



quarterly bulletin of research-based information  
on mission in Europe



Images: Wikipedia Creative Commons

## Bible Translation in Europe Today

One of the marks of the Reformation was the impulse to translate the Bible into the vernacular languages of Europe, so that the ploughboy could sing its words as he followed the plough. Those early translations, from the 16th and 17th centuries, became for each national church the authentic voice of God to his people. They replaced Jerome's Latin Vulgate, which many had also felt expressed the true voice of God. Similarly, many in Protestant churches today feel that the authentic voice of God uses 16th century vocabulary and grammar. A friend of mine has quipped that the King James Version could be named "Good News for 17th Century Man".

Perhaps using one older version for each nation was not such a great problem while a Christian consensus existed in these societies. But today the primary goal of the church in Europe must be to build new

Christian communities rather than focusing on keeping old churches open to bring secular populations to Christ, rather than to continue fighting yesterday's battles. 400-year-old language no longer communicates authenticity but irrelevance, and fits with unhelpful stereotypes of what the Gospel means today.

### Reaching today's audience

Most European languages have a variety of translations available, none of which is perfect, and (in my experience) none of which are so bad as to be unusable. They tend to be directed at different audiences. Translations which best communicate the overall gist of Scripture (especially to people unfamiliar with the Bible) tend to be more at the dynamic end of the spectrum, avoiding vocabulary and expressions which are alien to modern usage. For example, for a normal secular Brit, something like Today's English Version or the New Living Translation, will

## EDITORIAL

### The Word of God is not chained

The Apostle Paul's words to Timothy, written from a prison cell, were meant to encourage him as to the irresistible power of the Scriptures (2 Timothy 2:9). In today's Europe we need to hear this message and to hold on to the promise that nothing can contain the power of the gospel.

This edition of Vista deals with Bible translation and engagement in Europe. That Bible translation might still be necessary in some European languages may come as a surprise to some. More generally, the challenge of Bible engagement is a pressing one across the continent.

Our guest editor for this edition is Maik Gibson, director of the Centre for Linguistics, Translation and Literacy at Redcliffe College. He presents the challenge of reaching today's audience with translations which effectively and authentically communicate the good news.

I then tell the story of two forgotten heroes of Bible translation and engagement in Spain: Lorenzo Lucena and George Borrow.

Darrell Jackson gives a personal account of evangelical Orthodox collaboration in Bible translation in Eastern Europe, and Joanne Appleton completes the edition with another review of resources, in this case non-English language Scripture resources.

No chains can bind God's word, not even the apathy and secular disdain of today's Europeans. Paul's words to Timothy, written to encourage him to hope beyond hope in the power of the Scriptures, are words that we need to heed today. May we never take for granted the Bibles we have in our hands nor fail to remember those who work to translate the message of the gospel into the language of today's Europeans.

Jim Memory

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work much better than the King James or the ESV. Despite my own church background, as a teenager it was the Good News Bible that helped me to understand the Gospel of grace when reading Romans and Galatians.

The primary problem we encounter with these translations is that they don't sound like what we grew up with in precisely the same way that the Reformation translations

did not sound as holy as the Latin Vulgate to 16th century ears. Likewise, when Jerome released the Vulgate, many (including Augustine) complained that he had taken liberties, and that the older Latin translations were better. But if we are to evangelize this generation and the next, we must put aside our preferences, and focus on the intended audience.

### Types of Translation Project

Broadly speaking there are two types of Bible translation taking place in Europe today. The first is the production of new translations or revision in languages that already have them. Sometimes they add to an already present crowd, but in other cases they are one of a small handful, and a good alternative to older translations - for example, in Latvian, where the third complete translation was published in 2012.

The second type is into languages where there no existing translations, which some might find surprising. In some cases this is done primarily to give a little-spoken language or dialect legitimacy, rather than to reach out with the Gospel. But there are also ongoing translation projects into different varieties of Roma which are firsts, where the main goal is to help Roma people engage with the Bible in their own

**400-year-old language no longer communicates authenticity but irrelevance, and fits with unhelpful stereotypes of what the Gospel means today.**

language. Here the issue is not only access to Scriptures that can be understood, but Scriptures that speak from within the culture - communicating that God is not speaking from outside their world but from inside it - His word comes to indwell each and every culture and language. This is also the case of the ongoing work for the Deaf, such as into Spanish Sign Language, using video.

So, do you want to know which is the best English translation to use? I

remember Eddie Arthur, former director of Wycliffe Bible Translators UK saying that it's the one that you will use regularly. You can find more of his thought-provoking material and Bible translation and mission at [www.kouya.net/?tag=bible-translation](http://www.kouya.net/?tag=bible-translation).

Maik Gibson



Director, Centre for Linguistics, Translation and Literacy, Redcliffe College

### Numbers of Bible Translations in Selected European Languages

(numbers indicative)

- Albanian 4
- English 60+
- French 25+
- German 15+
- Italian 16
- Latvian 3
- Polish 8
- Portuguese 15
- Romanian 8
- Russian 6
- Slovak 3
- Spanish 40+
- Swedish 10

Overall the United Bible Societies state that there are 61 European languages with complete Bibles, 39 more with the New Testament, and 112 others with portions. And yet the distribution of numbers of translations varies widely, as these numbers show.

Source: [http://www.ubs-translations.org/about\\_us/](http://www.ubs-translations.org/about_us/)



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inside  europe?

### What does it mean to be a Christian inside Europe today?

Europe is a unique continent spanning many countries and cultures. A common Christian heritage (though now a distant memory) has helped create this rich tapestry. Yet the continent now faces many challenges and an uncertain future. How can we make a difference?

Christel Ngambi of the European Evangelical Alliance and Frank Hinkelmann, OM's area leader for Europe, will be sharing their thoughts on how we, as Europeans and Christians, can work together to restore hope to this continent.

**When:** 10.30-4.30 on 8th September 2015

**Where:** Wealdstone Baptist Church, Harrow, London

**Cost:** £25, including refreshments and lunch

More details at [eurofest2015.org.uk](http://eurofest2015.org.uk)

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# LUCENA AND BORROW – THE BIBLE IN SPAIN AND BEYOND

History is full of extraordinary coincidences. It is well known that Cervantes and Shakespeare, without question the most important figures of Spanish and English literature, died just a few days apart in April 1616. This brief article traces the lives of Lorenzo Lucena and George Borrow who, though little known, made significant contributions to the translation and distribution of the Spanish Bible during the 19th Century, and whose lives also have striking points of connection, even though there is no evidence they actually met each other.

Lorenzo Lucena Pedrosa was born in Aguilar de la Frontera, a small town in the province of Cordoba, Spain, on 25th March 1807. He became a priest of the Roman Catholic Church, then lecturer in theology and vice-rector of St Pelagius' College, the local diocesan seminary.

Borrow was born just a few years earlier in East Dereham, Norfolk, England on 5th July 1803. A talented linguist, as a young man Borrow was contracted by the British and Foreign Bible Society to go to St Petersburg, Russia, to supervise the translation of the Bible into Manchu. After two years in Russia Borrow returned to Britain and shortly afterwards was sent to Spain with the charge of arranging the printing and distribution of the Bible in Spain.



Birthplace of Lorenzo Lucena: Aguilar de la Frontera, Cordoba, Spain

Image: Juan A. Perez Gama

On 6th January 1836 George Borrow crossed the frontier between Portugal and Spain en route to Madrid. Just two days later and unbeknown to Borrow, Lorenzo Lucena resigned from his post at the seminary declaring himself protestant and fled to Gibraltar.

Borrow arrived in Madrid at the end of January 1836 and immediately sought governmental permission to reprint but without notes the Catholic New Testament translated to Spanish from the Vulgate by Padre Scio some decades earlier. At the time Spain was in the throes of a civil war but nevertheless Borrow waited patiently for an audience with Prime Minister Mendizabal.

The Prime Minister refused him permission for the printing but Borrow himself recalled Mendizabal's words:

**What a strange infatuation is this which drives you over lands and waters with Bibles in your hands.**

“What a strange infatuation is this which drives you over lands and waters with Bibles in your hands. My good sir, it is not Bibles we want, but rather guns and gunpowder, to put the rebels down with, and above all, money, that we may pay the troops; whenever you come with these three things you shall have a hearty welcome, if not, we really can dispense with your visits, however great the honour.”

Meanwhile in Gibraltar, Lucena had been licensed as an Anglican priest for the Spanish-speaking population, and had been

commissioned by the Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge (SPCK) to revise the text of another translation of the Vulgate by Catholic bishop Torres Amat.

The fall of Mendizabal's government shortly afterwards allowed Borrow to begin publishing and distributing his Spanish New Testaments. Ever since his time in Russia Borrow had always been fascinated with the Roma and on arrival in Spain had fallen in with them during his first weeks. He learnt something of their language, enough at least to attempt a translation of Luke's gospel into Caló, the Roma dialect of Spain's gypsies, which was published in 1837. Borrow stayed in Spain for the best part of five years and on

returning to Britain wrote up the story of his travels as “*The Bible in Spain*”, his most successful literary work.

In 1849 Lucena left Gibraltar for Liverpool where he spent ten years as a missionary to seamen as well as continuing to translate works on behalf of the Anglican church and teaching Spanish at a local school. Then in 1858 Lucena was invited to become the first Teacher of Spanish at the Taylorian Institution of the University of Oxford, a post he held until he died. And it was during his time in Oxford that Lucena made his most significant contribution to Bible translation and engagement.

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Image: George Borrow replica by Henry Wyndham Phillips (1843) National Portrait Gallery 1841

Portrait of George Borrow c.1841

Sometime earlier the SPCK had approached Lucena to ask him to undertake a complete revision of the Bible translated from the original languages by protestant Spanish exiles Reina and Valera during the late 16th Century. Others had tried to do this but, when it was finally published in 1862, such was the quality of Lucena's work that the British and Foreign Bible Society (BFBS), the Scottish Bible Society and the Trinitarian Bible Society all agreed to adopt Lucena's revision and publish it as their own.

In 1909 when the BFBS and the American Bible Society collaborated in the publication of a new edition, it remained largely a retouching of Lucena revision. The millions of Reina Valera Bibles distributed throughout the Spanish speaking-world in the late 19th and early 20th Centuries, largely in the revision undertaken by Lucena, have ensured that to this day the Reina Valera is the standard

Bible used by most Spanish speaking protestants.

Though they lived most of their latter lives in the south of England there is nothing to suggest that Borrow and Lucena ever met. But together they arguably made the most significant 19th Century contributions to Spanish Bible translation and engagement. And like Shakespeare and Cervantes, they too were united even in death, as they were buried within one month of each other in July and August 1881.

The tens of millions of Spanish-speaking protestants today owe these two forgotten heroes of Bible translation and engagement a huge debt of gratitude.

Jim Memory

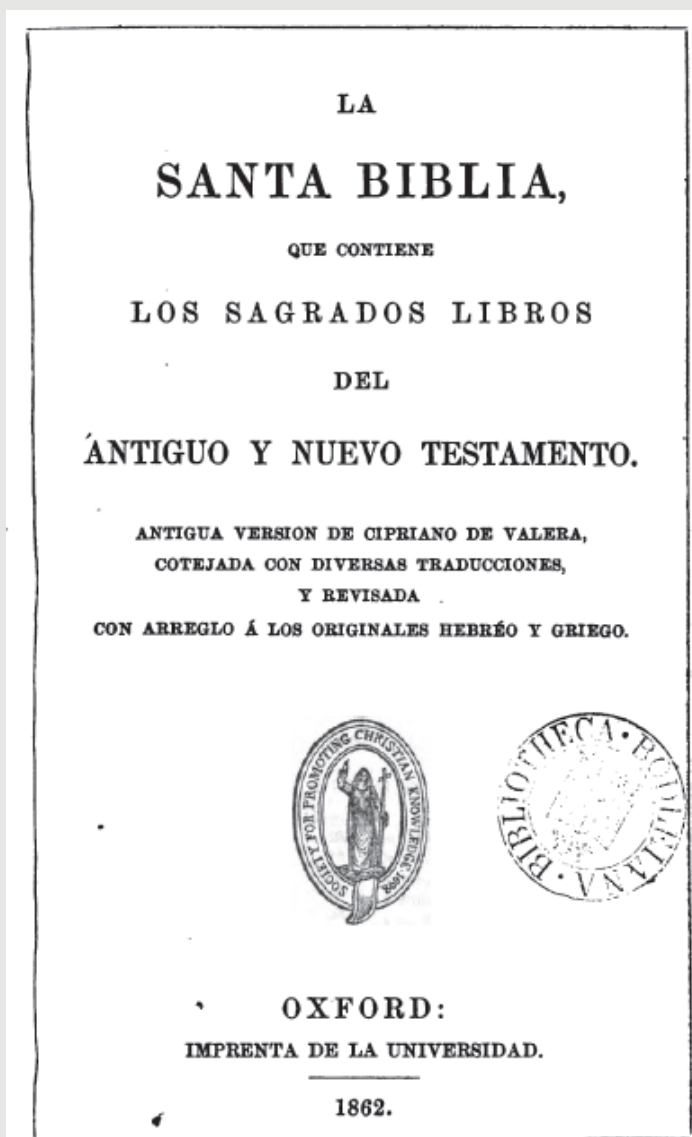
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Title page of Lucena's revision of the Reina Valera printed by the Oxford University Press in 1862



Lucena's gravestone in St Sepulchre's Graveyard, Jericho, Oxford





**Evangelical missionaries serving in Central and Eastern Europe have reason to wonder whether any co-operation with Eastern Orthodox Christians is a possibility. The ill-fated attempt at an evangelical-Orthodox partnership in the 1992 Mission Volga remains a painful memory for enthusiasts on both sides. The eventual Orthodox withdrawal reflected their concerns over proselytism (voluntary or involuntary) and followed brief, though intense, media coverage of the upcoming Mission.**

Individual Orthodox Christians who participated in the Mission point to this experience as a key moment in establishing relationships with evangelical Christians. Just over ten years later I sat down to talk with two of these Orthodox believers about the work of Scripture Union in Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). The Russian Board of SU includes a number of evangelicals and several lay Orthodox participants.

As we chatted, the Russian Director and his wife showed me copies of the Gospel of Luke, printed for young people, and published by SU Russia. It was an illustrated version using stills from the *Miracle Maker* film (released in 2000 and retold with the aid of clay puppets). Earlier translations of the text of Luke had been accompanied by illustrations adapted from the cartoon-style UK version. Trials among young people in Russia were rather negative towards this

version as it appeared 'too simplistic and not serious enough'.

The first edition of Luke's Gospel for young people ran to 10,000 copies. Its production was a good illustration of the way that some evangelicals and Orthodox believers have been able to find common cause in making Scripture more available and more engaging to young people in Russia. Whilst the work of SU Russia is collaborative, it is appropriately sensitive to the Orthodox Christian context in Russia.

A further example of their co-operation was the publication of a Bible-reading guide called *How to Read Mark's Gospel* that was illustrated throughout in a more typically Orthodox style, with the iconic representation of biblical characters and the use of liturgical symbolism.

Accompanying this commitment to making God's Word more widely available and accessible was personal commitment to regular, small-group Bible study. At around the time of my visit to Moscow, they were about to commence a new pattern of establishing adult Bible-study groups in the communal rooms of apartment blocks and in several downtown Moscow churches. The study groups were intended to be evangelistic as well as inter-denominational, led jointly by evangelical and Orthodox.

Elsewhere in Europe I have observed national Bible Society translation committees at work. These are typically made up of biblical scholars from different Christian traditions, each passionate about the importance of

correctly translating the Word of God. Of course, there are disagreements about how some phrases and words should be translated. Baptists are reticent about translating the apocryphal books of the Orthodox canon, for example. Orthodox scholars quibble over an evangelical preference for using terms equivalent to the English words 'Elder' and 'Overseer' over the more Orthodox-sounding 'Bishop'. But such difficulties are minor in the face of the urgent task of bringing God's word in new and fresh ways to the increasingly biblically-illiterate populations of Europe.

Bible translation work continues across Europe, often quietly and below the radar screen of the media. Much of it is collaborative and it's a cause for grateful thanks to God that many of those involved are also keen students of the Word of God in the context of their Christian discipleship. For this, and related reasons, I have been an enthusiastic supporter of the notion that co-operation between Christians across the traditional divides is most promising where the individuals involved are committed to prayer and Bible study. The Word of God is alive and active and, through prayer and study, lives continue to be transformed and conformed more closely to the image of Christ.

Darrell Jackson

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The following resources are just a small selection of those available. If you know of other useful resources, please share them on our blog [europeanmission.redcliffe.org](http://europeanmission.redcliffe.org) or on our [Facebook page](#):

### SGM Lifewords

A wide range of printed and digital bible-based resources including apps and ebooks are available from SGM Lifewords in many different languages, from Albanian to Macedonian, Dutch and Turkish. While the International Office is based in the UK, there is a ministry centre in Tourin, Poland. The [europe.sgm lifewords.com/en/](http://europe.sgm lifewords.com/en/) page is linked to the Global Bible Resource website.



Printed and ebooks in Latvian and Spanish from SGM Lifewords.

### French Bible Society

**French Youth Bible:** The ZeBible project uses an interactive website, videos and social media to get young people interested in reading the Bible. Over 6,000 youth have engaged in discussions about the Bible on the Facebook page. Find out more at [ze bible.com](http://ze bible.com) and [www.facebook.com/ze bible](http://www.facebook.com/ze bible).



**On the Road:** Written from a Migrant's perspective, this booklet takes the reader on a journey through 33 Bible passages with chapters looking at topics such as: Why leave? A difficult

journey, Seeking a place, Are all means acceptable?, Finding a place, Is a return possible? and God is close to everyone. It also includes personal stories and prayers that other migrants will be able to easily identify with. The booklet is available in French, English, Spanish (Latin), Chinese, Arabic, Farsi & Turkish plus shipping from France from the French Bible Society. Mail Elsbeth Scherrer [elsbeth.scherrer@sbf.fr](mailto:elsbeth.scherrer@sbf.fr)

**Words of Freedom:** In collaboration with the Catholic and Protestant prison chaplaincies, the French Bible Society has published a booklet called 'Paroles de liberté' (Words of freedom). The booklet contains commentary alongside 66 Bible texts around 10 themes: identity, confinement, guilt, responsibility, time, relationships, law and justice, the body, freedom, reconciliation and communion. It will be translated in English and Spanish in the coming months:

[www.editionsbiblio.fr/fiche-produit.html?nom=paroles-de-liberte-parcours-biblique&id=9026](http://www.editionsbiblio.fr/fiche-produit.html?nom=paroles-de-liberte-parcours-biblique&id=9026)



### Other Resources

**Slovenian New Testament:** A new Slovenian common language translation of the New Testament is underway, with the first two portions containing Luke, Acts Colossians, James and 1-3. The accompanying website is at [zivo.svetopismo.si/](http://zivo.svetopismo.si/)



**I Am She:** This little 64 page booklet contains Scripture passages to help female asylum seekers identify how God is at work in their lives. It is available in English,

German, Russian, Farsi and Arabic. Copies are available from the Austrian Bible Society website:

[www.bibelgesellschaft.at/ich-bin-wie-sie](http://www.bibelgesellschaft.at/ich-bin-wie-sie)



### Damaris Trust

The Damaris Trust focuses on apologetics and helping people engage with popular culture and the Bible. The Norwegian base Damaris Norge focuses on four main areas: Community, Schools, Church and TV. Their resources explore the relationship between Christian faith and contemporary culture, such as film. Find out more at [www.damaris.no/](http://www.damaris.no/) and [www.kulturvindet.no](http://www.kulturvindet.no)



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# Vista

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