

Primus Truber (1508–1586), the Slovenian Luther

by LUKA ILIĆ

June 2008 marked the quinentennial of the birth of Primus Truber (Primož Trubar), commemorated in many different ways throughout the year in the Republic of Slovenia, Germany and beyond.¹ UNESCO has placed this event onto its list of significant anniversaries; and in May of 2008 the European Central Bank put into circulation one million commemorative EUR 2 coins (fig. 1) bearing Truber's image.² Slovenia has also issued a postal stamp honoring Truber (fig. 2). The jubilee year was inaugurated by the country's president on February 7, 2008, unveiling a bust of Truber at the National and University Library in Ljubljana. Numerous exhibitions, conferences, concerts, excursions and other special events are planned to celebrate the anniversary, which took place during Slovenia's six-month turn at the rotating presidency of the European Union. Even a documentary film has been produced about Truber's life.

The accomplishments of Primus Truber are of outstanding importance for Slovenian culture. He was the author of the first Slovenian books (*Abecedarium* and *Catechismus*, 1550) and the first translator of the Bible (Psalms, 1566; the complete New Testament, 1582). Truber is considered to be the founder of Slovenian literature and of the modern Slovenian language, having developed theologi-



Fig 1 *The EUR 2 coin issued in 2008 in honor of Truber*



Fig 2 *The commemorative stamp of Truber and his catechism*

cal and juridical terminology. Altogether, he published about thirty books, mostly in Slovenian but also in German. His works also included the first printing of Slovenian music.

Truber's Life Journey

Truber was born on June 9, 1508, in the village of Rašica,³ seventeen miles south of the present-day Slovenian capital, Ljubljana. His father, Miha, was a miller whose piety Primus observed as a child and later wrote about. He sent his son to be educated first in Fiume⁴ on the Adriatic Coast in the fall of 1520 or at the beginning of 1521,⁵ then at the school of St. Peter's Benedictine Monastery in Salzburg, where Primus remained for three years. During this time Primus sang in the choir, both at church and in the streets, in order to support himself. It was here that he met Bishop Peter Bonomo (1458–1546) from Trieste, who invited Truber to come and be a singer in the bishop's choir and an attendant of his, while continuing his education. His studies in that environment, influenced by the Renaissance and humanism, included theological training and deepening his knowledge of languages.

At the beginning of 1528 Truber was sent to continue his studies at the University of Vienna. Soon after his arrival he witnessed the burning at the stake of the Anabaptist preacher, Balthasar Hubmaier, and the drowning of his wife in the Danube, which left a deep impression on him and contributed to his later conversion to Protestantism. Primus was forced to leave Vienna around Easter 1529, as the army of the Turkish Sultan Suleiman I was beginning to lay siege to the city. Truber returned to Trieste, where in 1530 he was ordained for the

priesthood by Bishop Bonomo. His first parish was Laško in Slovenia. During his pastorate he started reading literature written by Luther and the Swiss reformers. All this reading, together with the works of Erasmus, already familiar to him from his time in Trieste, began impacting his theology. Truber was invited to become preacher at St. Nicholas Cathedral Church in the city of Ljubljana in 1536. There he was advocating religious, moral and institutional renewal within the church and maintained contact with Protestant laypeople in the city. In the 1540s Truber began serving communion in both Roman Catholic and Protestant ways in Ljubljana. As a result of the Protestants' defeat in the Schmalkaldic War, the Roman Catholic position was strengthened and at this point the Catholic bishop in Ljubljana, who was trying to rid his territory of any influence of reform-minded priests, exiled Truber from Slovenia in March of 1548. He escaped to Nuremberg, where the preacher Dietrich Veit (1506–1549) offered him refuge. It was only then that Truber officially left the Roman Catholic Church and joined Lutheranism.

Upon Veit's recommendation Truber was given a preaching post in Rothenburg ob der Tauber; here he was inspired to share the message of the Reformation with his fellow nationals in Slovenian. As he later wrote, "The great love and worship that I harbor for you (my countrymen), and the grace given to me by God, my priesthood, this calling and God's commandment force and urge me to do this."⁶ As a result, the first book in the Slovenian language, *Catechismus*, was printed in 1550. Drawing on a variety of sources, including catechisms by Martin Luther and Johannes Brenz (1499–1570), it contained a litany, hymns, Bible expositions, and also a sermon on the true faith by Croatian-born Matthias Flacius Illyricus (1520–1575). Soon afterwards, Truber published his second work, *Abecedarium*, a spelling book meant to teach people to read Slovenian. With these two publications, Truber established the basis for the Slovenian literary language. After five years spent in Rothenburg, where he got married and his first son, Primus Jr. was born, he moved south, closer to his homeland. Truber became pastor in Kempten, where he served from 1553 to 1561.

Already in 1555 Truber began to correspond with Heinrich Bullinger (1501–1575) in Zurich at the request of Pietro Paolo

Vergerio the younger (1498–1565).⁷ Vergerio had talked to Gessner, a publisher in Zurich, about printing the whole New Testament in the Slovenian language.⁸ Even though those plans fell through, Truber kept up his correspondence with Bullinger and was also reading his works.

At the end of 1559 Truber got caught in the middle of the Sacramentarian controversy and was accused of being a Crypto-Calvinist. One of his personal letters was intercepted in which he condemned the discord between Lutherans and the Reformed and expressed his own views, which were somewhere in the middle between the two. The letter was then given to the chancellor of Tübingen University, Dr. Jakob Andreae (1528–1590), who immediately expressed his suspicions of Truber to Duke Christopher of Württemberg (1515–1568). As a result the Duke forbade Truber from publishing and ordered a detailed check of all of his previous publications to establish if there was any hint of Zwinglian spiritual understanding of the Lord's Supper in them. Truber then recanted and confessed that he believed in the real presence of Christ's body and blood in Holy Communion.⁹ His Slovenian biographer Mirko Rupel questions the sincerity of this change of conviction and concludes: "... he was too deeply caught up in the vicious circle of orthodox Lutheranism and was too strongly tied to its ecclesiastical and political authorities to be able to come out of it without causing harm to himself or to his fellow countrymen."¹⁰ According to Oskar Sakrausky, "Bullinger's influence on the theological position of Truber reaches its peak in the teaching of the Eucharist."¹¹

While making plans to return to Slovenia, he began his cooperation with Baron Hans Ungnad von Sonnegg (1493–1564) in Urach. The Duke allowed Truber to have a parish there and to establish a printing press for Slovenian and Croatian books. Truber lived in Urach for only a year and then he accepted a call to become the first general superintendent in Ljubljana, from where he was exiled a second time in 1565.

Truber returned to Germany again, taking a pastorate in Lauffen am Neckar for a year and in 1566 published his Slovenian translation of the Psalms. He then settled in Derendingen, a suburb of Tübingen, where he served as the pastor while continuing to write

books and translate. When the Book of Concord was published in Tübingen in 1580, Truber sent his son Felician (1553–1602) to the Austrian and Slovenian lands to solicit the support and signatures of the local clergy.¹² Truber died on June 28, 1586, at the age of 78.¹³ Jakob Andreae preached the sermon at his funeral.¹⁴ He is buried in the graveyard of the St.-Gallus-Kirche and an epitaph in the church pays tribute to his life.

Two of Truber's sons followed in their father's footsteps: Primus (1550–1591), who became pastor in Kilchberg,¹⁵ and Felician, who like his father was superintendent of Ljubljana from 1591 to 1599 and died as a pastor in Grüntal.¹⁶

Commemorative Celebrations in Slovenia

Slovenia's government, its academic and public institutions, and various associations are all taking part in commemorating the Truber jubilee year. The Slovenian minister of culture opened an exhibition on March 6, 2008, at the National Museum in Ljubljana, dedicated to Truber's life and literary legacy. The collection also presented the wider written, visual and musical heritage of the Slovenian Reformation. The most significant object on display was the only existing copy of Truber's *Cerkovna Ordninga* (*Church Order*), a book of Protestant church regulations from 1564. It was on loan from the Vatican Library, for the first time ever.¹⁷ In this tome Truber laid down the rules for ecclesiastical organization, church services, sacraments and Protestant schools. It was the first writing in Slovenian of its kind and is therefore of immeasurable value. Truber meant for it to be used in his homeland and through it to introduce the Slovenian liturgical language.

The Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts sponsored an international conference in Ljubljana on April 17–19. The theme was the Slovenian literary language of the sixteenth century and many of the papers presented explored Truber's linguistic contributions. The National and University Library in Ljubljana held an event in May, when the public got to see a collection of books that were published by the Biblical Institute in Urach by Truber and his coworkers.

The Slovenian Protestant Society “Primož Trubar” organized excursions and trips throughout 2008 to locations related to Truber in Slovenia, Germany and Italy. Destinations included Truber’s birthplace, Rašica, Germany (Nuremberg, Rothenburg ob der Tauber, Tübingen-Derendingen, Bad Urach and Kempten), as well as Trieste. The Society also took part in several of the government-organized celebratory events in Slovenia.

The Technical Museum of Slovenia organized a series of events called “Truber Days” on June 5–8, which included various workshops on the themes of printing, bookbinding, typesetting and more. During the same time The Lutheran Church in Slovenia organized a series of events in Ljubljana. On the eve of Truber’s birthday on June 8, an ecumenical church service with the blessing of the baptismal font was conducted by the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Ljubljana and Primate of Slovenia Alojzij Uran, and the Lutheran Bishop Geza Erniša.

The traditional “Ljubljana Medieval Days” on September 9–10 were partly dedicated this year to observing the Truber anniversary. The program, held at Ljubljana Old Town and Castle, included musicians, dancers, actors and other artists.

The Centre for Slovene as a Second/Foreign Language and the Department of Slovene Studies at the University of Ljubljana organized a conference November 20–22. Entitled “The Reformation in Slovene Lands,” the 27th Obdobja International Symposium explored the impact Truber and his contemporaries made on theology, literature, fine arts, music and language. The organizing committee included academics from Slovenia, Croatia, Slovakia, Poland, Italy and Austria.

Apart from all these happenings, numerous monuments to Truber are to be erected throughout Slovenia, as well as many streets receiving his name on account of his anniversary.

Events Elsewhere

Truber’s anniversary year is being observed in many different ways in his second home, Germany. Three different regional church

bodies, as well as local governments, have been involved in organizing celebrations. The Archbishop hosted around five hundred Slovenian Catholic pilgrims in March in Tübingen, on a trip following in Truber's footsteps. A road leading from the Hohentübingen Castle to Derendingen was named after the Reformer. Rothenburg ob der Tauber hosted a large delegation from Slovenia on May 30. A commemorative church service was held at the Heilig-Geist Church, in which the Lutheran bishops of Franken and of Slovenia both took part. Afterwards, they laid wreaths on the Truber memorial plaque and ceremonially named the court in front of the church after Primus Truber. On May 31 a church service with the Lutheran Bishop of Slovenia took place at the St. Gallus-Kirche in Tübingen-Derendingen.

The Bavarian town of Kempten im Allgäu received the Slovenian visitors on June 1. A festive church service was held at St. Mangkirche, where a special exhibition of printing equipment from Truber's time was also on display. The Slovenian group presented the congregation with a Truber memorial plaque.

In June a series of lectures and conferences in Tübingen followed: the symposium "500 Years of Primus Truber: A Reformer between Slovenia and Württemberg" was organized by the Eberhard Karls-Universität; a lecture on Truber's local work and influence was organized by the Evangelisch-Theologische Fakultät and the congregation in Derendingen. Furthermore, a touring exhibition titled "To all Slovenians" arrived in the city on Truber's birthday, June 9.¹⁸ At the end of the month a theater play began to be performed at the Primus-Truber-Haus in Derendingen.

The summer festival at the Stift in Bad Urach July 18-20 was dedicated to Truber, with his famous words, "To Stand and Withstand" ("*Stati inu obstati*") as the motto of the gathering. Organized by the Lutheran Deanery and Gustav-Adolf-Werk Württemberg, the program for the weekend included lectures on Truber's life and Bible translation work, as well as a variety of workshops and a special festive church service in the Amanduskirche together with Slovenian guests.

On April 26 in the Croatian town of Pula an exhibition about Truber was opened and a round-table discussion was held by partic-

ipants from Slovenia and Croatia. At the National Library in Prague, Czech Republic, two lectures about Truber were held by Slovenian scholars on May 15. Trieste in Italy hosted the 42nd Draga Debates, an annual three-day gathering of Slovenian intellectuals, between September 5 and 7. This year's motto was Truber's "To Stand and Withstand," with two lectures presented about him. At the Slovenikum in Rome, a theological symposium about Truber took place between 15 and 20 September. In the United States, the Northeast Pennsylvania Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is in companionship with the Slovenian Lutheran Church.¹⁹ At their 21st Annual Synod Assembly on May 30, a forum with the title "Primus Truber, the Forgotten Reformer" was dedicated to Truber.

Special Publications

A series of Truber's complete works began to be issued five years ago in Slovenia. The first volume (2003) contains five publications by Truber: his *Catechismus* and *Abecearium* from 1550 and 1555; and *Abecearium* from 1566. Volume Two (2004) has an edition of *Catechismus* with a brief commentary from 1567, and *Catechismus* from 1575. The third volume (2005) contains *Articles of the True Christian Faith* from 1562; *Church Order* from 1564; and editions of *Slovenian Liturgical Calendar* from 1557 and 1582. Volume Four (2006) has a collection of hymns, psalms and prayers written by Truber. At least two more volumes are projected to be published.

In Germany there have also been some noteworthy publications on account of the Truber anniversary. The Nordrhein-Westphalian Academy of Sciences issued a facsimile edition in 2006 of Slovenian Bible translations 1555–1582, containing Truber's New Testament and Psalter, as well as the Pentateuch, Proverbs and Jesus Sirach translated by his disciple, Juraj Dalmatin (1547–1589).

With Truber's letters²⁰ and his forewords in German to all his works already published,²¹ the complete collection of his writings will be an invaluable resource for future researchers of the Reformation and intellectual history of Central Europe.

Today, Truber's many achievements are recognized and celebrated both in his homeland and beyond. What many see as his

most significant accomplishment is his “formative influence on the written Slovene,”²² which is why he is often called “The Slovenian Luther” and the father of the modern Slovene language. This has earned him appreciation by even the government and the Roman Catholic Church in Slovenia and has secured him a place among the most outstanding figures of the Slovenian nation.

NOTES

1 For a detailed listing of all the events during the Truber year of 2008 see www.trubar2008.si A brochure in English and German about Truber is also available for downloading on the site

2 For Truber’s image on the 1 Euro coin see Luka Ilić, “Lutheran Reformer on Euro Coin,” *Lutheran Quarterly* 21 (2007) 340–341

3 Truber’s reconstructed home was turned into a Memorial House in 1986, for the 400th anniversary of his death, and can be visited today

4 Today it is the Croatian city of Rijeka In the sixteenth century it was ruled by the Venetian Republic

5 See Mirko Rupel, *Primus Truber Leben und Werk des slowenischen Reformators* [translated by Balduin Saria] (Munich Sudosteuroopa-Verlagsgesellschaft, 1965), 15

6 Quoted in Oskar Sakrausky, “Truber, Primus,” in Hans J Hillerbrand (ed.), *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation*, 4 vols (Oxford/New York Oxford University Press, 1996), 4 180–181

7 Vergerio was the Catholic bishop of Capo d’Istria (today’s Koper in Slovenia), who was excommunicated from the Roman Catholic Church in 1549 because he preached Reformation doctrines openly He escaped to Graubunden, where he was a pastor, from November 1553 he was a counselor to Duke Christopher and moved to live in Tübingen For his complete biography, see Anne Jacobson Schutte, *Pier Paolo Vergerio The Making of an Italian Reformer* (Geneve Libraire Droz, 1977), for his later years, see Angelika Hauser, *Pietro Paolo Vergerios protestantische Zeit* (dissertation phil., Tübingen 1980)

8 Rupel, *Primus Truber*, 101

9 Siegfried Reader, “Trubers Lehre von den Sakramenten,” in *Die Slovenen in der europäischen Reformation des 16. Jahrhunderts* (Ljubljana, 1983), 30

10 Mirko Rupel, *Primož Trubar* (Beograd Nolit, 1960), 212

11 Oskar Sakrausky, “Theologische Einflüsse Bullingers bei Primus Trubar,” in Ulrich Gabler and Erlaud Herkenrath (ed.), *Heinrich Bullinger 1504–1575 Gesammelte Aufsätze zum 400. Todestag*, Band 2 (Zürich Theologischer Verlag, 1975), 177–195, here 185 See also Luka Ilić, “Bullingerjev vpliv na slovensko reformacijo” (Bullinger’s Influence on the Reformation in Slovenia), *Stati inu obstati Revija za vprašanja protestantizma* 1–2 (2005) 72–81

12. Wilhelm Baum, "Der Klagenfurter Universitätsplan des Flacius Illyricus (1562) und der Flacianismus in Kärnten," in *Konziliarismus und Humanismus: Kirchliche Demokratisierungsbestrebungen im spätmittelalterlichen Österreich*, Wilhelm Baum et al. (eds.), (Vienna: Turia und Kant, 1996), 192–205, here 202.

13. For different aspects of his life and work, see Rolf-Dieter Kluge (ed.), *Primus Trubar und seine Zeit: Ein Leben zwischen Laibach und Tübingen* [Symposium for 400 years of Trubar's death, Tübingen, November 3–8, 1986], (Munich: Verlag Otto Sagner, 1995).

14. Iacob Andreae, *Christliche Leichpredig/ Bey der Begräbnus des Ehrwürdigen vnd Hochgelehrten Herrn/ Primus Trubern/ weilund einer Ersamen Euangelischen Landtschafft/ im Hochlöblichen Hertzogthumb Crain/ bestellten Predigers/ gewesñen Pfarrers zu Derendingen/ bey Tübingen. Gehalten den 29. Junij/ im Jar 1586. Durch Iacobum Andreae D. Probst zu Tübingen* (Tübingen: Georg Gruppenbach, 1586).

15. Rolf-Dieter Kluge, "Zum 500. Geburtstag des slowenischen Reformators Primus Truber," *Tübinger Blätter* 94 (2008): 26–34, here 34.

16. Near Freudenstadt in the Black Forest.

17. Most copies of the *Slovenian Church Order* were destroyed on account of the order issued by Archduke Charles II of Austria (1540–1590). When its last copy burned to ashes during the bombing of Dresden in 1945, it was thought that this outstanding work was lost forever. It was in 1971 that a German, Christoph Weismann, found a copy of it in the Vatican Library. The book was on display for only three months while the rest of the exhibition went through the end of the year.

18. The exhibition, consisting of seven panels depicting Truber's life journey, started its tour in the Slovenian parliament, visited towns in Slovenia, Sarajevo in Bosnia, as well as a number of German and Croatian cities.

19. St. John Windish Lutheran Church in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, was founded by Slovenian immigrants at the beginning of the twentieth century. Even today many members of the congregation are of Slovenian descent and have ties to the mother country.

20. See Theodor Elze, *Primus Trubers Briefe* (Tübingen: H. Laupp Jr., 1897) and Jože Rajhman, *Pisma Primoža Trubarja* (Ljubljana: Slovenska Akademija Znanosti in Umetnosti, 1986). Rajhman published 24 more letters than Theodor Elze in the earlier standard edition. He builds upon the work of Mirko Rupel, Branko Berčić and Oskar Sakrausky (all of them have published some new letters since Elze) and adds a few newly discovered letters.

21. See Oskar Sakrausky, *Primus Truber: Deutsche Vorreden zum slowenischen und kroatischen Reformationswerk* [Studien und Texte zur Kirchengeschichte und Geschichte 5/1], (Vienna: Evangelischer Presseverband, 1989).

22. Regina Pörtner, "Confessionalization and Ethnicity: the Slovenian Reformation and Counter Reformation in the 16th and 17th centuries," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 93 (2002): 239–277, here 251.



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