IT'S ALL NAILS TO ME

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We define the problem and we apply the solution. We see nails, so we reach for the hammer; but not everything out there is a nail!
Category: Mission

They say that if the only tool you have is a hammer, then all problems begin to look like nails. I reckon that this is often true of the world mission movement; we have an approach to things and we keep applying it, whether or not it's the best way to do it.

I've come across two blog posts in the last few days that underline this tendency (and which also give me the opportunity to introduce two blogs that you should follow).

The first post is by an old friend, Reudi, who writes about Bible Translation:

> *For decades, the Bible translation movement has been counting â€œlanguages needing translationâ€ rather than â€œministries needing translation.â€ One result has been that a large number of completed translations never found a place in the life of believers and churches. They were boxed away and soon buried under the sands of time.*
>
> *A second consequence has been the lack of appreciation for the way local ministries manage to navigate their multilingual environments. Such insensitivity keeps us from exploring how translations in various languages, including national, regional, and local languages, might strengthen these ministries.*

I've touched on similar themes myself from time to time.

The other blog post I want to highlight is from mission lecturer Mark, who wrote a fascinating article on preachers and teachers from the West visiting other countries:

> *The problem is this: we have become negligent of our duty to be cross-culturally aware. We think we can do cross-cultural ministry without a single hour of training in intercultural communication. We send our pastors off to Ouagadougou to do pastor training without giving them any lessons in contextualization. We fund the translation of our finest books into Telugu without first seeking to understand how the Telugu mind works. And we set up seminaries in Burma without the slightest crumb of knowledge of how Karen or Kachin tribes people best learn. Shame on us.*

At first glance,these two quotes may not seem to be related, but there is a common theme around the way in which we view other people and their needs. Reudi points out that (to put it crudely) Bible translators have tended to the view that where there is a language, there is a need for a Bible translation, without always taking into account the views of the local population and the complexities of how they use various languages. Mark highlights a similar issue; we have good training models and literature and we apply them in different contexts without seeking to understand the issues that people face in those contexts or the way in which they learn best.

We define the problem and we apply the solution; but we may well have misunderstood the issues

and our solution might not be the right one. We see nails, so we reach for the hammer; but not everything out there is a nail!