GOD THE TRANSLATOR

Posted on February 25, 2015 by Eddie

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Category: Mission

Imagine for a moment that I only spoke Kouya and that I had something really important to say to you. How would I get my message across? Well assuming that gestures and an elaborate mime didnâ€™t quite achieve the goal, Iâ€™d need to employ a translator. There are many theories about how translation works and what actually happens when translation takes place, but essentially a message which was expressed in one language is expressed in a second language so that speakers of the second language can understand it. One of the features of translation is that it apparently simplifies a message â€“ something which was completely incomprehensible or at best partially understood becomes clear.

This is what translation does, it makes the incomprehensible comprehensible. With me so far? Now, Almighty God, is far beyond our understanding. Mortal, fallen, human beings cannot get their minds round what it means to be an eternal, all powerful, perfect God. The bottom line is that God is just too big. And yet, the message of the Bible is that God wants to communicate about himself and his nature to us. So how could God get his message across to humanity when that message was incomprehensible? The answer is simple: God used a translator to translate the message about himself from Divine into Human. In fact, God translated himself into human: he became flesh and dwelt among us. Moses would have been destroyed if he saw God face to face, yet that same God became a vulnerable baby. The unapproachable God became a man who could be seen, heard and touched. And as a man, he became someone we could look at, read about and understand. If you want to know what God is like â€“ look at Jesus. Andrew Walls puts this beautifully:

â€œIncarnation is translation. When God in Christ became man, Divinity was translated into humanity, as though humanity were a receptor language. Here was a clear statement of what would otherwise be veiled in obscurity or uncertainty, the statement â€œThis is what God is like.â€

Or Darryl Gurder in his wonderful The Continuing Conversion of the Church writes:

> â€œGodâ€™s loving desire to restore all creation to Godâ€™s self resulted in the joyful event and message of Jesus. The incarnation translates and embodies Godâ€™s love for creation.â€

God is a translator! And he, himself has set the precedent for translating his words into other languages. Bible translation is possible because God first translated himself. KwamÃ© Bediako puts it like this.

> â€œBut behind the Christian doctrine of the substantial equality of the Scriptures in all languages, there lies the even profounder doctrine of the Incarnation, by which the fullest divine communication has reached beyond the forms of human words into the human form itself. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.â€

This post first appeared on Kouyanet back in 2007. It's sometimes nice to dig back into the archives and remind myself of things that I wrote and then forgot all about, years ago.