THE PRODUCT AND GUIDE OF MISSION: ENGAGEMENT

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Category: Bible & Mission

This is the third post in a short series exploring the relationship between the Bible and Christian mission. The other posts are here (1, 2).

What exactly is the end point of Christian mission? What are we seeking to achieve through mission work? The easy, and slightly more spiritual sounding answer is the 'glory of God'. This is captured well in John Piper's famous quote that mission exists because worship doesn't (see my comment on that quote here). That mission exists to bring glory to God is undoubtedly true, but sometimes we need to bring things down to a more human level if we are to make sense of them.

I would argue that, in time, the purpose of mission is *to establish communities of Christians who are living and experiencing the Gospel and reaching out to others.*

I'm not going to defend that definition for now, other than to point out that Jesus command 'teach them to obey everything that I have taught you' (Matthew 28:20) more or less implies something along these lines.

It flows on logically from this definition (or from Matthew 28) that people need to have some mechanism for knowing how to live the Gospel and how to share it with others. In other words, we need to see communities of people who have access to the Scriptures. An important aspect of any Christian mission is putting the Bible into people's hands so that they can read it and apply it in their cultural context. There are lots of excellent and thought provoking articles on this subject on the Scripture Engagement website, but let me just explore a few ideas.

Translation: the Bible was written in Hebrew, Greek and a little bit of Aramaic. There are very few people who can read these languages at a high level of proficiency. This means that if people are to be able to engage with Scripture, it needs to be translated into a language that they can interact with. Ideally, the Scriptures should be available in the mother tongue of each group, rather than in some majority language such as English. However, communities are able to grow and develop using foreign Scriptures and pragmatic concerns mean that it will be a long time before all people groups have all of the Scripture available to them.

Literacy: The Christian church has a long history of teaching people to read and write, and it is important that we continue this vital work so that people can read and understand the Scriptures. However, Scripture engagement isn't the only reason to do language development work.Â Incidentally, if you are interested in language work, this may be of interest.

Scripture Supports: Historically, most people in the world have not been able to read and even now, large groups of people are not functionally literate, nor are they ever likely to be. Down through the years, the church has made valient attempts to bring the story of the Bible to people who were not able to read it for themselves. In the West, stained glass windows served as teaching aids and in other cultures painted icons and church buildings have been used to remind people of stories they have heard. I well remember sitting through part of the liturgy in a Greek Orthodox Church in Cyprus.

I couldn't understand a word of the singing, but the amazing paintings on the roof gave a vivid reminder of the whole narrative of the Bible.

These days, we can do far better than paintings and stained Glass. The Jesus Film, which Sue works on, and audio Scriptures on MP3 players are all ways of bringing the story of the Bible to people who are unlikely or unable to sit down and read a whole book.Â The Kouya New Testament should soon be available on MP3 format - we'll put a sample here as soon as we can.

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