

## **Saint of the Week: John Wycliffe, translator (1330-1384)**

*Observed 30 October*

A priest of the church who was closely connected to the court of England, John Wycliffe was deeply opposed to the power and wealth that the church and clergy had amassed. Theologically, he maintained that ownership of property came directly from God as part of divine grace and could not legitimately be conferred by human institutions to sinful humans. He therefore felt that all clergy, sinful as they were and part of the sinful human institution of the church, should live in poverty and service. Not long before his death he was condemned for heresy and fomenting rebellion. His ideas were similar to those that would gain much broader acceptance during the Reformation. His followers, known as Lollards, were penniless preachers sent forth to preach to the people from the text of the Bible in English. They were widely condemned, but planted the seeds of what eventually became the Anglican Church.

Few people today have read Wycliffe's controversial ideas, but he is widely known as one of the first advocates of translating Holy Scripture into the language of the people. In the last years of his life, he was instrumental in the creation of the first two translations of the Bible into English (one more scholarly, one more common speech). People all over the world have benefited from the work of the group which bears his name and which has as its goal the translation of Christian Scripture into every living language.

Wycliffe Bible Translators was begun during the Second World War and has to this point created more than 700 translations of the Bible. Since translations into all of the major languages have been long since accomplished, they are now working on languages of smaller populations, often minorities facing cultural extinction in the context of larger surrounding cultures. Wycliffe works to develop community resources and promote literacy. Often this means that their translation task begins with putting the native language into written form for the first time. Once a written form has been created, the people are taught to read and all of the benefits of a literate population can be fostered, while the translators continue their work to provide Biblical and other spiritual texts in the native tongue. Thus, Wycliffe has not only spread the Gospel into many corners of the earth, but also facilitated the survival of countless beautiful small cultures.

Their vision, which would have greatly appealed to their namesake:

“God’s word accessible to all people in the language of their heart.”

*Lessons* Sirach 43:26-33, Psalm 33:4-11, Hebrews 4:12-16, Mark 4:13-20

*Collect* O God, your justice continually challenges your Church to live according to its calling: Grant us who now remember the work of John Wyclif contrition for the wounds which our sins inflict on your Church, and such love for Christ that we may seek to heal the divisions which afflict his Body; through the same Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.