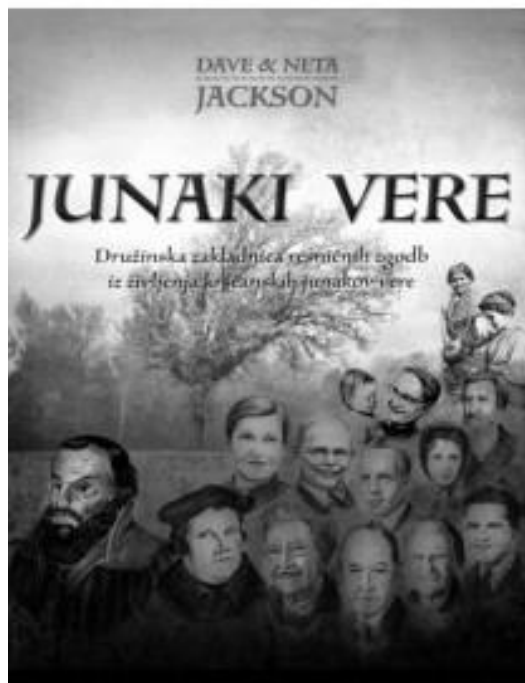


PRIMOŽ TRUBAR

The peacemaking reformer

By Todd Hunnicutt

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PRIMOŽ TRUBAR

The peacemaking reformer

“Yes, yes of course!” shouted the young boy. He was excited about this unbelievable chance to do something few boys could ever do. His father told young Primož the count in the nearby castle offered to send the boy to school where he would study with the best teachers and become a Catholic priest. This was a chance for the son of a miller to have a very different life than those in his family – a better life. And so in 1520 when he was 12 years old, Primož went to school in Rijeka and later in Salzburg, then in Trieste and finally Vienna. He was a bright student and a good musician. In Salzburg, he earned money by singing on the street with his clear, tenor voice, and sometimes people put a few coins in his hat.

Primož studied hard and did well in his classes, but he also learned about the new teachings of some Christian men called the Reformers. Slowly he began to realize their teachings were not really new as he saw that the Bible had always taught that all people can know God personally whether they are men or women or children. Though he worked hard for many years as a Catholic priest, Primož began to teach things that some people thought were dangerous. These people wanted to harm him, so he escaped to Germany.

But he didn't forget his people. Although separated from his home, Primož Trubar quickly began to write and publish Christian books in the Slovene language. These were the very first books ever written in Slovene! To write the books, he first had to make a literary language out of the peasant language he grew up speaking by listening to the sounds of his own language, and putting it in writing. What a great thing he did for his people!

Primož Trubar loved his own people, yet in his heart, he loved and cared about people everywhere. That is why he helped start the world's first Bible society where it was possible to print the Bible in many languages so more people could read it. Trubar was so good at languages, he helped write down the Bible and other books in many languages. He preached about God's love in the Slovene language, in German and other languages. Because Trubar never kept the Bible or God's truth for just his own people, but instead worked hard to give it to as many different groups and countries as he could, the director of the Stift in Bad Urach where Trubar once lived recently called Trubar “The First European.”

When Primož was no longer in danger, the Slovene Protestant leaders invited him to come back to his homeland as the Superintendent of the *Church of the Slovene Language*. He started the first Slovene language schools and the first libraries. But it wasn't long before he and his family had to run away again to Germany. He lived the final

19 years of his life as a pastor in Germany, always encouraging and teaching his beloved Slovenes from far away through the books he wrote and printed. Because he discovered the power of God's love through the Bible, Primož Trubar knew the Bible should be read by every person in every language.

If you go to the towns where he lived in southern Germany today, you'd be surprised how much local Germans know about Trubar. Sometimes they know more about him than people in Slovenia know! Did you know Trubar was very tall, at least 20 cm taller than an average person in that time? Few do! But even among those who can tell you about him and what he did, few can tell you why he did what he did. Few know or appreciate the passion and love this miller's son had for his beloved Slovenes.

PEACEMAKER

An inspiring execution

The prisoner cried, “My Father, thank you, that you have chosen to take me out of this valley of tears today.”

20 year-old Primož heard Balthasar Hubmaier shout this prayer as he was being led to be killed at the stake. As a young man studying to become a Catholic priest, Primož had heard the teachings of the Protestants; he knew they taught that the Bible said each person could know God and talk directly to Him. He had also heard that this idea was very dangerous, and that some who believed it could cause great trouble. They said Balthasar Humaier was one of those dangerous people. And now Primož saw this man go to die without fear, and with God’s courage.

The Catholic Austrian emperor wanted a big show for this execution of a Protestant on March 10, 1528. He wanted to show everyone what happened to people who believed that the Bible taught these things. As the huge crowd screamed for Hubmaier's blood, Primož silently watched him quote Bible verses to himself as his wife stood nearby in chains, shouting words of encouragement to her husband.

As the soldiers stripped Hubmaier of his clothes as Primož heard him say; “They also stripped you, oh Lord. I gladly give my clothes, please guard my spirit and soul.” As the executioner smeared sulfur and gunpowder in his beard Hubmaier said, “Goodness, you have seasoned me well.”

“How could this man have such peace in such a moment?” Primož thought. He watched as the fire was kindled, then the flames quickly jumped to Hubmaier's hair and beard. Hubmaier cried out “Jesus, Jesus!” and passed out from the smoke and died in the flames. Trubar saw a tear run down the face of Hubmaier’s wife.

Primož returned three days later to watch as the authorities executed her by tying a stone around her neck and throwing her in the Danube river. They joked that this was her “third baptism” for Protestants believed that one must be baptized as an adult believer who had chosen to follow Christ, even if they were once baptized as a child.

But killing Protestants didn’t solve Vienna’s very real threat. Soon Primož and thousands of others fled from Vienna as the Ottoman Turkish Muslim armies advanced toward the city gates. As he escaped to his homeland he pondered what he had seen on that terrible day. Back home he happily served Slovenes for many years as a Catholic priest, but his thoughts about the Bible slowly began to shift until the

things he was teaching so upset the leaders that he had to flee for his life.

In 1553, 25 years after Primož saw the killing of Hubmaier, Primož and his young family lived in Bavaria, where he had become a Protestant pastor. A man brought this message: “Primož, the German churches appreciate your work here in Rothenburg, but your unique gifts are needed elsewhere.” For five years Trubar had been preaching the plain biblical Gospel in German while working very hard to write books for his beloved Slovenes, far away. The messenger continued: “Kempton is in the Lutheran Schwabing region, close to the Swiss border where people with Calvinist beliefs live. We need someone who can pastor a church where people are fighting over what the Bible teaches.” Primož knew this was a difficult assignment in a time when Europeans were literally fighting about the message and meaning of the Bible.

His mind raced back to Vienna, 1528 and the death of Hubmaier, a man who had believed many different ideas about God over his lifetime and who finally became a man whose ideas about the Bible caused trouble in the churches and the government. Primož thought for a moment and then replied, “I want to serve the Lord with the same passion I saw in Hubmaier, but I will lead these believers in a way that doesn’t cause them to fight or split up. I will preach the Gospel, the Gospel of peace.” And that’s just what he did, making peace between

those arguing in the Kempton church offering a way of Christian living where God’s mercy and forgiveness replaced anger and blame. His plan for running that church lasted for centuries after his death.

Blessed are peacemakers who help Christ’s church to truly be one body under one head, Jesus- for they will be called sons of God.

FROM GOD’S WORD:

What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don’t they come from your desires that battle within you? You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight. “God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble.” (James 4:1-2a,6b)

LET’S TALK ABOUT IT:

1. Ephesians 4:3-6 says, “*Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called ; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.*” What do these verses say is the basis for the unity of believers (believers living together in peace)?

2. The biblical truths we all agree on are more important than other issues we don't agree on. What are those main, important truths we see in Scripture? If you had to summarize the message of the Bible in a few words, what would you say?

3. Have you ever heard people arguing about something? What was their argument about? How could you be a peacemaker -- someone who tries to bring two sides together?

FORGIVENESS

“Nowhere Home”

Primož always made the best of every situation. He was first a Catholic priest in a small town, and then he was made the preacher in the Ljubljana cathedral of St. Nicholas. After such an important position, Primož was assigned to another small town and given the lowly job of helping repair a church where not only the building was falling apart, but the people were, too. And he was glad to go!

“Father Trubar, we are so thankful that God sent you to us,” the people said. “You’ve led us to rebuild our church building, but we’re even happier you are teaching us the good news that is uniting us into a spiritual building.”

As he heard the horse approaching Šentjernej on June 1, 1567, Primož thought he must be finally getting a summons back to the capitol. The messenger spoke quickly: »Bishop Textor is arresting the priests who have agreed with Protestant teaching. You have been charged with ‘rebellion against the sovereign prince.’ The soldiers are on their way now. You have to hide!«

Trubar prayed a quick prayer, thanking the Lord that he had been far from Ljubljana when this happened; God’s hand was protecting him.

But as he hid nearby in the coming months, the bad news kept coming: “The courts have revoked your ordination and excommunicated you from the Catholic church. They have taken away your home...and Primož...they have taken your precious library.” 40-year-old Trubar has lost everything except his faith, and in March 1548 he realized he would have to flee.

But a secret escape across hostile territory wouldn't be easy for a tall man like Primož! He started across familiar roads through Slovenia, being careful to stay out of sight. For 17 difficult days he crossed the Alps of Catholic Austria and avoided his beloved Salzburg to get to safety in Nurnberg in protestant Bavaria. There he was baptized and ordained to be the Protestant pastor in nearby Rothenburg. Far from his beloved homeland, he used the haunting word “*Nigdirdom*”– which in Slovene means *nowhere home*. He was working in a foreign language with foreigners, with all his belongings gone...what would he do? Would he be angry? Depressed? Would he vow to never return to Slovenia? Would he just disappear into German culture?

No! Primož’s first step in this foreign land was to do something very practical for his people. He had to keep on sharing the truth of the Gospel with them, but how? Slovenes were spread out over five Austrian provinces, almost none were educated. There wasn’t even a written language; German was the language for the few who were

literate. So he created the Slovene literary language out of the dialect spoken by the Slovene peasants in the region between his home village and the large city of Ljubljana.

In Rothenberg, Primoz wrote the first two Slovene books. The books were printed in 1550 in Tübingen, but Primoz could not allow his name to be printed as the author because of the dangerous situation, so he made up a name, *Philopatridus Illyricus*, “The patriot from Ilyria”. These and other Protestant books that would soon be written had to be smuggled into Slovenia in wine casks! The first book was *The Catechism*, the message of the Bible in the form of teachings, a sermon, Bible verses (which he had to translate, of course), questions and answers, and even songs. The second book was a basic reader, *Abecednik*, created to teach his peasant people to read the Catechism and future books.

When others suggested translating the Bible into an artificial “uniform Slavic language” Trubar fought for his native tongue and the value of all languages by printing Bibles and Christian books in Croatian, Italian and other languages in Bad Urach, Germany. There in 1560 he founded the world’s first Bible society. He translated the New Testament into Slovene, and his pupil, Dalmatin translated the whole Bible, amazingly the 14th Bible in the world printed in a language the people could understand!

Later he started the first Slovene-language schools and the first libraries in Slovenia, and when he was forced to leave once again, he enabled Slovene students to come to Germany to study at the great university city of Tübingen.

He did so much out of love for God and love for his people, his “Beloved Slovenes”, a favorite phrase of his. Despite all the pain and loss, including the many threats on his life, the death of two wives and a child, the murder of his father, the burning of his home village by the Turks, the horror of helping people dying of the plague in the city as others fled to the countryside, with true faith in God Trubar would “stand and withstand” in life’s trials and temptations to be one of the greatest figures in any nation, even though after his death, he was rejected once again and reviled. (The phrase “Stand and Withstand” is from Trubar’s Catechism and is on the Slovene 1 euro coin!)

In the first sentence of the first book, he wrote “To all Slovenes (no one had ever called them that before!): grace, peace, mercy and the true knowledge of God through Jesus Christ I pray for you.” That was the message of the rest of his life, his deepest wish for his “beloved Slovenes,” even for those who persecuted him.

Those who realize how much they have been forgiven by God can forgive others and be free to love those who have been unkind to you.

FROM GOD'S WORD:

But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your father in heaven. (Matthew 5:44-45a)

LET'S TALK ABOUT IT:

1. What would it be like to be in Primož's situation, where everything was taken away and you had to run away from your homeland for fear of your life? How would you feel? When have you felt lonely?
2. When has someone taken something from you or hurt you? What was your response? By God's grace, what should your response have been?
3. In the Lord's prayer it says, "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors." What does that mean? Is there anyone you need to forgive so you can receive God's forgiveness freely?

LOVE

Love your enemies – really!

“You want me to go where? Back to Slovene lands?” Primoz’s friend German theologian Jakob Andreae had a strange request. “I need you to go back to Slovene lands and find out about the Muslims. We German Christians don’t know what they believe. All we hear are the horror stories from battle. Who are they? What is their religion about? We must know before they take over all of Europe. Your Slovenes live on the edge of the Ottoman Empire’s invasion of Europe.”

Primož had lived in exile in Germany for many years. And now he was being asked to risk being caught and go back to Slovene lands? And why? To find out about the Muslims? The same armies who he had to run from as they threatened Vienna so many years before? The same armies who burned his home village of Rašica twice? He’d heard an idea from the great scholar Erasmus, that the only way to solve the problem of the Muslim invasion of Europe was through converting them to Christianity, but no one knew what Muslims believed or if it could work.

In 1567 he set out on the long journey across the Alps on paths he had travelled many times before...but now he was much older! He was still very tall, he was still quite known, so he had to be careful.

His spirits rose as he crossed the final Alpine mountain range into his beloved Slovenia and began to see very familiar sights. He peeked at lovely Lake Bled where he had been welcomed in honor at the castle just a few years before. His heart skipped a few beats as he passed by Kranj and Šenčur, where his beloved first wife, Barbara, now deceased, was born.

He went directly to the castle in the center of Ljubljana where a Muslim Bosnian general named Usraim-beg was being held prisoner. His friends bribed the guards to look the other way as this large mysterious stranger entered the prison cell and spoke with the prisoner all night. There were so many people Trubar would love to see, to have even a moment with...one last time. But he couldn't, it was too dangerous. He headed north, back across the Alps, back to his adopted German home, never to return to Slovenia again.

As he arrived back in Tübingen, he heard people shouting “Kill them all!” A fresh wave of reports of Turkish atrocities had come out. Everyone was afraid of these strange, mysterious armies that had been threatening Europe for many years. These barbarians were shutting out the light of Christendom.

But, as Primož shared his findings with Jakob, he could see his friend was surprised by what he had discovered. “Well, Jakob, they also believe there is one God. They hold the Old Testament and the Gospels in great honor. But they say an angel helped their prophet Mohammed to write their holy book, the Koran, to “correct” the wrong things they say that early Christians put in the New Testament. They are not savages. They are not pagans. But they are lost, hoping to find some way to please Allah.« »What can we do?« asked Jakob. Primož replied, “Go ahead with your sermon series about the Muslims, to teach people what the Muslims believe and to compare that to the Bible. I will start to plan.” “To plan what?” asked Jakob. “Well,” replied Primož, “if we cannot defeat them in battle, we really should share the Gospel with them, and we can! They have never heard the message of grace and mercy. If they can read the Gospel in languages they can understand, they may turn to God and away from their warring ways.” In order to re-evangelize Central and Eastern Europe back to Constantinople, he helped found the world’s first Bible society. They printed books in the languages south of the Slovene provinces that were under Turkish control so they might come to know Christ. He loved the Turkish armies who threatened Europe and Slovenia enough to want to tell them about his savior, Jesus Christ. How about us, today? Do we love others in such a way?

A life filled with God's love is too busy loving others to be offended by them.

FROM GOD'S WORD:

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails (1 Cor. 13:4-8a)

LET'S TALK ABOUT IT:

1. Think through Trubar's secret trip back to Slovene lands, the long travels, the danger, the sadness of being home but not being able to see the ones you love. How would you feel? What would you be willing to do out of love for God and others if you had to?
2. If you go to Derendingen, Germany, today and visit the house Trubar lived in, you would find Turkish Muslims living there! What do you think about the growing number of Muslims in Europe today? What did Trubar think? How should we relate to people of other faiths?
3. How can we love our enemies? What is something you could do even this week to be a blessing to people who have caused you problems?