Meeting the Need without Messing Up

This century will likely see all of the world's remaining language groups* finally gain access to God's Word through their own Bible translation. Although the Bible was completed almost 2,000 years ago, it’s been only within the last 200 years that thousands of language groups have received their own Bibles. This is a tremendous accomplishment in modern Bible translation. God is raising up a host of workers to give the remaining people groups direct access to the Bible. It's an exciting time to be part of Bible translation!

Current Need in Bible Translation

The attrition of the current workforce, though, is slowing down these efforts. Translation consultants (who have gotten additional training to come alongside mother-tongue translators and their churches), are retiring faster than they can be replaced. Cross-cultural translators (who directly translate the Bible) are still needed, but what is even more urgently needed are godly, skilled translation consultants who can train and assist language groups as they help their own people. With the proliferation of Bible training and resources around the world, these language groups can usually find enough qualified leaders willing to
dedicate their lives to providing the Bible for their own people. But they still need highly trained consultants to come alongside them to train and assist them. Baptist Mid-Missions has a Bible society called Bibles International, which provides the expertise and experience in Bible translation to mentor and send missionaries to serve as either cross-cultural translators or consultants.

Arlington Statement on Bible Translation

Other Bible societies are also looking for new recruits to assist with their current and future translation projects. Godly, intelligent, and well-trained missionaries and nationals serve with various organizations (Bible societies and support groups) to help with the Bible translation needs around the world. But before you commit your life to serving with any organization, you need to make sure you know well their posture toward the Arlington Statement on Bible Translation (https://arlingtonstatement.org).

This statement grew out of concern over what is called “extreme contextualization.” Some practitioners had let their ministry and translation philosophy carry them so far that they’d be willing to modify certain key expressions in the Bible to make them more acceptable to adherents of certain religions, such as Islam. These practitioners may have good intentions, but the result of their work clouds or even alters the truth of God’s Word. Therefore, BMM and BI joined in writing the Arlington Statement in an effort to establish clear guidelines that limit how much contextualization should happen in Bible translation. We recognize that the linguistic elements of the Bible need to be contextualized in the target language and that cultural elements may need to
be unpacked, but the meaning must remain unchanged. Certain expressions, such as “Son of God,” must not be distorted in any way.

We at BMM and BI want all peoples to read the Bible and get saved and sanctified by it. We desire that God’s unaltered truth would transform them so they might reflect His glory. We hope you have the same passion and want to join us in the work!

*Language groups that have a confirmed need, as opposed to languages that are dying out or whose people can satisfactorily use Bibles in another language.

This month’s Serve was written by Troy. Troy studied linguistics at Michigan State University and the University of North Dakota. He also earned an MA in Bible and a PhD in New Testament interpretation from Bob Jones University, which has courses of study especially geared for Bible translators. Troy joined BMM in 2007 and serves with his family as Bibles International’s Chief Language Consultant.
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