LAUNCH OF THE PATOIS NEW TESTAMENT

Posted on October 10, 2012 by Eddie

Category: Minority Language Translation

There are certain things I want to say that I can only say in Jamaican language.

These words were spoken by the Jamaican High Commissioner at the launch of the Jamaican New Testament in London, last night. It was a great evening, jointly sponsored by the Bible Society and the High Commission. I don't know how many people were crammed into the room, but the place was full and a number of us ended up standing at the back of the room. It was good to see such enthusiasm for the new translation.

I must admit, this was rather different to other New Testament dedications that I have attended, then again Knightsbridge in London is a long way from rural Ivory Coast; they do things differently there!

However, the thing that really struck me was that without exception, every speaker at the event felt a need to defend the production of the New Testament in Jamaican. The High Commissioner, the representative from the Bible Society, Joel Edwards from Micah Challenge and Courtney Stewart from the Bible Society of the West Indies all took time to justify this new translation. I found it rather sad that they had to do this.

As I tweeted last night; the story of the Jamaican language is the story of all minority languages. Whether you are in the West Indies, West Africa or East Asia, there is always an educated elite insisting that minority languages should be suppressed in favour of English, French, Arabic, Chinese or what-have-you. The implication is that if you abandon your own language in favour of one of the 'world' languages, you will somehow be able to manage better in the globalised world. However, Rev Stewart pointed out, Norwegians and Swedes seem to do quite well despite the fact that their languages aren't spoken by other nations. He then added "We are Jamaicans our heads are not so small that we cant learn both English andÂ Jamaican". The future belongs to people who are multilingual and multicultural.

The truth is that people are more able to integrate into the wider world when they are educated and literate in their mother-tongue first of all. A good basis in your own language strengthens and confirms your cultural identity and gives a platform for people then to gain an understanding of other languages and cultures. The production of the New Testament in Jamaican is a step forward for the Jamaican people. Here is hoping that other literature will also become available and that more people will start writing in Jamaican.

For a variety of reasons, this New Testament launch has provoked a lot of interest in the UK. But we shouldn't lose sight of the fact that there are hundreds of other translation projects taking place around the world:

> *In 1999, when Wycliffe and key partners adoptedÂ Vision 2025, we reported our involvement in almost 1100 of the 1500 translation programs known to be in progress. Since the start of Vision 2025 more than 250 New Testaments have been published with Wycliffe involvement and new work has begun in almost 700 languages.*

> *By Sept 2011, personnel from participating organisations in the alliance were involved in 1476 active language programs: About a third of these languages have populations less than 10,000, a third between 10,000 and 100,000 and a third over 100,000 speakers.*
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> *Additional work is being undertaken in a further 500 languages by organisations outside of the Wycliffe Global Alliance.*

That's a lot of translation going on!

You can see other posts which mention the Jamaican translation here.Â