on desktop computers, tablets, and smart phones.

We recently introduced 30 new subject-themed collections in Pearl, including ones focused on foreign and domestic mission work, education, social and political issues and activism, ecumenical and interfaith activities, early American history, and the Protestant Reformation. Users can browse these collections on the newly redesigned homepage.

Searching has also been improved. Users can now narrow their search by collection as well as search broadly across Pearl. Interested in images from a specific time period? Use our new date range filter to narrow your search.

We hope you'll take a look around Pearl and keep checking back to explore our growing collection of digital content: www.history.pcusa.org/pearl



500TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE REFORMATION ÷ 50 YEARS AT 425 LOMBARD STREET =

10 NUMBERS TO CELEBRATE IN 2017

34,000 cubic feet of preserved historical items

467 patron visits so far in 2017
(up 11% from last year)

6 Alexander Sterling Calder statues conserved and displayed

11 online exhibits on topics including the American Revolution, Hymnals history, and Civil Rights

250 blog posts ranging from preservation advice to stories from the archives

70% of staff members with a Master's degree or higher, and **40%** who are professional archivists

34 Preservation Grants awarded to churches to digitize their vital records

7,580 items to explore in our online archives, *Pearl*

16 years of printable bulletin inserts to celebrate Heritage Sunday and Reformation Sunday

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10 Numbers in 2017

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REFORMATION SUNDAY

To celebrate Reformation Sunday on October 29, download this year's church bulletin insert featuring "Luther's Bible" at www.history.pcusa.org/reformation-sunday