BIBLE TRANSLATION: A MODEL FOR PARTNERSHIP

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Category: Translation and Mission

In a recent post, Krish Kandiah has raised some interesting questions about the difficulties involved in mission partnerships. Krish closes his post with the following challenge:

> *So I pose a challenge: who can you partner with today? I would love to begin a viral trail of stories of small and significant partnerships that instead of duplicating ministries begin to multiply fruit.*

It is my experience that many Bible translation projects around the world could provide the sorts of examples that Krish is asking for. One of the great things about the Bible is that there isn't a Methodist, Anglican or Baptist Bible. Christians may argue about how to apply or practice what Scripture teaches, but there is generally agreement about the text of Scripture itself. Because of this, it is very rare (though not unknown) to see denominiational or factional translation projects. My experience across Africa and elsewhere has been that translating the Scriptures is something which draws believers together in real partnerships.

In an earlier post on this question, I wrote:

> *Bible translation is one area in which Christians from different confessions can unite in order to advance the Gospel. The Scriptures are above our theological differences; there is no premillenial Bible as opposed to a post or amillenial one. The faithful translator strenuously avoids placing their personal slant or theological spin on their work â€“ and where inevitable mistakes occur there is a rigorous checking procedure to ensure faithfulness to the original. If we are truly Christians, of whatever background, our concern must be to make Godâ€™s revealed word available to the millions of people around the world who still canâ€™t read the book in their own language. Placing the Bible and Godâ€™s desire to communicate through it, above our own theological and cultural convictions is a liberating experience. It allows Christians who might never meet or who might, in other circumstances, be hostile to one another to work together towards a cause that is bigger than them and their secondary convictions.*

Not everyone finds this sort of unity easy, especially when it crosses the broader confessional boundaries. There is sometimes unease amongst Protestants when they discover that there are Catholics associated with Bible translation projects. "We don't want a Catholic translation of the Bible", they say. Precisely! But nor do we want a Protestant one. The job of the translator, Catholic, Protestant or Orthodox, is to render the text in the new language, free from their own bias about the application of the text.

The unique nature of Bible translation as a ministry means that Christians from different backgrounds can work together. It is a remarkable experience and one that I would recommend to

others. When you are wrestling with a Greek verb, trying to express it clearly in another language, it doesn't matter whether you are charismatic, Calvinist, Episcopal or emergent. At the translation desk we are all doing the same job.

You can join in discussion on the topic of partnership at the Lausanne Global Conversation: there is lots of good stuff appearing there now.