

Friday Sep. 14, 1:30-3:30 pm – “More and Luther”

Chair : Rev. Dr. Jonathan Arnold (Magdalen College, Oxford)

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Translations of Five Key Words in the New Testaments of the 1483 Deutsche Bibel and Luther, More and Tyndale

Before the Reformation there were fourteen translations of the Vulgate into High German. One of the best was published in Nuremberg by Anton Koberger in 1483, and Luther probably read it. However, Luther made his NT translation (September 1522) from the original Greek in the second edition of Erasmus' NT (1519).

Thomas More quoted the Latin NT, usually from the Vulgate, but sometimes from Erasmus. More also translated many NT verses into English. In *Dialogue Concerning Heresies and Confutation of Tyndale*, More attacked Tyndale for his translations of “agapē,” “metanoia,” “charis,” “ekklēsia,” and “presbyteros.” Having studied Tyndale's translations of these key words, I now compare their translation by 1483 and Luther.

More objected to Tyndale's translation of “agapē” as “love” because there are good and evil kinds of love. 1483 and Luther both chose “liebe” because it is the normal German word for “love.”

More rejected Tyndale's translation of “metanoia” as “repentance” instead of “penance” because More accepted auricular confession in the Sacrament of Penance. 1483 and Luther both chose “buße” because they saw no intrinsic opposition between a change of heart and a rite.

1483 and More translate the Vulgate's “gratia” as “genad” and “grace.” The beauty of the translation of “charis” in Erasmus, Luther, and Tyndale is the variety they give to 1 and 2 Corinthians: three or four words in addition to “gratia,” “gnade,” or “grace.”

1483 and More translate the Vulgate's “ecclesia,” as “kirch” and “church.” Luther wanted to revive the fellowship (“gemeynshafft”) of local churches so he translated “ekklēsia” always as “gemeyne.” Tyndale wanted to restore their local autonomy so he translated “ekklēsia” as “congregation.” More was so committed to the unity of Christendom that he uses two verses twelve times each to assert the primacy of Peter (Matt. 16.18) and the necessity of obedience (Matt. 18.17b).

About AD 375 the name “presbyteros” for “elder” absorbed the meaning of “hiereus” for “priest” (OED). In AD 382-384 Jerome corrected the Old Latin text of the NT so this evolved meaning found its way into the Vulgate NT. In naming officers of Christian communities, 1483 follows the Vulgate. More cites only those Vulgate verses that use “presbyter” so he translates them with “priest.” Luther and Tyndale wanted to restore the name and office of “presbyteros” as found in the NT and early Church so they translated “presbyter” as “el(l)tister” and “elder.”

1483 preserved traditions and More championed them. Luther embraced continuity and change but Tyndale was more radical.

