PEOPLE IN OUR SIGHTS

Posted on February 25, 2011 by Eddie

Category: Theology and Purpose of Translation

When I was a student at Bath University, the Christian Union held a mission week, which (for some strange reason) we called, Close To the Edge. We worked hard to create an interesting and innovative programme (ballet dancing in the biology refectory) and we prayed that people would become Christians - and some did. However, my excitement about the mission week was somewhat dimmed a few weeks later, when the student newspaper wrote up a review of the mission. The thing which really struck me was the report of a conversation between two Christian Union members, which went something along these lines:

> *Student one: "how many did we get last night?"*
> *Student two: "It was great, we got three or four."*

Obviously, the Christian students were excited at the number of people who had made some sort of response to the presentation of the Gospel the night before. But the University newspaper was, quite rightly, offended at the way the Christians were treating other people as objects to be "got". It was a valuable lesson and one which I need to keep relearning. This quote from From Orality to Orality: A New Paradigm for Contextual Translation of the Bible (Biblical Performance Criticism) by James A. Maxey raises similar questions about the way in which we talk about Bible Translation. It rather makes me squirm and I suspect that a number of my colleagues will find it rather uncomfortable too.

> *Bible translation is neither a neutral nor a simple activity. The challenges and complexities of translation involve issues of power and issues of effective communication. All translation is interpretation. As a result, all translations reflect to varying degrees the social locations of those who were involved in the translation...*
>
> *... translation cannot be presented as a simple dichotomy of source and target/receptor languages. To present language communities as "targets" reeks of colonial agendas. to name them as "receptors" prsupposes a unilateral strategy whereby local communities are viewed as objects with outsiders not benefiting from the experience.*

Christians have a responsibility to tell people about the Gospel and to translate the Scriptures, but we must never treat people as objects, as targets for our activities.