

One of the great friends of the Foreign Mission Foundation is Dr. George Patterson, a teacher and trainer extraordinaire in the area of mentoring in the style of Jesus and the apostles, and in the house church planting movement. This month's article was written by a long-time protégée of Dr. Patterson's, Jay Pratt.

Soon after beginning work with a Buddhist people group in S. Asia Jay realized that it is extremely helpful to a movement when Bible translations are adjusted to fit a people group's cultural and language preferences at the local level. The same is true for training materials to equip the leaders.

In his article Jay describes challenges that must be overcome to accomplish this objective. Jay also describes some of the factors that led him to the conclusion that faster, more relevant translations of the Bible can greatly enhance ministry among new people groups.

-Dr. Gene Davis

-Jay Caven

Jay Pratt

Jay has been quietly doing Community Development and Relief work in Southeast Asia since 2002. He has coached several leaders to multiply leaders in multiplying networks of churches. Jay has a B.A. in Art from Union University in Jackson, TN and M.A. in Intercultural Studies from the Kim School of Intercultural Studies. Jay and his new wife Anna are currently residing in Asia.

Praise God for how he is opening new doors and bringing new ideas to allow his Word to spread at a quickening pace. God's Word is needed in an unprecedented number of languages as people are responding to the Gospel.

Wycliffe is developing new approaches and new software and hardware tools that can enable accurate local translations, facilitated by locally trained workers. It is certainly no coincidence that organizations like Wycliffe are strenuously working to develop new tools that will enable exactly this kind of translation to happen. Many of the traditional ways of doing translation are changing. You can see an example of this by clicking on the Wycliffe Bible Translators link above.

It is always humbling to realize that ideas and strategies we had held to be so critical and important can actually be

hinderances to our objectives. Even cheap paper and a weak binding in making a book, which we may consider as poor quality and inappropriate for scripture, may make a rural people group feel they can "own" the book for themselves. An example like this causes us to consider; "Should we care more about our own approach and opinion of what people should like, or should we be most concerned about what speaks to their heart? With so many new ideas and ways to do ministry, we must carefully consider this question. Thank you to Jay Pratt for helping us look at Bible translation in a new light.

God bless you as you seek to serve and glorify Him.

For His Kingdom,

Gene Davis and Jay Caven
Foreign Mission Foundation

The term Bible Translation Movement was first described to me by a colleague in South Asia where the largest turning of Muslims to Christ in history is happening. A Bible Translation Movement begins when new churches start to multiply in an unreached people group and new believers and leaders start to translate God's Word into their own language. Such new believers are also often motivated to help translate God's Word into neighboring languages that are similar to their own. There are some excellent lessons that we can learn from what the Lord is doing here.

Twenty-five years ago, Dr. Viggo Olson of the Association of Baptist for World Evangelization and his colleagues undertook to retranslate the entire Bible into a Muslim majority dialect. This proved to be a groundbreaking work of contextualization that helped stimulate an unprecedented Church Planting Movement in that country. The standard Bible translation had been made in the minority Hindu dialect a century earlier. Today, hundreds of thousands of Muslim-background believers have been baptized where Dr. Olsen's translation is used and the movement has spilled over the border to every adjacent country.

I have witnessed a similar trend happening in a Buddhist background Church Planting Movement that I have worked with over the past six years. Not long after I arrived in the area, I met a handful of Buddhist believers. We began to translate gospel tracts and multimedia materials into their language. We also told Bible stories and had leaders learn the stories in their local language. Yet, they said this was not enough. The leaders of this unreached people group wanted something to read, not just oral stories. However the traditional-language Bible translation was not considered by the leaders to be relevant to the Buddhist masses.

These new church leaders formed their own translation committee and began translating from the Contemporary English Version into the majority language. After seeking evaluations from new believers and seekers among Buddhist families and highly-educated monks they have completed the synoptic gospels and Acts as first importance for them. The translators are following Jesus' example in adapting key terms. For example, Jesus redefined the traditional Jewish terms kingdom (basileia) and God (Theos). Jesus also added meaning to traditional terms. For example, He called Theos, (God) "Abba" (Father). Calling the Old Testament God "Father" imported a scandalous new meaning into the Jewish community, as is still the case in Muslim cultures.

The days of a missionary couple going into an isolated area to start churches, and spending twenty-five years to translate God's Word into the local language might be at an end. The new believers in the Buddhist communities I work with want the Word of God today! - written in a language that speaks to their heart and soul. The main apostle of this Buddhist movement laughed out loud as he and I read the words of Martin Luther, "I do not want a Bible in German. My people need a German Bible." When I asked him why he laughed, he pointed to a contemporary language version lying on his table. "That is not a Bible for our people for it is not of our culture. It was not translated by our people but by a foreigner." I thank God for the traditional scripture translations that God has used to bring many into the Kingdom. The existing translations will never lose their predominance in the established church. However, if churches are to reach both majority and minority peoples, we must develop and use other versions and adaptations, as well.

Many Bible translation consultant groups cannot work closely with church planters due to written agreements with national, traditional churches allowing them to only work on languages where those churches focus. And, they can not tamper with traditional key terms and phrases. Also, most international Bible consultant organizations have agreements with the national Bible Society that does not allow them to work on a newer translation of an existing Bible. These are challenges that the Church must look at for the future.

In the end, translating the Bible as well as training materials without regard to the culture and needs of each people group, is not as effective as we would hope. Not all translations really speak to the heart of Muslims, Buddhists or Hindus. Church planters and trainers do not have to always wait for professional translators. Rather we must empower and encourage newer, indigenous, contextualized translations and as George Patterson says, "Trust the Holy Spirit in the hearts of obedient believers... Trust the Holy Spirit!"

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