ENDANGERED LANGUAGES

Posted on February 20, 2009 by Eddie

Category: Language and Society

The Guardian has a report on a UNESCO survey of endangered languages which makes interesting reading.

> *"We as human beings should care about this in the same way as we should care about the loss of the world's variety of plants and animals, its biodiversity," said Christopher Moseley, editor-in-chief of the Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger. "Because each language is a uniquely structured world of thought, with its own associations, metaphors, ways of thinking, vocabulary, sound system and grammar - all working together in a marvellous architectural structure which is so fragile that it could easily be lost forever."*
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> *The modern world plays its part. A once healthy language dies because its speakers shift allegiances to that of a bigger, more powerful group of people, and, while this can happen through political pressure and military force, it is now most often brought about by the flood of migration from the country to the city. Perhaps unsurprisingly, two of the countries where the risk is greatest are India and Brazil, which are undergoing rapid economic transformations. " often bring about the loss of traditional ways of life and a strong pressure to speak a dominant language that is - or is perceived to be - necessary for full civic participation and economic advancement," said Unesco. (read more)*

To go along with the article they also have an editorial entitled 'In praise of small langauges' and a list of the top ten endangered languages.

It won't surprise anyone to know that I am concerned at the loss of languages too. Of course, when languages die out, it doesn't (normally) mean that whole groups of people have died, it means that they have chosen to use another language for some reason or another. But each language has a value and gives us an insight into another part of humanity. But as a Christian, I feel that there is more to it than this: each language and culture brings its own expressions of praise and understanding of God's nature and gives us a unique insight into the character of God. When we lose a language we lose the ability to express something unique about our Lord and that is rather sad.

I tried to capture this thought in a piece I wrote for another website.

Minority Groups
The Triune God of the Bible is a God of variety and this is reflected in humanity which is created in his image. Far from being monolithic, human beings are varied in their colour, culture, food habits, music, art languageâ€¦ and so the list goes on. This variety brings and incredible richness and depth to human life and is a profound blessing from God. Each ethnic group, be they big or small has something special about them and something to contribute to the rich tapestry of human life. However, in a fallen world, even Godâ€™s greatest gifts can be turned to ill use. So, rather than giving depth and grace to our lives, the wonder of human diversity can all too often give rise to war,

hatred, racism and oppression.

It is only as each ethnic group allows its cultures and customs to be infused by the Gospel that they really become the people that God wishes them to be and that they are able to step back from the suspicion and hatred that so easily mars our diversity.

At the end of time, saints from all of the peoples of the world, great and small, will be gathered before the Lamb. There, as a mighty choir they will sing a song of praise and the many languages and music styles will bring this song to heights of perfection that no one group could ever have managed. But, just as a great musician will add extra little notes or changes as he plays, lifting the music from the everyday to the sublime; so the voices and music of the minority groups â€“ those who were looked down upon and marginalized on the earth, but who have been counted worthy to reign with the Lamb â€“ will take the song of praise far beyond the capacity of those who were counted strong and powerful on the earth.