BEING MISSIONAL 1. BIBLE TRANSLATION

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Categories: Bible Translation, Mission

It's always interesting to see how other people list this blog. I quite like Tim and Ali, who list us under 'cool blogs'.Â I don't think I've been cool since I had hair. But the classification that pleases me most, is probably, the one on Brian Russell's blog, where we are listed under missional church. Though ostensibly about Bible translation, which is our day job, this blog covers our wider interests including politics, humour and increasingly the need for the church in the UK to move to a missional footing, rather than being preoccupied by maintenance. Now, I'd be the first to admit that missional is not a word which is in everyone's vocabulary (it's being marked as misspelled here) so what does it mean? In a recent post, Brian gave this definition of reading the Bible in a missional fashion:

> *This is a way of reading Scripture that recognizes Godâ€™s mission as the central theme of the Old and New Testaments. It privileges a contemporary application/appropriation for contemporary readers who are engaged in mission. In other words, I do not see a missional hermeneutic as something foreign to the biblical record itself. Rather it is a key that unlocks meaning and insight that has existed all along in the text itself. As Christopher Wright has written in multiple places, there is not a biblical basis for mission but rather a missional basis for the Bible. The Bible as a whole is a record of Godâ€™s mission and purposes. My particular contribution to a missional hermeneutic is an insistence of seeing three interrelated themes under a rubric of missional interpretation:* ***mission***, ***holiness (or character)***, *and* ***community***.

In another post, I will be looking at the implication of these three broad categories on the life of the church, but in this post, I'd just like to briefly examine Bible translation under the headings of mission, holiness and community.

Most people would happily see Bible translation as being mission. It's a way of bringing the gospel to people in a new language and culture. But as I've argued elsewhere: *translation is not simply a way to convey the message: translation is the message*. Christian mission is about creating indigenous communities worshipping God and understanding the Gospel through the medium of their language and culture. The translation of the Scriptures is central to the creation of these communities. Translation of the Scriptures lies at the very heart of mission.

But what about holiness? To many the image of Bible translation is of an isolated intellectual sitting at a desk and pouring over commentaries. Surely it doesn't matter what your character is like if all you are doing is essentially an academic job? I would like to suggest that there are two reasons why holiness is important to the translator. Firstly, our character and experiences shape the way in which we translate. This is forcefully illustrated in two powerful blog posts by Suzanne McCarthy and Wayne Leman. In addition to this, in a mission situation, the character and lifestyle of the translator will affect whether the people for whom the translation is destined will want to read it. The life of the translator is perhaps the most powerful illustration of the contents of the Bible that many people will

ever see. If that life is not positive, why would anyone want to read the book. To my mind, it is very significant that the main European Training Programme for Bible Translators now includes spiritual formation alongside the linguistics and translation courses.

While the stereotype of a translation project might be of an individual working away at a lonely desk, Bible translation is at it's best when the work is being done by a group of people with a clear community in view.Â A team of translators brings much more strength than could come from an individual. The Nyungwe Bible Translation Blog is an excellent illustration of how a team can work together.

It is interesting to note that the three dimensions which Brian sees as key to being missional are very much a part of Bible translation.