PROJECTION PROMISES

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Category: Controversies

I have been musing on an excellent post over at Missionary Confidential. You should read the whole thing, but here are the highlights:

> *The first time I heard it, it went something like this:*
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> > *â€œWith our method, we hope to plant 200 churches in the mission field within four years.â€*
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> *Since then, the number of churches, or years, or the method changes every time I hear it, but itâ€™s the same intent: an astounding number in a very short amount of time. And it makes me wonder, do missionaries have to make projection promises just to get funding? Or maybe attention?...*
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> *...I see so much focus on numbers, whether it be how many years to accomplish something or how many are filling the seats of your meeting, yet I see so little focus on discipleship or spending time with people. Were I to be given a demand to projection promise, all that I can promise is that I will be faithful to and do my best to follow Godâ€™s will for the ministry in which He has placed me. If He chooses to cause our ministry to birth ___ churches in ___ years, He is most certainly able, but I donâ€™t have that kind of information at the moment. And Iâ€™m not sure that we Christians need that information, either.*

Thought provoking stuff, I'm sure you will agree.

Within the Wycliffe world the most obvious place where this sort of thing becomes an issues is our Vision 2025. There is no doubt that we face the continual temptation of turning Vision 2025 into the sort of crude promise that Missionary Confidential is unhappy with. However, the point of Vision 2025 was not to promise when the last Bible translation would be finished. The reason for Vision 2025 was to encourage Wycliffe, as an organisation, to change the way it has functioned historically - and it has been relatively successful in achieving this, as I wrote in an earlier post:

> *The vision was adopted by Wycliffe at our International Conference in 1999 (at which point it was a twenty six year goal!). During that conference there were two major themes in our discussions. Firstly, there was the fact that at the rate at which Bible translation was progressing; at that point we would not start all of the programmes needed for around 150 years. Secondly, we had to deal with the fact that while the Church is growing exponentially around the world, Bible translation was controlled and managed almost exclusively by Westerners. We realised that Wycliffe had to change the way it works and be much more open to partners from around the world who wanted to be involved in Bible translation.Â The date itself was never really in focus; itâ€™s main purpose was to encourage us to think about*

> *making the sorts of changes that our organisation needed to make in the face of the growing world church.*

I share Missionary Confidential's unease about making promises that we will achieve certain things in a fixed amount of time. It seems to me that if we do that we are claiming for ourselves a degree of divine authority and insight which is not ours. I certainly would not claim that Vision 2025 will definitely come to pass - though I hope and pray that it will. However, I do think that as human beings it is good to have targets and Visions to work towards. Goals can encourage us to change the way we work and give us a way to gauge the effectiveness or otherwise of our activity. But we should never claim the power to make things happen - that lies with God alone. One more quote from my earlier blog post:

> *The genius of Vision 2025 was its call to realign ourselves with what God was doing in and through his people worldwide. We need to be constantly working to renew our alignment with Godâ€™s mission on an individual and corporate level. As we do that, God will sort out the dates â€“ we can safely leave that to Him.*