

MORE THAN WORDS

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REFORMATION

Reflecting on the Reformation

by Dr David Tan, Chief Editor



2017 marked the 500th anniversary of the Reformation which began on 31 Oct 1517 when Martin Luther nailed his 95 *Theses* on the University of Wittenberg's chapel door. Luther was also an advocate for vernacular scriptures and translated the Bible into German himself. He believed that "a simple layman armed with Scripture is greater than the mightiest pope without it." Luther's vernacular German Bible significantly influenced the spread of Protestant Christianity outside Germany. It influenced William Tyndale's English translation which formed the basis of the King James Version of 1611, and also other vernacular translations of the Bible throughout Europe.

Of course, Luther was building on the foundation laid by the early pioneers of the Reformation, in particular John Wycliffe, who advocated the doctrine of Scripture as the sole authority of our faith and practice. John Wycliffe also believed that the Bible should be available to everyone in the vernacular. As we reflect on the impact of the Reformation, let us also remember the important part that vernacular or heart language scriptures played in the history of the church.

Today, 500 years on, Wycliffe Singapore, together with members of the Wycliffe Global Alliance, continue to build on the foundation laid by these reformers to advocate for and provide the Bible to every people group in a language which resonates with their hearts. We believe this is crucial for the transformation of lives and communities.

In this issue of *More Than Words*, we have an article reflecting on the Reformation. Besides that, we highlight various ministries which help achieve our goal of reaching and discipling people in their heart languages. *Art – the Language of the Soul* shows us how the arts can help lead people to engage with vernacular scriptures. Community development projects can often be a gateway to starting Bible translation projects. *Order in the Chaos* is an observer's account of a translation development workshop which builds capacity in mother tongue translators.

Grace and peace for the new year.

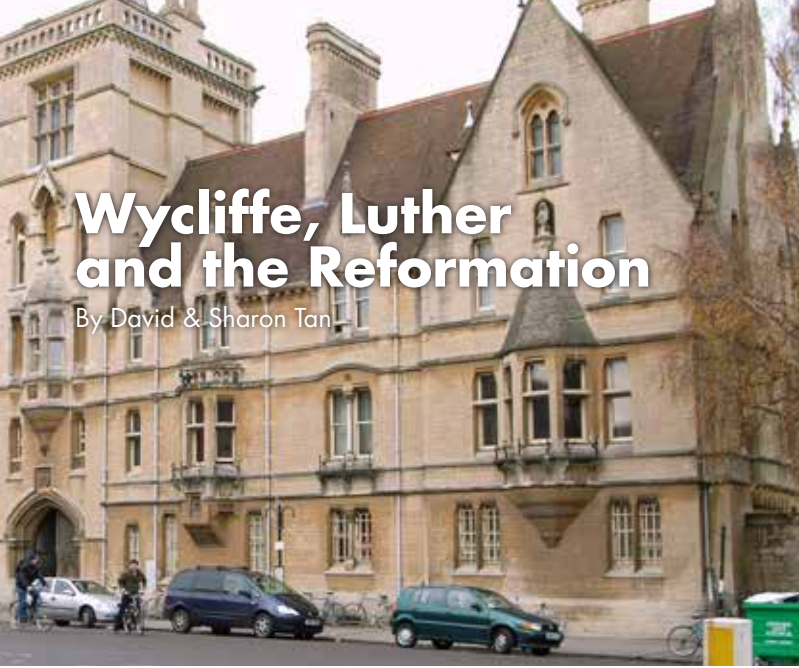
A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dan'.

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Wycliffe, Luther and the Reformation

By David & Sharon Tan



Balliol College, Oxford. Photographer: Steve Cadman. Flickr Creative Commons.



John Wycliffe.

You say it is heresy to speak of the Holy Scriptures in English. You call me a heretic because I have translated the Bible into the common tongue of the people. Do you know whom you blaspheme? Did not the Holy Ghost give the Word of God at first in the mother-tongue of the nations to whom it was addressed?

– John Wycliffe, responding to his accusers.

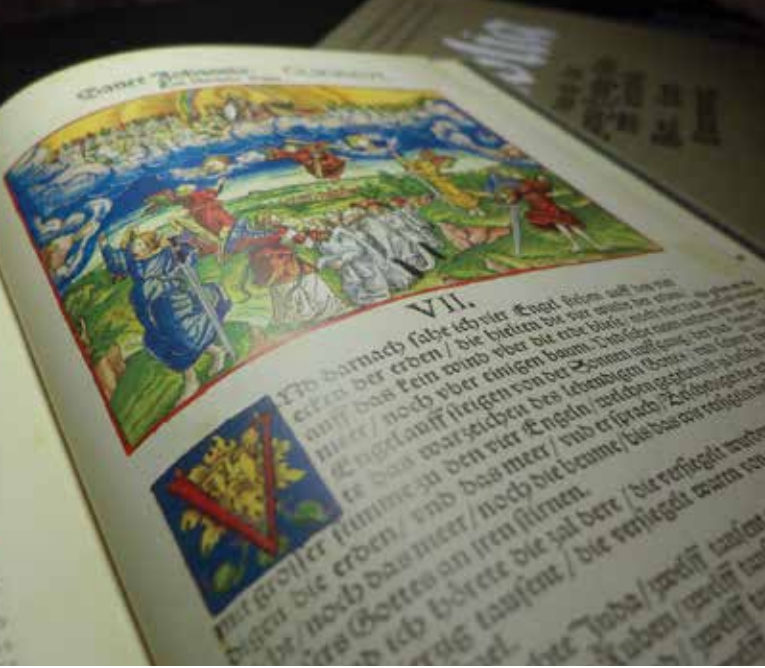
John Wycliffe (1330–1384) was called the Morning Star of the Reformation. Although he died 130 years before Martin Luther wrote his *95 Theses* in 1517, his life and work influenced others such as Jan Hus, a Czech priest and early reformer, and Luther himself.

Wycliffe was at one time the Master of Balliol College, Oxford. Although he taught philosophy, he was drawn to theology and strongly believed that the Scriptures were the only reliable guide to the truth about God, as reflected in his significant work, *On the Truth of Sacred Scripture*. This led him to a firm conviction that the Bible should be available to everyone in the vernacular. He completed a translation of the Bible from Latin into English in 1382, a heresy punishable by death under Roman Catholic law. In fact, in 1415, after his death, the Council of Constance declared Wycliffe a heretic and ordered that his bones be exhumed and burned, and the ashes cast into a river.

The man known as the Father of the Reformation, Martin Luther (1483–1546), was a monk and a German professor of theology. To understand Luther, it is important to understand his own personal experience of the grace of God. Luther initially hated the word “righteous” in Rom 1:17 — “The righteous will live by faith.” That was because he knew that a righteous God would punish unrighteous sinners, of which he was one. It was only upon much further reflection that he later understood “that the righteousness of God is that through which the righteous lives by a gift of God, namely by faith”. His description of his experience of being justified by faith was “as if I were entirely born again and had entered paradise itself through the gates that had been flung open”.

Luther’s own experience of justification by faith led him to protest against the practice of selling indulgences, which was the key issue in the *95 Theses* he nailed to the door of All Saints’ Church, Wittenberg. The Roman Catholic Church’s view on indulgences was that freedom from God’s punishment for sin could be purchased with money. In fact, a popular jingle of that time, often attributed to Johann Tetzel, was:

*Sobald der Pfennig im Kasten klingt,
die Seele aus dem Fegfeuer springt.
(As soon as the coin in the coffer rings,
the soul from purgatory into heaven springs.)*



Facsimile edition of Luther's German Bible. © Ed Suominen. Flickr Creative Commons.



Martin Luther, by Cranach.

Luther taught that the most important truth in Christianity was that justification (i.e. God's act of declaring a sinner righteous) was by faith alone through God's grace. Luther also contended that inner spiritual repentance was required in order for sins to be forgiven, not merely external sacramental confession. He argued that indulgences caused Christians to avoid true repentance by leading them to believe that they could forgo repentance by purchasing an indulgence.

Luther's 95 Theses went viral; translated from Latin into German and reproduced using the latest technology of the day (the printing press), it spread throughout Germany in two weeks, and all over Europe in two months. A phenomenal speed in those pre-digital days!

Eventually declared a heretic by the Roman Catholic Church, Luther went into hiding. Knowing that many Germans could not understand the disputed matters because they were unable to read the Latin Bible, he championed the right for any individual to read and understand the Scriptures for themselves. He went on to translate the Bible into German. He said, "A simple layman armed with Scripture is greater than the mightiest pope without it." Luther's vernacular German Bible also had significant influence over the spread of Protestant Christianity outside Germany.

It influenced the English translation by William Tyndale which formed the basis of the King James Version of 1611, and also other vernacular translations of the Bible throughout Europe.

Members of Wycliffe Bible Translators continue to press on to make the Bible available in the heart languages of all ethnic peoples who need it. Today, across the world, there are about 2400 projects in progress, but there are still about 1800 languages which do not yet have any Bible translation work. Please continue to pray for this crucial work of translation and transformation.

If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his language, that goes to his heart.
– Nelson Mandela

Dr David Tan is the Executive Director of Wycliffe Singapore. He and his wife, Sharon, served overseas for several years, and are now continuing to participate in the work of Wycliffe in the Singapore office. They have 2 daughters aged 20 and 18 years.

Art: The Language of the Soul

by Levene



Girls learning a traditional dance. Photographer: Marc Ewell.
© Wycliffe Global Alliance.



Dancer. Photographer: Elyse Patten.
© Elyse Patten.

It is often said: "Art is the universal language". Without words, a painting or a song can convey joy and gladness, grief and sadness. Art speaks to each of us in a unique way. Every culture or people group expresses themselves through art in some way — be it stories, songs, dances or drawings. This insatiable desire to create can only be attributed to the God who created the world — we reflect His creativity through expressions of our own.

For most of us, our culture and identity is closely knit with artistic expressions, many of which are central to rituals to commemorate significant events in our lives and community. To forsake these rituals would be a declaration of isolation and separation from the community. Unfortunately, for many people groups today, when individuals turn to Jesus and embrace a new way of life, they are viewed as forsaking their own culture and community. Christianity is perceived as a foreign religion — with its Western songs, instruments, and style of worship.

One morning, a group of believers from four different hill tribes gathered in a church, a quiet haven in a busy city. They sat in a circle and shyly shared the songs and poems they had created since they had last met, two-and-a-half years ago, in the same place. Then, they had learned that every culture and language is precious to God, and that they could worship God even more meaningfully through their own language and cultural expressions.

Dao*, from the Jishan* tribe, sang a lilting chant in a strong steady voice, in a style very similar to what he sang as a shaman before coming to know Christ. Hoang*, from another tribe, played on a stringed instrument commonly used in his village. It had a body fashioned from a gourd, with a long slender neck holding the strings taut. It was his first time sharing this song with anyone outside his family, he said.

The Senior Musicologists and Arts Consultants from SIL listened attentively. They

shared how encouraged they were to see the progress. These new songs, they explained, were not just for the believers themselves, but would be the very tools that they would use to bring the gospel right into the heart of their communities.

In order for the message of the gospel to effectively reach its audience, the messengers have to take into consideration the culture of the listener while maintaining the accuracy of the scripture the message is based on. The illustration given was that of an arrow and a target. The feathers on the arrow (culture and scripture) help to balance and stabilise the arrow so that it hits its target accurately. An imbalance on either side would cause the arrow to miss the mark.

For many people groups, it is a radical idea that they can worship God in their own language and songs. The good news of Jesus Christ is for all cultures and all peoples, and they are not required to turn away from their own cultures to embrace a foreign one.



When people worship in their own culture and language, God becomes even more real to them, and it is a powerful witness to their community that God loves their language, culture and people.

Watch the video for the full story at the link: <https://wycliffe.sg/blog/ethnoarts>

** Not the real names.*

Levene serves in Wycliffe Singapore as an Event Coordinator and Communications Designer. She has a degree in Design and Illustration and has a passion for children's books. She is excited to be able to explore how her passion can be used as part of God's work in missions!

Ada* Bible Dedication (August 2017)

After seven years of hard work, the Ada Bible was printed! A group comprising representatives from Wycliffe Singapore and Covenant Presbyterian Church, a supporter of the project, attended the Bible dedication.

The Ada language is one of three in the Basera* language cluster (18,600 speakers). These people live in remote villages in a Southeast Asian country and are mainly subsistence rice farmers. The other two languages in the cluster held their Bible dedications in November and December 2017.

** Not the real names.*



The team from Singapore.



The celebration feast.



Guests were warmly welcomed.



Community Development: Meeting Felt Needs

Go to the people, live among them, learn from them, love them. Start with what they know, build on what they have: But of the best leaders, when their task is accomplished, their work is done, the people all remark, "We have done it ourselves."

- attributed to Chinese sage, Lao Zi

Wycliffe's focus is life transformation through God's Word. However, in cases where a community is not yet interested in Bible translation, or the language team needs a valid reason to live among the minority people in a closed country, a gateway project can help raise awareness and open closed doors. Community development (CD) projects which offer practical help are tangible ways to demonstrate love and build relationships with a community and local officials. When they experience such care, they are more likely to be open to God's love and eventually desire to have His word in their language.

Language teams may start CD projects to address specific community needs such as health education, agricultural improvement

and income generation. This type of work requires many skills and specialties in a wide range of areas such as health, agriculture, water purification, education and business. As a result, language teams often need the help of other volunteers who can provide such skills.

The aim of the CD specialists is to encourage community members to get involved in the projects along with the foreign volunteers. This also serves to increase their confidence and capacity to work together to reach their own goals and meet their own needs. CD workers hope that community leaders will eventually be able to take over the work, adapt strategies to meet their community needs, and seek outside help only when needed.

Read about the experience of the Jin language project in Asia, illustrating how CD can be closely integrated with translation work.

If you would like to find out more about opportunities to partner language teams to serve such communities, please contact Wycliffe Singapore (<https://www.wycliffe.sg>).

Community Development and Translation: The Jin* People Group

by Reenie

These people are so kind. They came all the way to our place to help us. They have sponsored one of the village girls for a heart operation and now she is well.

- Jin village head

These words were spoken by the village head at one of the village meetings held to discuss the clean water project for their village. Each family in the village pledged to contribute labour and the smaller pipes for the water project while financial resources and the larger pipes were supplied by believers overseas. This glimpse of the love of Christ through meeting their felt needs marked the beginning of a good relationship with the community.

A few years later, a few villagers accepted the Lord and a small house church was formed. Later, when government officials warned the villagers not to associate with us, the villagers fearlessly told the government officials, "Without them, we would not have clean water to drink." And, the local believers continued in their faith in the Lord. Praise the Lord for His sustaining grace!

Beginnings

When I was sent to serve among the Jin people, I needed a valid reason to live in the rural area where Jin people were. Amazingly, two weeks after attending a training programme on CD and poverty alleviation, I found out that there was a poverty alleviation project among the Jin people. Through helping in the poverty alleviation project, I was able to live in the area, live among the Jin people and learn their language. Over the years, God has provided funds through a variety of sources, including through a couple I only met once, who then went back to their home country and raised funds for the Jin people.

Over the years, the CD projects we have worked on include:

- Education: Sponsoring school and living expenses of children from poor families, up to university level if they qualify. Our hope is that higher education will lead to improved living conditions and higher standards of living. From time to time, we also visit their families to care for and

* Not the real names.



Children walking to school. Photographer: Marc Ewell. © Wycliffe Global Alliance.

encourage them. We also raised funds to build a school dormitory.

- Water: Providing clean water to over 30 families.
- Biogas: Contributing materials to build biogas systems for the individual homes in partnership with the local government. Human and animal manure is converted to fuel for lighting and cooking.
- Medical: providing medical care through the local hospital for the sick, both non-believers and believers, who are poor and in need of help. We bring them for medical checks and treatment, care for them, and pay their medical expenses.
- Handicraft: Purchasing handicrafts from the villagers to provide them with another source of income. The handicrafts are sold overseas and the profits channelled back to help the poor and meet medical needs.
- Micro-enterprise: Helping to start businesses such as rearing animals and selling street food. The current focus is to help local church leaders and believers to earn a living while being involved in ministry.

Deepening Relationships

CD work has helped us build trust relationships with the Jin people and has widened our network among them. Besides giving us the opportunity to share Christ with them, it has greatly helped the progress of the translation project. The medical ministry in particular works closely with the local church leaders and believers. This relationship makes it easier for us to partner with them in checking and improving the translation and the promotion of heart language scripture use. Many of the Jin who have come to know the Lord have been using the translated Bible stories and songs. They need more Scripture and songs in their heart language to grow strong in the faith, and the CD projects have made it possible for us to live among them and provide such materials to them.

Reenie has lived and served among the Jin people for more than 10 years.



Villagers working together on the water project.



Biogas pit.

Order in the Chaos

by Jane



Photographer: Marc Ewell. © Wycliffe Global Alliance.

I have just returned from a five-week stint in South Asia, a place I never dreamed would become so indelibly etched in my heart. The workshops were a beautifully jumbled flurry of activity. Mother-Tongue Translators (MTTs) had come from four separate language projects to have their translations checked and to attend English classes. At the same time, a number of foreigners had come to attend the first Translation Consultant Development Workshop (TCDW) in the country.

Translation Workshops

I was surprised to see just how much happened at a translation workshop. Obviously, translation was a big part: MTTs brought their translated portions or stories to be checked by consultants for clarity, accuracy, naturalness and acceptability. These translations had already been checked within their communities.

There was a lot of academic work. MTTs had classes every day to help them grow in their faith and become better translators. English was taught so that they could use English translation tools and resources. Some of the them were working toward academic degrees in translation awarded by a local university. These credentials will equip them for future life even after the translation work is complete.

The workshop provided leadership training. The MTTs organised and facilitated many components of daily life such as the morning storytelling devotions and team reports. They also took charge of Sunday services, Testimony times and Fun Nights where everyone could laugh, dance, and de-stress. The community of the workshop was a safe place to practise and develop useful leadership skills.

MTTs leave workshops with many tools for translating the Word into their language and to effect transformation in their communities. They carry back booklets of the work they have done, storybooks for literacy projects and community development, and the intangible skills to be leaders in their families, churches and villages. God equips his people and sends them out, armed with his Word. It is beautiful.

My Role in the TCDW

When I first agreed to help at this workshop, it was to help teach Semantics. Great, I thought, I could put my Linguistics degree to work and it was an area I could succeed in. But shortly before the workshop, I found they already had enough people to teach Semantics. Would I be interested in helping as a Translation Advisor in Training (TAT) instead? What was a TAT? No one had a clear description that I could understand, but I agreed anyway.

A TAT was a new role, and I was a guinea pig! In essence, the TAT's role was to help clean up the translation in a pre-check so that the consultants, who were often under extreme time pressure, could quickly identify the most important issues. This would speed up the translation process. After all, the goal was to get the Word out there!

An important part of that clean up was to make sure that the back translations were consistent with the MTTs' language. The MTT's translation would have been translated into the national language and then into English to make it accessible

to English-speaking consultants. With so many languages in play, the potential for confusion was high. Often we would find that something had been lost in back translation!

It was a steep learning curve for me. God pulled me out of my comfort zone to a place He could succeed in using me. Then, a few weeks in, some of the students needed help writing their project essays and I was thankful to be able to help, but now clearly knowing it was not in my own strength.

Some Thoughts

I was continually struck by the closeness fostered by the community at this workshop. Every person there had known loss, loneliness or isolation in some form. Even so, as hard as we worked – and we worked hard! – the workshop was a place of spiritual renewal and encouragement for individuals spread thin in their responsibilities at home.

Last October, my husband was posted to a South Asian country and I followed him there. This was not what I wanted to do. I didn't know anyone there and found the culture



extremely difficult to adjust to. Now I see that if not for the struggles and growth I encountered in moving to another country, I would never have been prepared for the time at this workshop. In fact, after meeting other brothers and sisters from my new “home country” at the workshop, I find I can love it more. God is softening my hard, selfish heart.

He is also showing me what true discipleship looks like. Who in their right mind would go to a dangerous place with harsh living conditions to work their fingers to the bone for nothing? It just doesn't make sense without God. But after five weeks, it was so incomprehensibly rewarding that I didn't want to leave.

And if God calls me back, how can I say no?

Jane claims that she is a little crazy. She has long had an interest in Bible Translation and has volunteered with Wycliffe Singapore for a number of years. Last year, she followed her husband to the exotic region of South Asia. Since writing this, she has been invited to help at the workshop again, and she has said “Yes!”



Photographer: Marc Ewell. © Wycliffe Global Alliance.



Photographer: Marc Ewell. © Wycliffe Global Alliance.



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