

Confessional Lutheranism: The Mother of Vernacular Bible Translation

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The Historical Setting¹

From the time of the apostles to the time of Martin Luther, very much unlike our present secular age, the “religious nature” of basic reality was very much in focus.

For the apostles and early Christians this “religious nature” of reality was normed by the “Apostolic Doctrine” with an emphasis on “repent and be baptized” in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins will be forgiven, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the *promise* is made to you and to your children and to all who are far off - for all whom the Lord your God will call” (Acts 2:38-39).

Already in those early days “the mystery of iniquity” was at work. Satan successfully scattered the seeds of pride and heresy in order to render Christ and the promise of full forgiveness of sins in Him of none effect.

At first the Church remained, for the most part, pure in faith and practice, firmly rooted in the “Apostolic Doctrine.” The clergy did not claim ruling power because they clearly remembered that it belonged to Christ as Head and to all the saints as members.

Later as Christianity was favorably recognized by the Roman Empire and as the churches grew in size, financial strength, influence, power, and worldliness they no longer saw themselves as the “communion of saints” with Christ as the head but as an earthly kingdom, in which the clergy became a hierarchy of rulers and the laity the ruled. Soon the influential clergy called themselves bishops with the bishop of imperial Rome taking to himself the powers of a supreme ecclesiastical monarch.

As a result from century to century the bishops asserted more explicitly, urgently, impertinently, their right, as “vicars of Christ,” to be the visible heads of all Christendom. Following the model of papal power in Rome, now biding their time, now forcing issues, now using “earth in defense of heaven,” now “heaven itself to defend earthly possessions,” consistently, relentlessly they strove to make the vision of earthly power a reality by converting the primacy of honor into the supremacy of secular power.

History was on the side of this march toward papal power. The Church in the East would not bow to papal Rome. With the rise of Islam it was forced either into total submission or into a peripheral position. In the West the Papacy of Rome played the power game with grand success. First it became more and more independent of control by the “Roman Empire” until during the time of the fall of “Eternal Rome,” finding a ready alliance with the Germanic migrations in the North the Papacy moved into the position of supreme power in what became known as the “Holy Roman Empire.”

In this empire the “Bishop of Rome” as “the vicar of Christ” was the head of a gigantic hierarchical corporation, which he called the kingdom of God, outside of which there was no salvation. In this kingdom the Pope made and unmade, at will, laws and articles of faith. He conditioned participation in this kingdom upon the administration of his sacraments by his priests. The Scriptures in the standard Latin translation (The Vulgate of Jerome), then one thousand years old, were judged to be dark and incomplete and so the Pope took it upon himself to interpret, supplement and at times totally pervert the Holy Scriptures on the basis of apocryphal legends, the teachings of tradition or on his own fancy, saying in effect: “Search not the Scripture; I am the Lord your God: I am the way the truth and the life.”

For his “infallible” ordinances he exacted unconditional obedience as the price of salvation. His hand was laid on men in their home, their education, their amusement and their business. He touched them in this life and in that to come, regulating the purgatorial sufferings and opening or closing the door of heaven itself. He taxed all Christendom with tithes and fees. Since in the papal kingdom all authority and administration on earth was derived from God by the Pope, all temporal rulers were of necessity, as no less a man than Augustine had taught in his *City of God*, subordinate to the Pope, and bound to do his bidding or lose their thrones. Active

dissenters were not only excommunicated and driven out of reputable association with their fellow-men, but handed over to severe punishment, inflicted, at the Pope's insistence, by civil authorities.

With the rise of the papacy, the formal principle (*principium cognoscendi*), that is the course and norm of all doctrine and life, was threefold in the Western Church. It included in descending order of importance the following principles:

- A. The *Decrees* of the Pope
- B. The *Traditions* of the Church
- C. The *Scriptures*

With this tripartite foundation the Western Church wandered further and further from the "Apostolic Doctrine" as revealed in Sacred Scripture which had been its bedrock during the first several centuries after Christ.

By the time of Luther the Western Church taught a complex road to salvation which included Christ not primarily as Savior but as stern and angry judge. This complex road to salvation focused primarily on man's own effort capped by priestly meditation and manipulation. The law was used to show man his sinfulness, but also and especially it led him to think that within himself there was some power for good. He was not shown from the Gospel that the merits of Christ were sufficient for the forgiveness of all sins, and that a gracious God for Christ's sake forgives us all our sins. Instead, man was told that since faith is to be accounted as little more than outward confession of the creed, works were necessary for salvation, chiefly works and mainly such as the Church prescribed, such as: fidelity to the Pope, auricular (heard with the ear) confessions, mass, celibacy, monasticism and invocation of Mary and of the saints.

With the flowering of the papacy, the most fundamental doctrine (material principle) of the Western Church was that salvation/justification before God could be obtained only through the Holy Mother Church and that on the basis of good works.

Man was told that the priests could forgive his sins as long as there was sufficient merit accumulated on his behalf. This merit was understood to include any basic merit in man which was never sufficient, plus the initial contribution of merit from Christ which had to be augmented by offering Christ up again and again in the sacrificial mass, plus additional merit which could be gained through doing penance, fasting, pilgrimages, flagellation and the like. The final supply of merit was gained for a consideration, normally financial, and was described as indulgences which were transferred to the sinner's account from the inexhaustible treasury of merit laid up by the saints and managed by the priests under papal authority through the Church.

In this situation man was, by design, made to tremble forever in doubt of the certainty of his salvation. In most cases he was delivered up to a greedy priesthood within the overall context of a greedy papacy to his own undoing. The more pious he was the more he was undone.

To enchant the victims of deceit the Pope spun out his system of salvation with attractive ceremonies and appealing melodies. But amid the pomp and pageantry of crowns and gowns, processions and genuflections, relics and rosaries, incense and candles and crucifixes, tinkling of bells and holy water, benedictions and consecrations, paternosters and Ave Marias—ceremonies not utterly unlike the prayer—wheels and the rituals of the Dalai Lama—where was the knowledge of a living God, or the loving all-sufficient Saviour from all sin?

Under Christian forms man was being offered for salvation the pagan creed of human works. The "mystery of iniquity" sat enthroned in God's temple. Rome gave its obedient children stones for bread. It fleeced the flock instead of feeding it. The house of God had become a den of thieves. At best the discipline of the Church helped to police unruly communities but it failed to effect their spiritual regeneration. In summation, we must conclude that the false doctrine that the Pope with all his worldly whims was the "vicar of Christ" had led to the DEFORMATION of the Church.

Luther: A product of his times

Luther like the other children of his age grew up in a religious world, a world as we have already mentioned above in which the sacred was, for most people, as important if not more important than the secular. That is the unconscious and primary world view of Luther's time still was one in which the "religious or spiritual nature" of things was understood as central to ultimate reality.

Luther grew up in a pious home. His father, Hans, was a copper miner. History speaks of Luther's father as "pure of character and of good conduct." Luther's mother, Marguerite, was known for her modesty, her fear of God and her constant communion with God in prayer. A basic feature of the Luther home was strict discipline. This discipline was strongly reinforced with the image of Jesus as the "stern judge." Martin Luther was taught early that the fierce anger of Jesus "the stern judge" could only be pacified and held back from destroying him by his own good behavior and by the help of the saints whose meritorious powers were controlled by the Church and the Pope.

In 1488, even before his fifth birthday Luther was sent to school. School in those days, following the supernatural world view of that time, gave religious learning a prominent position. Luther soon learned the Ten Commandments, the Apostles Creed, and the Lord's Prayer as well as Latin grammar, reading, and writing. His education continued through to a Bachelor of Arts degree at age nineteen, a Master of Arts degree at twenty-two, and finally a Doctorate of Theology at twenty-nine years of age.

In 1505, at the age of twenty-one, while attending school in Erfurt, Luther became preoccupied with the prospect of death and with his own sinfulness. He often thought about becoming a monk in order to save his soul from his many sins and thus have a better chance to enter heaven.

After the summer vacation of 1505 as Luther was walking back to school in Erfurt from his parents' home he was caught in a severe thunderstorm. Lightning struck round him and he was hurled to the ground. In a moment it was all clear to Luther. He was about to die. There was the all-terrible God ready to punish him for his many sins. A messenger of God was standing ready to seize him by the hair and ready to throw him into the fires of Hell. In utter terror he cried out to his father Hans' saint, the Patroness of Miners, "Saint Anne, help me! I will become a monk!"

All at once the storm passed; Luther had survived. He hurried to Erfurt to fulfill his vows. He became an Augustinian monk and with great determination he resolved to be a monk to the utmost. Not simple obedience, but full poverty, chastity, and a complete dedication to mortification of his flesh, fasting, prayers, and sacred readings. The more he tried the worse it got since in honesty he knew he could not perfectly satisfy God at any point.

In 1510 Martin Luther had a chance to go to Rome on behalf of the Augustinian Order. He jumped at this chance and used it as an opportunity to search for the spiritual indulgences and merits which would bring him peace. Rome was a total disillusionment for Luther. The absolute ignorance, foolishness, irresponsibility, and obscenity of the Italian Priests offended him. He saw them rattling through masses at six times the speed with which he could say a mass. He was shocked to see Italian Priests making jest of the sacred wine and bread. Again Luther came up short with feelings of total inadequacy and disgust not only with himself but also with the entire Church. Later Luther commented that he went to Rome with onions and came back with garlic.

Luther: Reformed by the Word of God

On his return from Rome Luther was transferred from Erfurt to Wittenberg. Under the kind direction of Staupitz, the Vicar of the Augustinian Order at Wittenberg, Luther was turned away from his own preoccupation with personal sin to the Scriptures and to teaching, preaching, and counseling. As he lectured on Psalms (1513), Romans (1515), and Galatians (1515-1517) the Spirit of God RE-FORMED Luther.

A new view of God was revealed to Luther. He found that the all-terrible God is also the all-merciful. Wrath and love fused into one upon the cross. The light really came on for Luther when the Spirit of God revealed to him on the basis of Romans 3:28, "the just shall live by faith," that the justice of God in the Scripture stands for two things. One is God's demand for complete perfection but the other is the perfect righteousness of God himself which, on the basis of God's undeserved grace and pure mercy, God graciously

uses to justify his own demand for complete perfection. The key for Luther was that God does this through faith and not through works. Further, that even this receiving hand of faith is a gift worked in our hearts by the Spirit of God through the Word of God.

In Luther's own words we read, "Night and day I pondered until I saw the connection between the justice of God and the statement that 'the just shall live by faith.' Then I grasped that the justice of God is that righteousness by which through grace and sheer mercy God justifies us through faith. Thereupon I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise. The whole of Scripture took on a new meaning and whereas before 'the justice of God' had filled me with hate, now it became to me inexpressibly sweet in greater love. I ran through the Bible, insofar as I could remember the appropriate texts, and found similar thoughts everywhere, e.g., God's work is that which God works in us; God's strength is that by which God makes us strong; the wisdom of God is that with which he makes us wise. So now I praise the 'righteousness of God' with a love as strong as the hate which once had possessed me. It became to me a most glorious word. This text of Paul had truly been to me the gateway of paradise."ⁱⁱⁱ

Luther the missionary-reformer

Once the Word of God had become for Luther not a vehicle of death but the very breath of life, he could not keep quiet. His regular lectures at Wittenberg University from various portions of Scripture led him to a rock-hard certainty that the Scripture was the only source and norm of Christian faith and life and that going back to Scripture alone for the authoritative pattern of religious reality was being true to the doctrine and life of the ancient Church. What he learned from the Scripture he immediately shared with his students and colleagues in the University and the Church.

Two centuries before Luther's time preaching was nonexistent. By the time of Luther preaching orders had developed. Their habit was to read sermons written in Latin or tell stories of saints and share popular legends. In 1514, just prior to the time that God helped Luther to see the spiritual light of "justification by grace through faith," Luther became an assistant to the parish church in Wittenberg. He immediately became a preacher of a new type. He preached the Bible. He spoke not in Latin but in clear, easy-to-understand German. He took aim at the hearts of men by preaching against astrology, witchcraft, saint-worship, religious pilgrimages, indulgences, omens, signs and charms. He addressed the needs and sins of the people and never failed to hold high the cross and to preach the glory of God's grace and forgiveness in Jesus Christ. His model of preaching spread not only throughout Germany but also to many other countries since one-third of the sixteen thousand theological students enrolled at the University of Wittenberg between 1520-1560 were from other countries.

Confessional Lutheranism: Back to Biblical Basics

Confessional Lutheranism was the natural outgrowth of Luther's powerful and straightforward act of personal confessing. It was the result of his dynamic and dramatic break with the entrenched medieval view of reality. It was Luther's uncompromising proclamation of the truth of God victoriously maintained and sustained in confrontation with the Church, the Pope, the Emperor, the accepted "world way" of thinking and the devil that set the stage for Confessional Lutheranism.

Luther's thoughts and confrontational assertions were discussed and publicly debated as theses (1517) long before they were crystallized into a formal and systematic series of statements of basic belief. Even after the process of written formalization started with the presentation of the Augsburg Confession to Emperor Charles V at the Diet of Augsburg in 1530 it was 50 years before the complete Book of Concord was published in 1580.

What then is the relationship between these Lutheran Confessions and vernacular Bible translations? Now in order to get directly at that question I would propose that out of the fiery setting which we have carefully placed in mind we consider specifically the Lutheran Confessional view of the formal and the material

principles of true religion in direct contrast to the formal and material principles of the medieval Church with the Pope as its head.

We have already recognized that the Western Church under the Pope had, as its source and norm of all doctrine, a tripartite formal principle listed in descending order of importance:

- A. The *Decrees* of the Pope
- B. The *Traditions* of the Church
- C. The *Scripture*

The Reformation began with Luther strongly questioning the first two parts of the Medieval Church's tripartite source and norm of all doctrine. The 95 Theses of 1517 are replete with questions about the extent of papal authority. Thesis 76 states, "We affirm, on the contrary, that papal indulgences cannot take away even the least of venial sins in regard to guilt." Many other of these 95 theses including at least 5, 6, 20, 21, 33, 42, 45, 48, 49, 52, 75, 79, 82, 83, and 84 also question the Decrees of the Pope as being a fit source and norm for doctrine.

The 95 Theses also question the *Tradition of the Church* as an acceptable source and norm of doctrine. Thesis 27 states, "They preach human doctrine who say that the soul flies out of purgatory as soon as the money thrown into the chest rattles." Many other of these 95 theses including at least 32, 34, 35, 36, 37, 39, 43, 46, 47, 53, 54, 55, and 80 also question the Traditions of the Church as a fitting source and norm of doctrine.

The 95 Theses also suggest what Luther saw as important, by way of a proper source and norm of doctrine, a proper formal principle, in thesis 53, which reads, "They are enemies of Christ and of the Pope who, in order that indulgences maybe preached, condemn the Word of God to utter silence in their churches." And again in thesis 54, which reads, "Wrong is done to the Word of God when in a sermon as much time is spent on indulgences as on God's Word, or even more."

For Luther, the central and most important teaching, the material principle, of the Word of God was Gospel. Thesis 62 says, "The true treasure of the Church is the Holy Gospel of the glory and grace of God." And thesis 68 underlines this material principle by saying, "Yet they (indulgences) are in reality in no degree to be compared with the grace of God and the piety of the cross."

When it comes to the Book of Concord the FORMAL PRINCIPLE, that is the source and norm of all doctrine and life, is clearly identified as Scripture alone. What follows are some of the more important supporting quotes taken directly from various parts of the Lutheran Confessions:

1. In these last times of this transitory world almighty God in His immeasurable love, grace, and mercy toward mankind has permitted the pure, unalloyed and unadulterated light of His Holy Gospel and of the Word that alone brings salvation to appear to our beloved fatherland, the German nation, and to light our way out of papistic superstition and darkness. Therefore a short confession was compiled out of the divine, prophetic and Apostolic Scriptures (Preface to the Book of Concord, p. 3, Tappert edition).
2. Nothing is taught in our churches concerning articles of faith that is contrary to the Holy Scripture (Augsburg Confessions, Article about Matters in Dispute, p. 48, Tappert edition).
3. We have introduced nothing, either in doctrine or in ceremonies, that is contrary to Holy ScriptureIf anyone should consider that it (the Augsburg Confession) is lacking in some respect, we are ready to present further information on the basis of the divine Holy Scripture (Augsburg Confession, Conclusion, p. 96, Tappert edition).
4. The Word of God shall establish articles of faith and no one else, not even an angel (Smalcald Articles, Part II, p. 295, Tappert edition).

5. He (the devil) cannot bear to hear God's Word. God's Word is not like some empty tale, such as the one about Dietrich of Bern, but as St. Paul says in Romans 1:16 it is, "the power of God," indeed the power of God which burns the devil and gives us immeasurable strength, comfort, and help (Large Catechism, Preface, p. 360, Tappert edition).

6. We believe, teach, and confess that the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testament are *the only rule and norm according to which all doctrine and teachers alike must be appraised and judged*, as it is written in Psalm 119:105, "Thy Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." And St. Paul says in Galatians 1:8, "Even if an angel from heaven should preach to you a Gospel contrary to that which we preach to you, let him be accursed." Therefore, other writings of ancient and modern teachers, whatever their names, should not be put on a par with Holy Scripture. Every single one of them should be subordinated to the Scriptures and should be received in no other way and no further than as witnesses to the fashion in which the doctrine of the prophets and apostles was preserved in post-apostolic timesIn this way the distinction between the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament and all other writings is maintained, and Holy Scripture remains the *only judge; rule and norm* according to which, as the *only touchstone*, all doctrine should and must be understood and judged as good or evil, right or wrong. Other symbols and other writings are not judges like Holy Scripture, but merely are witnesses and expositions of the faith, setting forth how at various times the Holy Scriptures were understood by contemporaries in the Church of God with reference to controverted articles and how contrary teachings were rejected and condemned (Formula of Concord, Epitome, pp. 464-465, Tappert edition).

These quotes from the Lutheran Confessions make it abundantly clear that in contrast with the tripartite formal principle of the Medieval Papal Church, which included the decrees of the Pope, the tradition of the Church and the Scriptures, the FORMAL PRINCIPLE, which is also the first distinctive principle of the Lutheran Reformation, is *Scripture alone (SOLA SCRIPTURA)*.

The second distinctive principle of the Christian faith, the MATERIAL PRINCIPLE, as it is often referred to in Lutheran theology, is the Gospel. That is the good news that man is justified in the sight of God on the basis of the grace of God through faith.

The Book of Concord speaks clearly about this principle also. What follows are some of the more important supporting quotes taken directly from various parts of the Lutheran Confessions:

1. It is also taught among us that we cannot obtain forgiveness of sins and righteousness before God by our own merits, works, or satisfactions, but that we receive forgiveness of sins and become righteous before God by grace, for Christ's sake, through faith, when we believe that Christ suffered for us and that for his sake our sins are forgiven and righteousness and eternal life are given to us (Augsburg Confession, Article IV, p. 30, Tappert edition).

2. They (the papists) condemn us for teaching that men do not receive the forgiveness of sins because of their own merits, but freely for Christ's sake, by faith in Him. They condemn us both for denying that men receive the forgiveness of sins because of their merits, and for affirming that men receive the forgiveness of sins by faith and by faith in Christ are justified. In this controversy the *main doctrine of Christianity is involved*. (Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article IV, p. 107, Tappert edition).

3. In the words of the Apology the Article of "justification by faith is the chief article of the entire Christian doctrine without which no poor conscience can have any abiding comfort or rightly understand the riches of the grace of Christ." In the same vein Dr. Luther declares: "When this single article remains clear, Christendom will remain pure, in beautiful harmony and without any schisms. But when it does

not remain pure, it is impossible to repel any error or heretical spirit (Formula of Concord, Solid declaration, Article III, p. 540, Tappert edition).

4. The first and chief article is this, that Jesus Christ, our God and Lord, “was put to death for our trespasses and raised again for our justification” (Romans 4:25). He alone is “the lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). “God has laid upon Him the iniquity of us all” (Isaiah 53:6). Moreover, “All have sinned,” and “they are justified by His grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; by his blood” (Romans 3:23-25). Inasmuch as this must be believed and cannot be obtained or apprehended by any work, law, or merit, it is clear and certain that such faith alone justifies us, as St. Paul says in Romans 3, “For we hold that a man is justified by faith apart from the works of the law” (Romans 3:28), and again, “that He (God) Himself is righteous and that He justifies him who has faith in Jesus” (Romans 3:26). Nothing in this article can be given up or compromised, even if heaven and earth and things temporal should be destroyed. For as St. Peter says, “There is no other name under Heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). “And with His stripes we are healed” (Isaiah 53:5). On this article rests all that we teach and practice against the Pope, the devil, and the world. Therefore we must be quite certain and have no doubt about it. Otherwise all is lost and the pope, the devil, and all our adversaries will gain the victory (Smalcald Articles, Part II, Article I, p. 292, Tappert edition).

These quotes from the Lutheran Confessions make it abundantly clear that, in contrast to the material principle of the Medieval Papal Church which taught that salvation/justification before God could be obtained only through the Holy Mother Church on the basis of works, the MATERIAL PRINCIPLE of the Lutheran Reformation teaches that salvation/justification before God is received by *grace alone (SOLA GRATIS)* and by *faith alone (SOLA FIDE)*.

Implications for Bible Translation

In the second and third century before Christ the Old Testament Scriptures were translated into Greek. This translation, called the Septuagint (LXX), was completed so that non-Hebrew and non-Aramaic speaking Jews who lived outside of Palestine could “come to know the truth and be saved.” Between 40 A.D. and 100 A.D. God gave us the New Testament in the Greek language. During the three hundred years just after the “Apostolic Age” (100 A.D. - 400 A.D.) translations of Scripture were made in Syriac, Armenian, Georgian, Coptic, Ethiopic, Gothic, and Latin. This was done so that the people who did not read Greek could “come to know the truth and be saved.”

During these first four hundred years after Christ the “Apostolic Doctrine” was strongly in place and thus the source and norm for Christian truth was the Old and New Testament without the addition of the traditions of the Church or the non-inspired sayings of Church leaders. Thus it is clear that the Spirit inspired desire of the early Christians that all “come to know the truth,” no matter what their native language, linked with the conviction that the Word of God in the Old and New Testament alone was “that truth,” was the driving motivation for a good number of vernacular Bible translations.

Further, it is extremely significant that from approximately 400 A.D. for one thousand years Bible translation was not an important activity of the Church. During this time the Latin Vulgate translated by Jerome in 405 A.D. was the Bible of the entire Western Church even though there were many non-Latin speaking people in the Church. In fact as the years went by Latin became a “Church language” that not even the Italian, French, Spanish, and Portuguese peoples understood without learning it as a foreign language.

Why did Bible translation not receive high priority during this period? The answer, I believe, is that the formal basis for doctrine had changed. During this period the traditions of the Church and the decrees of the bishops and finally of the Pope far out-shined Scripture as the source and norm of doctrine and so there was

little concern for the Scriptures to be made available in the language that the ordinary priests and the people could understand.

Now, I hope, it all begins to make sense for you. In fact the direct and almost automatic connection between Confessional Lutheranism and vernacular Bible translation can now be logically predicted.

Since it was the direct study of the Scriptures, especially the Psalms, Romans, and Galatians, that the Spirit of God used to give Luther a RE-FORMED and vital life-giving view of true religion, it is natural that for him and also for Lutheran Confessionalism the Scriptures in the vernacular languages of the people should be key, not only as the source and norm of all religious thought and doctrine, but also as the natural vehicle for inculcating the true religion into the hearts and lives of others. Certainly it was the Word of God, and nothing else, that Luther confessed in his preaching and teaching.

Luther in his preface to the New Testament says it in his own words as follows, “This report and comforting message, these divine evangelical glad tidings, are also called a *New Testament*, because, as in a testament, by which a dying person disposes of his goods and orders them to be distributed among his appointed heirs after his death, Christ, prior to His death, has given command and direction to proclaim this Gospel throughout the world after His death, therewith bestowing on believers, as their possession, all His goods, to wit, His life, by which He has swallowed up death, His righteousness, by which He has wiped out sin, and His salvation, by which He has defeated eternal damnation. A poor human being that is dead in sins and consigned to hell cannot be told anything more precious than this blessed, loving message concerning Christ.”

In order to communicate this “comforting message” clearly and well it was necessary for Luther to move the Biblical concepts out of the Hebrew, Greek, and Latin language into the German tongue. At first he did this more or less automatically in his utterly Biblically based oral teaching and preaching. He tried it this way and that way until he got it right both in terms of easy-to-understand German and in terms of an accurate rendition of the original meaning.

Already in 1517, the year of Luther’s memorable Wittenberg theses, he had begun to put some of his oral translations, particularly of the Psalms (6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 103, 143), into writing. Between 1518 and the appearance of the German New Testament Luther continued the process of perfecting his translation process on key sections of Scripture. After he had worked each one of them out through oral presentation he wrote down his dynamic and easy-to-understand oral translation for others to read and understand. By 1521 he had done this with eleven key sections of Scripture.

In 1521, on his return to Wittenberg from the Diet of Worms, Luther was kidnapped by five armed riders who took him to the Wartburg Castle for safekeeping. This was necessary, since on June 15, 1520 he had been excommunicated by Pope Leo X and on May 26, 1521 he was put under the imperial ban by the Emperor Charles V. From May 4, 1521 to March 1, 1522, a period of ten months, Luther stayed in hiding at the Wartburg. In order to make the Word of God available to all of the German people he wrote out the translation of the entire New Testament from the original Greek into an accurate and easy-to-understand German translation. The first edition of this New Testament consisted of five thousand copies printed in Wittenberg by Melchior Lotter.

As the years went by, Luther, in the midst of a great deal of other work, continued with the translation of the Old Testament. In the Old Testament work a good number of his colleagues at the University were of noble assistance to him. In 1534 he completed the translation of the entire German Bible. His work of Bible translation united the various German dialects into one and gave German a universally accepted form which later became known as classic High-German. Luther’s German translation immediately became the norm for all German Bible translation for the next four hundred years.

We have contended that Luther’s high view of Scripture as the sole rule and norm of faith made his German Bible translation a natural. It is also my feeling that the understanding of “justification by grace through faith in Christ Jesus” played an important role in HOW Luther did his translation.

Luther and Confessional Lutheranism took great joy in the incarnation of Jesus Christ, in the fact that Jesus Christ took our place under the law, that He became all things for us so that He might fully redeem us. The principle is that Christ made all the adjustment in working out our redemption. He came all the way to us.

In like manner, as Luther got into the work of translation he felt it was absolutely necessary for the Scriptural message to take on the full skin of the people, that is, to be fully inscripturated just as Christ became fully incarnated in order to serve and to save us.

In order to get a taste of Luther's approach to Bible translation we will turn to some of his quotes on that subject:

1. Translation is not an art that everyone can practice. It requires a right, pious, faithful, diligent, God-fearing, experienced practical heart (WA30, II, 640).
2. One may not ask the Latin language how to speak German...one must ask mothers in the home, children on the street, the common man at the market, and watch carefully how they speak. After that one may translate. Then those who read will understand you and know that you are speaking German with them (WA30, II, 637).
3. I endeavored to make Moses so German that no one would suspect he was a Jew (*Open Letter Concerning Translation*).
4. In translation you cannot speak German with a Greek or Hebrew tongue (*Open Letter Concerning Translation*).
5. Your reader must be able to read God's Word "as though it were written yesterday" (WA12, 444).

The result of Luther's work was that persons from all ranks of life could read the German Bible translated by Luther with full understanding and joy. Cochlaeus, one of Luther's bitterest opponents, put it this way, "Even shoemakers and women become so absorbed in the study of Luther's German New Testament that they are able to carry on discussions with doctors of theology" (Four Hundred Years, Dau, p. 115).

The news of Luther and his views which put Scripture back in place as the basis for all true Christianity raced throughout Europe, especially to England. There at Oxford University, another church scholar came to believe that "it is impossible to establish the lay people in any church unless the Scriptures are plainly laid before their eyes in their mother tongue."ⁱⁱⁱ He was William Tyndale. Using Luther's German translation as a model, Tyndale by 1524 had translated the New Testament into English. Since the English church hierarchy would under no circumstances approve an English Bible, Tyndale packed his belongings and went to Wittenberg in order to spend an academic year learning from Luther and his colleague, Melancthon.

The first edition of three thousand English New Testaments was published in 1526. Because they could not be published in England they were published in Worms, Germany, a situation made possible because of Tyndale's close relationship with Luther. These New Testaments were smuggled to England in sacks of wheat. The Church authorities in England did everything they could to stop the people from getting these New Testaments. When almost the entire first edition was destroyed, it looked as though they had succeeded. However, Tyndale's English New Testament continued to come off the press faster than the authorities could destroy them. In the next period some additional fifteen thousand copies were printed in Worms. Meanwhile Tyndale continued with Old Testament translation. When he had finished about one-half of the Old Testament he was betrayed and imprisoned in Belgium. After a year and a half in prison Tyndale was strangled and his body burned at the stake. His last words were a prayer, "Lord open Thou the King of England's eyes.

In 1535 under the careful work of Coverdale the first complete English Bible was published. Soon after this Tyndale's prayer was answered. During the reign of Henry VIII the English Church authorities reversed their judgment on the Bible and the second edition of the entire Bible was printed with the King's permission. By 1519 the English church authorities stated that every church was to set up a Bible of the largest size so that the common people could read it or have someone read it to them.

Conclusion

The thesis of this paper is that there is a direct connection between Confessional Lutheranism and Bible translation. We have seen that during the Middle Ages with a formal principle that emphasized the decrees of the Pope and the traditions of the Church there was little Bible translation but that with the reformation which put Scripture alone in its rightful place the Word of God became important and Bible translation developed as a natural outgrowth of the formal principle of Luther and the Lutheran Confessions.

This stone of Bible translation which had been cast into the pool of religious life has continued to move out in ever-expanding circles into the vernacular languages of the world including English, French, Spanish, Portuguese, the languages of the Scandinavian countries and on into the numerous languages of Africa, Asia, and the Americas until at the end of 1988 there are some 1,849 languages of the world with at least a portion of the Holy Scripture in their language. Three hundred and one of these languages have full Bibles. Six hundred and thirty-six additional languages have a New Testament and 914 additional languages have some portion of Scripture.

If we have agreed that Scriptural Confessional Lutheranism is the mother of vernacular Bible translation then we in 1989 who are especially interested and committed to worldwide outreach for Christ with the Gospel of “justification by grace through faith in Jesus Christ” will continue to give Bible translation a very high priority in our list of things to get done in missions.

Personally I see Bible translation as a most basic, if not the most basic, foundation stone for all Christ-centered and Biblically based mission efforts.

ⁱ A number of key concepts in this first section have been gleaned from pages 1-10 of *Four-hundred Years* by Professor W.H.T. Dau, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, MO, 1917.

ⁱⁱ Bainton, *Here I Stand*, pp. 49-50.

ⁱⁱⁱ American Bible Society, *How Our Bible Came To Us*, p. 18.