

LutherFacts #30

As the Turkish threat to Europe receded, Martin Luther's influence on the unfolding Reformation continued to expand. His efforts can be tracked in a variety of interesting but often forgotten ways. One that usually escapes our attention is how Luther helped shape the languages of Scandinavia. In 1540-41, the new Swedish king Gustav Vasa authorized the translation of the first Swedish-language bible. The new bible was based directly on Luther's 1526 German bible. In Sweden, Denmark, and Norway, the translators—usually individuals personally known to Luther—framed their efforts on the structure and grammar of the German version. In Sweden, for example, the new bible laid the basis for the Swedish language. "It established a uniform spelling of words," notes one source, "particularly the infinitive ending -a instead of the more Danish-sounding -e, and defined the use of the vowels å, ä and ö," among other linguistic innovations. The Gustav Vasa Bible remained the official translation of the Swedish Lutheran state church until 1917. In this turn of events, one can see the profound way Martin Luther shaped not only the Reformation but the rise of Scandinavian languages and culture.

