

Key Stage 2

Dissent, Diversity and Danger in the Christian Church

LESSONS 3 AND 4: LOST IN TRANSLATION?

One of the ways Luther's original protest electrified first Germany then the rest of Europe was his translating of the Bible into German. Prior to that the Bible was presented in Latin, a language very few ordinary people understood. Priests were necessary to guide ordinary people in accessing the Bible's teachings and commands. However, once people could hear the Bible in a language they understood, the role of priests was called into question. The Church had nurtured and guided communities through the priesthood for hundreds of years, so Luther's challenge as to their purpose was distressingly revolutionary to many, as well as exciting and liberating to others.

In these lessons pupils will find out about how the Bible came to be translated into English through the work of two men, Wycliffe and Tyndale. This happened after Luther's German Bible, and by the time the Bible appeared in English, most European countries were used to the Bible in the local language. Pupils will learn why the English Bible translations were made and why people risked their lives to make them, as well as think about whether important texts should be updated to reflect changing times, or whether something important could be lost in translation. Pupils will consider arguments regarding why the 'priesthood of believers' was so exciting for some, and so challenging for others.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

LESSON 3: WYCLIFFE AND THE ENGLISH BIBLE

This lesson explores Wycliffe's reasons for translating the Bible into English in the late 1300s. The class will learn briefly that he was declared a heretic and his work banned. This could have meant imprisonment, violence and even death. You might not want to dwell on this, but the fact that Wycliffe and others persevered shows how much they believed bringing the Bible in English to English speakers was the right thing to do. This lesson explores arguments for and against change in religion, allowing pupils to think about how aspects of religion do change over time.

By the end of this lesson pupils will:

- **know** that Wycliffe translated the New Testament into English in the late 1300s
- **understand** why Wycliffe did this, and why the Church objected
- **reflect on** the value of updated versions of traditional teachings, and the value of sticking with tradition

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

1: RECAP: HEARING GOD'S WORDS

LESSON CONTENT

- a. Remind pupils of the four characters encountered last lesson who all took slightly different positions with regards to Luther's new church and the traditional Church.

Ask pupils to remind you why individuals stayed with the Church or were attracted to Luther's church.

- b. Display an image of Luther's German Bible translation (search Google Images for 'Luther Bible'). Ask pupils to remind you why some people welcomed this work and others preferred the traditional Latin teachings mediated by a priest.

FURTHER INFORMATION

- a. Herr Bertolf and Father Albert: loyal to tradition, Herr Kristoff: interested in Luther but loyal to Church, Herr and Frau Johannes: huge supporters of Luther's German Bible.

2: WYCLIFFE'S BIBLE

LESSON CONTENT

a. Show a picture of Jesus talking to a crowd of people (search Google Images for 'Jesus teaching'). Ask if Jesus would have been speaking to them in a language they understood.

b. Display this quotation by a fourteenth-century Englishman called John Wycliffe, and identify what he is suggesting:

'Christ and his apostles taught the people in that tongue that was best known to them. Why should men not do so now?'

(From *On the Pastoral Office*, c. 1378.)

c. Wycliffe translated the Bible from Latin to English in the late 1300s. Show an image of Wycliffe's Bible by searching online.

Display these translations of Genesis 1:3:

Genesis 1:3 in Latin (translated from Greek in late fourth-century CE)

Dixitque Deus fiat lux et facta est lux.

Gen 1:3 in the Wycliffe Bible (translated between 1382 and 1395)

And God said, Light be made, and the light was made.

(Wycliffe Bible Copyright © 2001 by Terence P. Noble.)

Genesis 1:3 in the New International Version (translated in the 1970s)

And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light.

(Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV® Copyright ©1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.)

Ask pupils which is easiest to understand. Ask if pupils think it is important to update the Bible to reflect changing times, or do they think important meanings could become lost in translation?

FURTHER INFORMATION

a. Jesus and his followers were all from the same area. They would have spoken a language called Aramaic (the basis for Syrian, Hebrew and Arabic).

b. Wycliffe is suggesting that Jesus and his apostles would have taught the people in a language they understood, so today God's words should be heard in English by English people.

c. Pupils can compare the Latin which was the normal way of hearing God's words, to this early English version. Wycliffe tried to create a translation that people would find familiar by using the sort of English that was spoken.

The New International Version is a modern translation to reflect modern English.

You will return to this question in the following section. It may therefore be helpful to ask pupils to jot down their thoughts.

NB: most people who could read English in this period would also be able to read Latin. The English Bible would have been heard by ordinary people rather than read.

3: A TRADITIONAL OR NEW BIBLE?

LESSON CONTENT

- a. Teach that Wycliffe's Bible was banned in 1408 as well as all subsequent English translations. Explain that Wycliffe was declared a heretic and his followers persecuted. After he died, his body was dug up, burnt and his ashes scattered in a river, away from the holy ground of a churchyard.

Invite pupils to reflect on why he and his followers would have taken such risks.

- b. Give the 'New Bible vs Traditional Bible' worksheet on p. 8 out to groups or pairs. Hand out the 'Arguments' squares on p. 9. Ask groups or pairs to place them in either column, depending on whether they support a traditional Bible or a new Bible.

Alternatively copy the worksheet format onto the board and work through the arguments as a class, reading each one and deciding in which column to place it.

- c. Return to the question at the end of the previous section: 'Is it important to update the Bible to reflect changing times, or will meaning become lost in translation?' Discuss pupils' responses after this argument task. Have any views changed?

FURTHER INFORMATION

- a. A heretic is someone who is considered to be in the wrong by the Church. Heretics were often imprisoned, tortured and even killed. Wycliffe and his followers took this risk.
- b. Different pupils might have different views. Allow this, but ask for explanations.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

LESSON 4: TYNDALE AND THE ENGLISH BIBLE

In this second lesson we focus on William Tyndale and his contribution to the translation of the Bible into English. Tyndale lived a century later than Wycliffe, and believed just as passionately that people must be able to hear or read the Bible in their own language. Tyndale took the same risks as Wycliffe: imprisonment, torture and the threat of being burnt alive as a heretic. Tyndale did most of his writing in exile in Germany, and missed England very much. He was eventually betrayed, captured and executed by being strangled and then burnt. You might not want to share this fact with the class, but focus instead on what Tyndale's determination reflects about the centrality of the Bible in Protestant Christianity.

Pupils will think about what changes Luther's protest brought about in European Christianity, as well as the reasons why the changes were resisted.

By the end of this lesson pupils will:

- **know** that a century after Wycliffe, William Tyndale was also determined to translate the Bible into English
- **understand** Tyndale's reasons for pushing for an English translation
- **reflect on** the value of a 'priesthood of believers'

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

1: STARTER: THE BIBLE IN CHRISTIANITY

LESSON CONTENT

- Look at the arguments on the worksheet from last lesson (pp. 8–9). Ask groups or pairs to choose one argument which explains why the Bible is important to Christians. Ask for a few to be read out.
- Create an 'opinion line' across the front of the classroom using string or rope. Pin the words 'own understanding' at one end and the words 'expert guidance' at the other. Ask pupils which they think is best, when it comes to reading the Bible for Christians.
- Ask pupils to place themselves on the line as to their opinion, and share thoughts with a partner for one minute.

FURTHER INFORMATION

- Pupils may choose quite different arguments. This is fine. The activity aims to recap the previous lesson.
- This activity also aims to recap previous ideas. Invite all responses.

2: TYNDALE'S BIBLE

LESSON CONTENT

a. Show an image of Tyndale's Bible, such as this page on the British Library website: www.bl.uk/collection-items/william-tyndales-new-testament

b. Read to the class the paragraph below to set the scene:

'In 1523 William Tyndale, a priest from Gloucester in England, decided to create a new translation of the Bible in English himself. However the king had forbidden this, and once he started, Tyndale realised it was so dangerous he would have to leave the country. He went to live in Germany where he would be safe. All over Europe the Bible was being translated into local languages but it was illegal in England. Punishment would certainly involve prison and maybe torture, and even being burnt alive. William Tyndale knew that once he had published the book there would be no going back to England. He would always be at risk.'

c. Ask groups to discuss for two minutes and then offer a reason as to why they think Tyndale was so determined to make a new English translation.

d. Gather reasons and jot them on the board. Put the reasons below on the board, written onto card, before comparing to the class' answers:

- Christians should follow the words of the Bible.
- Christians need to understand the words of the Bible.
- The Bible contains the words of God.
- Christians cannot achieve salvation if they do not know God's words.

e. Return to the opinion line created in this lesson (lesson 4), activity 1b. Give pupils a minute to place themselves on the line after this discussion. Have any views changed? Give a minute to share their thoughts.

FURTHER INFORMATION

a. Wycliffe's English translation was banned in 1408. Tyndale began his in 1523.

b. You could display an image of Tyndale from the internet as you read.

Tyndale did not use the Latin translation as the basis for his Bible, as Wycliffe had done. He worked straight from the original Greek and Hebrew.

c. Tyndale was a Protestant reformer. He accepted Luther's original argument that individual Christians will find God through their own faith. In order to come to this position of genuine faith in God, Christians must be able to consider the words of the Bible for themselves.

This explains the centrality of the Bible in Protestant churches.

3: A 'PRIESTHOOD OF BELIEVERS'

LESSON CONTENT

- a. Play a game of Chinese whispers either as a whole class or in groups.

Explain that the Qur'an is only considered genuine in Arabic; a translation is not, strictly speaking, a Qur'an. Ask the class why Christians should be able to hear the Bible in translation – why shouldn't they learn the original Hebrew and Greek to hear the words of God? Relate the discussion to the game of Chinese whispers.

- b. Brainstorm as a class what pupils think a priest's role is. To focus pupils' thoughts, ask them to decide which of a priest's roles are about **helping or guiding** people, and which are about **leading** people. Ask the class if they would say a priest has a closer link to God than someone who is not a priest. Allow all answers – this is an open question to get pupils thinking.

- c. Show a famous image of Luther as a priest, painted by Lucas Cranach the Elder in 1529. Ask if the class remember that Luther was a monk when he originally protested. Ask what happened to him after his protest.

Read about Luther's idea of a 'priesthood of believers' on p. 10 as a class.

Extension: for further information, read the following text on 'anticlericalism' in addition (p. 10).

- d. Ask pairs or groups to read the 'priesthood of believers' text on p. 10 again with highlighters ready. Pupils should highlight the text which suggests priests are not necessary or not a good idea. Then ask pupils to create one or two arguments AGAINST a priesthood.

Secondly, ask groups to summarise the purpose of a priesthood of believers in 15 words maximum. Share answers.

Extension: if you also read the anticlericalism information, ask pupils to discuss the question: *is change always a good thing?*

- e. Return to the brainstorm of pupils' ideas as to the role of a priest. Ask them to suggest reasons for why challenging tradition can be a good thing, and for reasons why the guidance of a body such as the Christian priesthood is of value.
- f. Return one more time to the opinion line from activity 1b (lesson 4) and ask pupils to line up. Have any ideas changed?

FURTHER INFORMATION

- a. Can pupils see the similarity between the game and Bible translations? A long and complicated message, passed on over many years by many different people, runs the risk of being changed.

- b. For example support, teach, nurture, *provide stability, act as a source of authority, a role model, etc.*

- c. *Luther opposed the Pope's authority and was expelled from the Church. He publically burnt the letter informing him of this expulsion!*

- d. The purpose of this task is to understand the value of a priesthood of believers rather than to be critical of a priesthood.

Traditional Bible

New Bible



<p>The traditional Bible is trustworthy and reliable</p>	<p>Centuries of expertise lie behind the traditional bible</p>
<p>Christians can only attain an individual connection to God through understanding of the Bible</p>	<p>Christians need to read or hear the Bible in a language they understand</p>
<p>The Bible is to be directly experienced, not via a priest's explanations.</p>	<p>Wycliffe's Bible follows traditional teaching. It is not 'new', it is in English</p>

A Priesthood of Believers

Although this is not a phrase used by Luther, he started the discussion by suggesting that all humans are equal in the eyes of God. Priests are not 'more holy' than those who are not priests.

The idea developed into the 'priesthood of believers'; anyone who had accepted the truth of Christianity was like a priest because they could tell others about Jesus. It is their faith in God that makes them special to God, not any training.

Protestant churches still use priests to support and guide people, and to officiate at important life events such as marriage and funerals. However in the Protestant Church priests are not seen as any better than those who are not priests. All Christians must find their own connection to God.

Anticlericalism

'anti' = against

'clerics' = priests in the traditional Church (from the Greek *klerikos*; 'priest')

'anticlericalism' = resentment of or opposition to the traditional priesthood

In Germany before Luther's time there was dislike of clerics, largely because all popes and most senior priests were Italian rather than German. It was not so much the fact of popes and priests that annoyed the German people, but the use of the Italian language instead of German in religious matters.

Luther did not disagree with having priests, but argued that priests should not get in between an individual's connection to God. However many people who hated the priesthood used Luther's teachings to justify conflict and sometimes violence:

- Posters were produced depicting priests as wolves and the pope as a dragon.
- In Cambridge in 1520 a man shovelled a lump of cow dung and dumped it on a priest's head.
- Hugely popular plays were performed all over Europe which represented priests as greedy or foolish.