The Eight Conditions of Scripture Engagement
Social and Cultural Factors Necessary for Vernacular Bible Translation to Achieve Maximum Effect

by T. Wayne Dye

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Modern scholars recognize the power of the Scriptures in one's own language. Yale University professor Lamin Sanneh attributes the dramatic expansion of the African church to the translation of the Scriptures into the local language (1989, 123–125). As historian Mark Noll has observed,

> Over the course of the last century, Christian penetration of local cultures has accelerated as never before. The great vehicle of that acceleration has been translation, primarily translations of the Bible into local languages . . . In a word, the world Christian situation is marked by multiplicity because of how deeply the Christian message, translated into local languages, has become part of local cultures (2005).

Local Languages are the Key

The Scriptures themselves, as well as cultural and sociolinguistic factors, illuminate why it was the Bible in local languages that has brought this transformation, rather than just the Bible in some other language used in the local area. These differences can be summed up as "understanding" and "proximity."

We Christians worship a God who wants a very intimate relationship with each person. Jesus taught us to pray to our "Father," our "dada" as Paul put it in Romans 8:15. Jesus said we are loved and He wants us to love Him with every part of our being. This kind of love requires the engagement of our minds. As Paul said, "This is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ" (Philippians 1:9–10).

Jesus spoke of repentance as the natural result of understanding. When Philip met the Ethiopian official, he did not ask whether the man was really committed or whether he had actually gone to the temple. He first asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" Understanding is an Old Testament emphasis as well; more than fifty passages speak of understanding as a basic requirement of faith.

In many parts of the world, two or more languages are in regular use, and it is critical to use the best one for Christian teaching. As Donald McGavran put it,

Hundreds of millions live in two worlds. The first, of great importance to them, is that of intimates who speak the same language; the second, of relatively slight importance, is that world of a strange tongue in which we trade and work with outsiders. In the first, the medium of *communication* is the language of the heart; in the second, the language of *confusion* is a trade language or standard language, good enough for buying and selling, taking orders and finding one's way, but pitifully inadequate for the things that really matter. People fight, make love, and mourn in their mother tongue (1990, 159–160 italics his).

Linguists call the second language the Language of Wider Communication, or LWC. When the Bible is read and the faith taught in the LWC many people are unable to decipher what was said. Typical of many minority groups was the situation of the Baju in Nigeria, studied by Carol McKinney (1990, 279–290). Many Baju believers had been active in church for more than twenty years, but their level of understanding of Christian teaching varied from reasonably good to not even knowing who Jesus is. Their understanding was directly proportional to their fluency in Hausa, the LWC of that area and the language spoken in church. Since Christian growth depends on understanding, faithful church members who didn't understand Hausa were blocked from growing in their faith.

Even when people understand the Bible in a second language, the truth often loses its impact because hearers perceive God as distant and Christian faith as of little relevance to their daily lives. Good Christian living is about interpersonal relations, about emotion, about the deep springs of human life. Teaching that is all in the LWC suggests that Christian living is only for one's public persona, and internal spiritual growth is seriously hindered.

Unfortunately, many people learn their Christian faith through a language of wider communication, while traditional folk religion is in their local language.

This problem was widespread when I worked with some missionary and local colleagues in the Central African Republic. Witchcraft accusations and sorcery were part of daily lives of active church-going Christians. We reported this in a seminar for leading evangelical pastors in the capital. They responded that they fully believed the whole range of African Traditional Religion and assumed that God had given it to them for their welfare. Since they knew and used the national language in all their church teaching, I asked them which national language terms they used for

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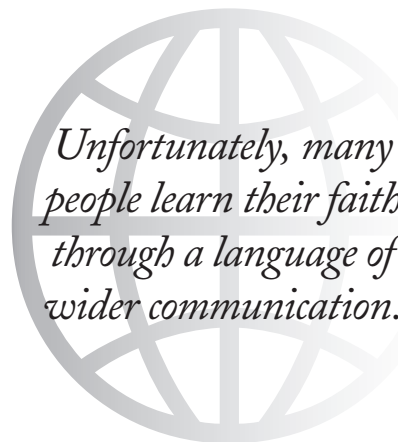
witchcraft, sorcery, amulets and other concepts in their traditional religion. After pondering for a while, one finally said, "We don't know what the terms would be in the national language; we only talk about traditional religion in our local languages" (T. W. Dye 1996). They believed and taught two incompatible religions, but by using different languages for each they had never noticed a conflict.

To sum up this section, the vitality of Christian faith depends on the Bible being understood and its teaching brought into daily life. Both are hindered when only a language of wider communication is used with people who are most at home in their local language. This hindrance can be tragic, because when the Word of God does get into their lives, people are transformed.

Why Scripture Engagement Work Is Needed

Scripture engagement does not happen automatically, however. Many trans-

lations are actually read or heard by very few in their target audience. In recent decades the Bible translation movement has recognized that more than translation is often needed. Workers have therefore sought ways to encourage people to actually use the Scriptures in their language in life changing ways. Many organizations have formed to promote literacy, create books, pictures, audio, and video, and develop a great variety of equipment to present the Bible in creative ways for various cultural contexts.

However, these materials leave Christian workers with an important question: "Which resource will be strategic in my situation?" That was the question put to me when I returned to Papua New Guinea in 2007 to further study the Bahinemo language. Workers there had gathered a very wide array of wonderful tools for communicating the Bible. They told me that despite having so many good methods, they could offer little help to their colleagues working in any particular language. They wanted to know how to use these materials most effectively.

I could not evaluate these methods without knowing much more about each specific situation in order to see which of a bewildering variety of factors might be influencing Scripture engagement. I offered a two and a half week workshop to teach their consultants how to categorize the various factors that influence the use of Scriptures, how to use a numerical score to see where an intervention is most needed, and how to choose strategic Scripture engagement activities for the specific issues in each translation project. These workers learned a model for choosing the most strategic activities to foster Scripture engagement. They are now teaching it to others.

The Conditions Necessary for Effective Scripture Engagement
The Eight Conditions of Scripture Engagement proposed here form an analytical framework that draws from the disciplines of linguistics, sociolin-

guistics, ethnography, and missiology. Interventions can be made to improve each condition to make the situation more conducive for people to use the Scriptures in their language. This model is built on twenty-five years of consulting and on the research and experience of many involved in Bible translation.[1] The model is informed by the work of a steadily growing number of trained people who are using it.[2] Together we have identified numerous social and cultural factors that influence people to use Scriptures.

It is possible to group the helps and hindrances into a small number of categories, which I call "conditions." The conditions proposed here are not a list of single items; instead, they are categories of multiple factors that can affect the eventual use or non-use of the Scriptures. There are many different ways to change a condition, each appropriate to some situations but not others. When all eight conditions are met,

*U*nless these weak conditions are strengthened, the Scriptures are not likely to be used in that situation.

good Scripture engagement is highly likely. When even one is unmet or very poorly met, engagement becomes problematic. These eight conditions are:

Condition 1. Appropriate Language, Dialect and Orthography

Condition 2. Appropriate Translation

Condition 3. Accessible Forms of Scripture

Condition 4. Background Knowledge of the Hearer

Condition 5. Availability

Condition 6. Spiritual Hunger of Community Members

Condition 7. Freedom to Commit to Christian Faith

Condition 8. Partnership Between Translators and Other Stakeholders

Condition 8 addresses the essential factors of interpersonal relationships with local pastors and leaders and inter-mission relationships. Condition 8 is more important and pervasive in its effects than the other conditions. Positive relationships and cooperation between missionaries, local leaders, linguists, and Bible translators are the essential factors that enable consideration of and action on the other conditions. Conditions 1 to 7 cannot be positively met or effectively improved without first successfully addressing Condition 8.[3]

Over-riding cultural factors sometimes influence several of the conditions positively or negatively. In such cases we consider them under each of the conditions they influence. For example, a dominant religion that controls the social system

The Welser Scale: A Tool for Evaluating the Conditions

Since 1999, Matt and Marcia Welser have used the Eight Conditions model in their work as Scripture engagement consultants in the Americas. At that time, Marcia proposed using a scale of 0 to 10 to evaluate the strength of each of the conditions for facilitating Scripture engagement. The "Welser Scale" proved to be practical and helpful as a planning tool for determining which condition most needs improvement, a key step in determining how to encourage Scripture engagement.

Local Christian leaders, the translation team and those people ready to work on Scripture engagement begin by discussing all aspects of their language situation. In some cases they divide the situation into subgroupings, such as urban and rural or believers and unbelievers. After choosing a situation, they consider each condition separately and record a tentative "strength" score. Zero means that category of factors is entirely negative, completely blocking all Scripture engage-

ment. For instance, a language that as yet has nothing of the Bible is 0 for condition 3, accessibility of the Scriptures. At the other end of the scale, 10 means that set of factors really couldn't be better. In the United States there are English Bibles for every conceivable viewpoint and interest, so the character of the Scriptures themselves would have a score of 10 for American English speakers. In this way, they examine each condition in turn.

When this process of clarifying intuitions is carried out by the same team and over a short period of time, it becomes realistic to compare the scores for each condition relative to the others. The scale does not, however, enable anything to be said about how one language situation compares with another, or even about how one person's assessment of, say, Condition 3 compares with an independent judgment by another person about condition 5.

After setting a value for each condition, the team looks for those with lowest

scores. This is where they will focus their energies first; other conditions can wait. Unless these weak conditions are strengthened, the Scriptures are not likely to be used in that situation. If the Welser score for the strength of a condition measures between 7 and 10, it is reasonably well met and the situation can be left as it is. The goal is to put major effort into strengthening the conditions that most seriously block the use of the Scriptures.

The planning team must then take another step. They must closely examine the conditions that most hinder the use of Scripture, and work out which of the many Scripture engagement interventions would be most useful in that situation. Using the Welser Scale enables workers to move from awareness of Conditions for Scripture Engagement to a practical plan for bringing the most change to the situation.

For a pdf with more information about this scale, write wayne_dye@gial.edu.

will influence nearly every condition, and particularly Conditions 6 and 7.

The Eight Conditions Model provides Bible translators, community church leaders, and missionaries with a framework for strategically assessing the dizzying array of factors affecting any Bible translation project. It is a simple but effective tool for clarifying what needs to be done in each situation.

In what follows, I will first explain the nature of each condition, show how to evaluate its importance, and mention a few interventions that have made a difference in various language areas. For more information on useful interventions, see Hill and Hill, 2008 or visit the Forum of Bible Agencies International site, www.scripture-engagement.org.

Condition 1: Appropriate Language

If people are to use Bibles in any language, that language, dialect, and orthography must be considered appropriate for expressing Biblical truth (Walker 1991). People only read Scriptures if they see their language as an adequate vessel for carrying the eternal Word of God. It is not uncommon for speakers to think of their own languages as too unimportant to merit a translation of the Scriptures.

For example, the Central Subanen on Mindanao Island in the Philippines had such a low view of their own language that when a missionary translator first began to learn it, they protested, "Please, do not speak my language." It was embarrassing to them to hear their language spoken by an outsider (Brichoux 1988, 27). If people consider the local language to be too menial, unimportant, or inappropriate, they are not likely to use Scriptures in that language.

When a group is switching rapidly to the official language, they will not perceive the local language to be appropriate (Hatfield & Lewis 1996). If there are high and growing levels of bilingual proficiency among a significant number of people, translated Scriptures are less likely to be used. The appro-

priate language must be determined carefully, usually through a formal sociolinguistic survey. In many such language groups, bilinguals consider the second language more proper, more appropriate for prayer and teaching, and especially for the word of God.

Walker (1988) suggests that the Scriptures in a particular language are likely to be used only when that language is dominant in at least one of these domains: church, singing, school, or occupation. This points to a serious problem. People might use the LWC for all of the above yet rarely use it at home

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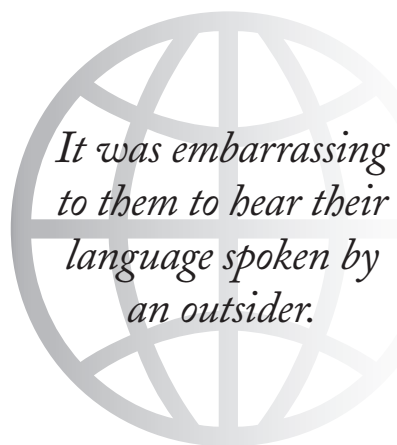
or for traditional religion. Such people usually do not hold their core religious concepts in that second language. Bible translation into the local language is then essential for helping them to understand the Gospel message and recognize that it is appropriate for their lives. When the LWC is used for public domains but core concepts are in the local language, an effort is needed to encourage people to value their language and recognize that it is appropriate for literature and for speaking to and about God. Positive attitudes toward local language for Christian expression may result from a socio-ideological movement among the people themselves or from a mission agency promoting the concept of relating to God in the vernacular language. Signs of positive attitudes include believers talking about issues in local language and idioms and using local music to express their Christian faith.

In multi-dialectical situations, the choice of dialect strongly influences

the use of a translation. People usually accept either their own dialect or the most prestigious dialect in their area, but may reject other dialects. Dialects tend to be rejected for very strong reasons: they may be spoken by a rival subgroup or a group which is disdained. If an inappropriate dialect is chosen for translation, it is unlikely to be used.

In addition to the language and dialect, the orthography (alphabet and spelling) and script need to be acceptable. Recent Bible translators often find serious weaknesses in missionary orthographies used before the development of modern linguistics. If a faulty orthography has led to serious ambiguities, one must work with leaders to change it and to do promotional work explaining and teaching it. If any local language orthography is much more difficult to read than the official language orthography, people will quit trying to learn it (Bendor-Samuel 1988).

In addition to being usable, an orthography and script need to be perceived as adequately prestigious for reading the Bible in that language. Often this requires that both be as much like the national language orthography and script as possible. For the most part, the choices are best made at the beginning of a project, with representatives of future users having a major part in the decision. They may need to have the choices and their possible results explained to them. Even after the choice is made and books are available, further explanations may be required before the whole community can come to a positive consensus. Building appreciation for local language and culture may be an ongoing need for Scripture engagement.

Condition 2: Acceptable Translation

People will only use a translation if they think it is really the Word of God and is in an appropriate form. The category "Acceptable Translation" encompasses a number of factors ranging from the style of the translation to the moral qualifications of translation team members. Mission agencies and indigenous churches alike must take great care to

ensure that decisions about the translation project are made with prayer and after careful consideration of local church expectations, because these can determine whether they will choose to read or hear that translation.

The way translators live can affect whether their Scriptures are accepted. Alphaeus, a Bible translation consultant in the South Pacific, was discussing his translation project with a local community leader. Some members of the translation team had had significant, protracted moral failures. Alphaeus asked that leader his opinion of the Bible translation project. He replied, "It is incredible that you translators are able to translate this very powerful book. It is even more incredible that this powerful book is not able to translate you translators; you translate the Word, but the Word is not able to translate your words and your works." The reputation of the translation project and the acceptability of the translation suffered significantly from the immoral lifestyle of a few members of the team (Zobule 2007).

In addition to acceptable translators, the translated Scriptures must be seen as an accurate rendering of the original and doctrinally correct (Reimer 1983). Normally this requires official approval by each denomination before its members will use the translation. Approval usually requires that some approved member from that denomination has participated in the review process so that they are sure it was done accurately. Local church leaders need to be a part of the translation team, either as members of the board or as reviewers. This encourages input and trust throughout the process. In current literature, the term "authenticity" is used to describe this developing conviction that the Scriptures are trustworthy and in an appropriate form. Local Christian leaders should also approve of the style of the translation. Some groups want it to be adapted to local speaking style; others want it close in grammatical form to the original (Dooley 1989).

Mission organizations teaching or translating Scripture need to agree with local leaders on the key biblical

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terms to be used. Depending on how biblical terms such as salvation, grace, and the Holy Spirit are translated, the Christian message can be clear or it can be misunderstood and distorted. Key terms need to be the best equivalents of the original, accurate and natural for the language. Borrowing key terminology from an LWC Bible, while tempting, is usually less communicative than using local terms. Unfortunately, translators frequently find people using key terms that were borrowed or translated before adequate study had been done. Local leaders may need to be taught biblical background and translation principles so they can make an informed choice. The process of coming to agreement on key biblical terms can be time-consuming, but it has the additional benefits of teaching translation reviewers and building mutual trust.

The perception that a translation is acceptable is primarily a result of decisions made in the course of translation with the participation of local church leaders. However, if older translations were completed without this participation, all is not lost. It is possible to improve this condition by explaining through courses for pastors and in other ways how the translation was done and why. Such explanations are seldom as effective, however, as community participation in the decision–making process from the beginning.

Condition 3: Accessible Forms

People groups must be able to "access" the Scriptures once they are translated. "Access" in this context means that individuals can read the Bible or hear it read or see it in drama or other communicative arts. If the Scriptures are written, some people must be able to read. If they are promulgated in oral forms, then people must be able to tell Bible stories or there must be electronic forms of Scripture. The focus in this condi-

tion is therefore on either increasing the number of people who can read (literacy) or developing avenues for making the Bible available orally or visually.

Because many minority group members do not read regularly if at all, in the last decade the focus has shifted to creative methods of oral and video Scripture products. See the next issue of *IJFM* for a brief description of these.

Condition 4: Background Knowledge

People need background information about the Bible before they can make sense of it. To understand this need, try reading an article on theoretical physics or microbiology or any other complex topic with which you are not already familiar. The normal reaction is just to walk away from that information source, because it doesn't make sense. Many people do not read the Bible because they find too many parts they don't understand, even though they believe that it is trustworthy and important. They lack knowledge about the historical and cultural context of the Bible (Hill 2006).

Hearers without enough background knowledge are forced to fill in the cultural blanks themselves. For instance, in Papua New Guinea, some believers were confused as to why or how Peter would go on top of the house to pray. Papuan houses have grass roofs pitched too steeply to walk on.

In addition to its socio-historical settings, some idea of the primary teachings of the Bible is needed to understand Scriptural passages as the authors intended them. In many places in the world, the Old Testament is used as a justification of polygamy. As the renowned linguist Kenneth Pike often put it, "If the text is not given a context, the culture will dominate the text." Alternatively, hearers can simply lose

interest altogether and the translation never brings its intended result.

Many people who come from a background of folk religion or Hinduism or Islam or Buddhism believe that the power of holy words is not appropriated through understanding their contexts and basic doctrines. They believe that books containing holy words are for ritual use, for the power of their words, not for study and application by lay people. In these systems, much of the magical power of a holy book is found in its incomprehensibility. Therefore, a new orientation to holy writ will be needed for people with those backgrounds to realize that this holy book is meant to be understood.

An important source of key background information for many passages is the Bible itself, especially parts of the Old Testament (Brown 2002). This is the reason for the "chronological" in the discipling methods Chronological Bible Teaching (McIlwain 1991) and Chronological Bible Storying.

Background information can also be communicated through footnotes, study helps, artistic expressions of the Scriptures, and through sermons. It is vital that each language group be adequately equipped to make sense of the newly translated Scriptures. Bible teaching is inherently the work of local churches, because it needs to continue indefinitely. If churches neglect this their parishioners will have an inadequate framework for interpreting the Scriptures.

Condition 5: Availability
To engage with Scripture, people must be able to obtain a copy or they must be able to hear someone telling it to them. A system is needed for distribution, sales, and informing people about where the Scriptures are available (Collins 1984). Translators in one east African language group asked me why no one was buying copies of the local language New Testament books. It turned out that this language group of over a hundred thousand people was spread out over a wide area, but

the books were available only in the unmarked translation office. Very few people in that group even knew a translation was being done. Even those who knew about the books would have had to travel all day to buy one, then stay overnight among strangers where there were no public accommodations. Before the translators could expect users, they needed to seriously rethink their distribution structures.

Missionaries and pastors are key people for increasing the awareness of the Scriptures and encouraging their use. Missionaries need to know

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what vernacular Bible translations and Scripture products are available in their regions and promote them wherever they can. It is best if missionaries speak the minority language, but even if they don't they can at least support local people in engaging with the Scriptures in their heart language (Landin 1990).

It is usually necessary to have a trained person responsible for distribution over a long period of time, if sales are to continue after the translation project ends. A well-defined financial system for distribution with a local system of accountability is also necessary for sustainability. Although pastors are key people for promoting the Scriptures, they are seldom good distributors because of obligations to be generous in distributing books and cash to needy parishioners.

Distribution systems should extend beyond the printed Bible or New Testament to include audio products and Scripture-based materials that

address the felt needs of individuals in a people group. In some regions of the world, the Internet is the most practical and widely used system of distribution of Scripture, in the form of downloadable texts, mp3s and videos. As of mid-2009, FOBAI has provided a website, www.findabible.net, that aims to provide links and information about finding the Scriptures in as many languages as possible.

Lives will only be changed by the Scriptures when people are aware of them and can find them.

Condition 6: Spiritual Hunger
The number of believers within a people group and their level of spiritual hunger can be a strong predictor of the level of Scripture use. In most ethnic groups, only Christians and people interested in becoming Christians will read the Bible for any length of time. The best way to increase the number of Bible readers is for the church to evangelize more people. At the same time, local language Scriptures are a powerful tool for evangelists (Brown 2002).

Church attendance is an indicator of the number of believers and thus of the potential readership. Usually, the number of Christians in an ethnic group is not larger than the number who regularly attend church. Conversely, in many parts of the world there are large numbers of people who attend church but have no vital faith. Hunger for the Bible might be missing even with a large apparent readership. Such people only become interested after experiencing personal renewal.

Many Muslims are interested in hearing parts of the Bible. This is usually related to their hunger to know God and the high respect which Islam teaches for most of the Bible. Any renewed interest in traditional or organized religion is a strong indicator of unmet felt needs and spiritual hunger (S. Dye 2003), but it is not a strong predictor of Scripture engagement unless Christians are showing them that God can meet those needs.

A key component in spiritual hunger is the perceived relevance of Christianity and the Bible to felt needs of whatever sort (S. Dye 2003). In an extensive study several years back, the author discovered a strong correlation between use of local language Scriptures and the degree to which people saw them as relevant to their daily lives (T. W. Dye 1985, 9). When people saw how the Scriptures spoke to their daily lives, their interest in the Bible increased significantly. Identifying the legitimate needs of the community and demonstrating how the Word of God addresses their important life issues is one of the most important tasks that local pastors, missionaries, and Bible translators can undertake (Loewen 1967; T. W. Dye 1985; S. Dye 2003; Hill 2006).

A powerful way to communicate that the Bible is relevant is to be ready with a Scripture-based answer when people bring up a felt need. This answer can be an appropriate biblical story, a more recent example of how God met a similar need, or a word of promise or correction from Scripture. I call these "Good News Encounters"—small episodes in daily life when God or the Bible are seen to meet a felt need (T. W. Dye 1985, 45ff).

Such encounters can have a powerful effect. In one language group the expatriate translators had done no formal Bible teaching or training; they only shared Good News Encounters. People soon began coming to them for help, and the translators never turned them away. Within a few years the translators were spending an amazing 16 hours each day in Good News Encounters. They only had time to do their translation work when away from the language area. Many people became strong believers through these encounters.

Soon these believers began to develop their own churches and then to disciple people in other villages. Many strong churches grew up from those discipled in this way. By the time I visited them, there were more than a hundred churches. They had developed their own Sunday schools, Bible training

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courses, in fact a whole functioning local denomination. Their language had five tones, tonal glides, and consonant clusters, but the Christians had taught themselves to read just to be able to read for themselves the Bible that they could see was the source of this life changing information (T. W. Dye 1985, 51).

Especially when done in the form of relevant Bible stories, Christian workers are finding that Good News Encounters are well suited to informal witness in resistant and even relatively dangerous areas. One can prepare for witnessing opportunities by preparing Bible stories and biblical answers to address specific needs within the culture. Whatever form the witness takes, it is important to show that God and the Bible meet felt needs in order to help people see their need to know God. When dealt with this way felt needs become an avenue to spiritual hunger for not-yet Christians.

In summary, spiritual hunger in anyone can contribute significantly to the use of a Bible translation.

Condition 7: Freedom to Commit

Freedom to commit means exercising spiritual freedom to choose to follow Christ wholeheartedly, including turning from ancestor worship, traditional magic, fetish worship, and any other belief or practice that conflicts with the teaching of the Bible. The Bible makes demands on people, demands to accept God's solutions to life problems and to give one's life over to obeying its teaching. If there is no freedom to do so, then people will not continue to read or hear the Scriptures.

Lack of freedom to follow Christ wholeheartedly is the great hidden obstacle which hinders Scripture engagement more than most Westerners imagine. Social factors such as the need for family unity in traditional religious practices are a crucial part of this hindrance to

becoming a follower of Christ and the Bible. Religions and religious practices are closely tied to group identity. To change these is often equated with ceasing to be part of the group.[4]

There is some evidence that response to Christ is not seriously hindered by persecution from governments or powerful outsiders even when it is severe, involving destruction of property, injuries, and sometimes deaths (T. W. Dye 1985, 167–70). Indeed, if people resent the government or those outsiders, persecution by them can lead to response. In contrast, ostracism or mere disapproval by beloved family members or other important people in one's social network can cut off response to faith. Regardless of the reason for their fear, potential believers who are afraid to follow the teachings of the Bible often quit reading or hearing it. Contextualization addresses group identity issues by demonstrating that people can express their faith in Christ in local social and cultural forms (Whiteman 1997; S. Dye 2003).

Heldara,[5] a Muslim background believer, worked as a member of the Bible translation team in her language group. Her husband, Kalif, disliked her involvement, saying, "The Bwanda people are Muslim. Christianity is a foreign religion." Finally, he agreed to come to a Bible study. The believers began singing original worship songs in the Bwandan language and style. When they opened the Bwandan language New Testament, the pages were decorated with traditional Bwandan ornamentation. At the end of the Bible study Kalif said, "I can now see that one can be a follower of Jesus and be a good Bwandan." In a few weeks, Kalif chose to become a believer.

Not infrequently, believers will continue their contrary religious practices in spite of their professed belief in Christ. Nominalism may be acceptable. These practices hinder commitment to

spiritual growth, which in turn limits willingness to read the Bible and the degree to which Bible reading leads to changed lives.
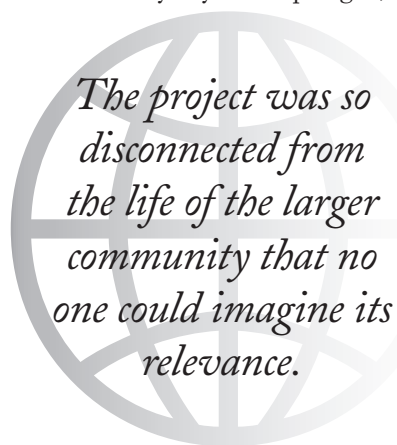
Beliefs in local supernaturalism are often very deep; they are the things rural people "know" are true. Typically, the beliefs which most hinder Christian commitment are traditional religious means for protection from witches, ghosts, local demons, or other perceived sources of evil attack. Where traditional religions are strong, even Christians may be utterly convinced that their lives depend on following traditional religious practices at some points, for protection against witchcraft, for healing, for good crops and good hunting. If they do not see a Christian solution to these practical problems, they may not even hear when someone points out that there are problems with their traditional answers.

It is common that missionaries do not know the actual beliefs and practices of local Christians in matters such as witchcraft, magic, and ancestor veneration, which frequently are barely distinguishable from the beliefs of pagans of the same ethnic group. If missionaries in the past have reacted negatively, denying the validity of traditional beliefs, church leaders and national translators may deny that any such beliefs exist, or claim that they only result from ignorance. An expatriate who builds close friendships, then accepts local ideas as having basis in reality, soon finds these denials replaced by open discussion of actual beliefs. Phased Bible teaching in an atmosphere of mutual respect is crucial to any change in this situation. Such teaching must be accompanied by demonstrations that God has real power in daily life and can meet their needs better than traditional resources.

Three young researchers in the Central African Republic listened to the traditional beliefs that had been hidden from missionaries for generations. When they shared these with missionaries there, one mission leader told the young women, "You have learned more about

the people's beliefs in four months, than our missionaries have learned in forty years." She apologized to these congregations for the missionaries' failure to listen to the people and welcomed their honest sharing. The missionaries were then able to show them specific biblical teachings in answer to their questions. Many repented of their witchcraft and sorcery killings in the church. They were finally free to hear the Word and understand it (T. W. Dye 1996).

In addition to the social and world-view hindrances, which can be delineated by any anthropologist,

The project was so disconnected from the life of the larger community that no one could imagine its relevance.

missionaries note that satanic opposition hinders Bible reading and understanding of Christian teaching. In His explanation of the parable of the sower, Jesus warned us that "the devil comes and takes away the Word from their hearts, so that they cannot believe and be saved… Others believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away" (Luke 8:12–13). Christian workers have observed that Satan operates below the surface of events, but his actions are a crucial aspect of the problem. Prayer and actively resisting Satan may be necessary to free them to commit to Christ.

Condition 8: Partnership

Partnership issues are among the most important factors contributing to the success or failure of Bible translation projects. David Landin's breakthrough research (1990) concluded that two of the most important factors affecting vernacular Scripture engagement

among minority language church members were whether local church leaders and missionaries used and promoted the vernacular Scriptures. When the local church and other missions are not invested in vernacular Bible translation projects, these projects can have little hope for success.

Bible Translation organizations have, in the past, often labored as if their work were completely independent from the life of the church. In Papua New Guinea, a missionary Bible translator asked his local colleague how many copies of the completed New Testament they should publish. "Two," he replied. "No one else will be interested in it but you and me." The project was so disconnected from the life of the larger community that no one could imagine its relevance.[6]

If a Bible translation team helps fulfill the vision of local churches, their translation is far more likely to be used. After discovering the visions of the local church and other missions, Bible translators in close dialog with the church can discover ways Bible translation can help fulfill these visions. Where no local church exists, translators should seek to partner with missionaries and other stakeholders working in that area.

On their part, local church leaders and missionaries can view vernacular Bible translation projects as partnership aspects that support their own ministries. Bible translation teams need to encourage missions and local leaders to facilitate the translation work in every way possible, soliciting prayer on behalf of the project, supplying gifted mother-tongue speakers as personnel for the team, and promoting the translation project throughout its life. By taking part in the process, local leaders and missions have a better understanding of how the translation supports their ministries. Communities should be owners of the translation process. This not only provides the key to Scripture use, but respects the local rights to determine their language development needs. The translated Scriptures are

used more when a community owns the translation process.

It is often the case that many potential readers understand their mother tongue best, but key leaders are adequately bilingual, so they may not as easily see the need for use of the mother tongue. In that case, use of translated Scriptures is heavily influenced by the attitudes of these leaders. Bible translators should seek to show the value of the local language for common people and to speak frequently in favor of its use.

Vernacular translations belong to the whole church and should not be perceived as being overly influenced by one denomination or mission. If a translation is seen as theologically biased towards one group or another, this will greatly reduce its acceptance by other Christian groups. Thus, expatriate missionaries and local churches of all kinds need to cooperate within a translation project, authentically valuing the perspectives of other groups of believers.

When cooperation between translators and local church leadership works, the results can be dramatic. Several years ago, I consulted with a translator working in the Philippines who had partnered with a group of four thousand Baptists in an area of 100,000 Catholics. Near the completion of the New Testament project, the translator approached the Catholic bishop to ask if he would approve his churches using the translation. The bishop did not trust the translation because the translator had been working only with the Baptists, who preached against Catholics. At the request of the translator, this busy bishop began reviewing the draft New Testament. Four years later, he still had not finished, and the translator and the Baptists were tired of waiting. The translator asked me whether or not to abandon the review process with the bishop. I said that it depended on whether her goal was to engage 4,000 readers or 104,000 readers. She stuck with the partnership and the bishop finally approved the translation. The New Testament dedication

I said that it depended on whether her goal was to engage 4,000 readers or 104,000 readers. She stuck with the partnership . . .

was the largest ever in that area, and it included both Baptists and Catholics. A few years later, a people movement had sprung up among the Catholics using the translated Scriptures.

There is one important exception to the need for partnership. In some parts of the world, there is a dominant religion and a relatively small, and often old, minority Christian community. McGavran noted many years ago that such Christian communities have survived by keeping to themselves and emphasizing their separateness from the dominant culture (McGavran 1990). In that way they minimize persecution and decrease the likelihood that their children will change to the dominant religion. Christian communities of this sort have much to lose by making the adjustments necessary to engage in extensive evangelism. Many of them vigorously resist even using terms in the translated Scriptures that are the same as those used by the dominant religious community.

When there is such a socially separate church, it is sometimes necessary to have two translations, one for them (if they even want a new translation) and one translated for those unfamiliar with the Scriptures. This second translation must be used by those Christians, often foreign missionaries, who are committed to evangelism. It is mainly the dominant community, by definition not yet believing Christians, that needs to be comfortable with this second translation. Since the Bible is widely recognized as an important literary work, such a community might accept a translation for the prestige it brings even though they don't believe the Bible.

There is one major religious community that does indeed consider most of the Bible an important holy book that people should revere and can appropriately read or hear. This is the

Islamic community. Muslims consider the Old Testament and the Gospels to be holy books, albeit with errors compared to the Holy Qur'an. It has therefore proven acceptable for good Muslims to distribute Bible stories and to publish books of the Bible if they are in appropriate form for a holy book. Some Muslims are even willing to help translate biblical books (James 2006). Sometimes respected scholarly Muslim organizations will publish them.

Today there are millions of copies of oral biblical stories being sold and circulated by practicing Muslims in the Middle East. There are also an increasing number of published copies of various biblical books. It is not possible to directly assess the impact of this literature, but there are some indicators. For instance, in a recent survey of first person testimonies of Muslim background believers, Maranz found that nearly all of them had read the Bible before becoming followers of Jesus (2004). I conclude from this that Bible translation and Scripture engagement in such a context is best done by those in cordial relationship with leading Muslims.

To my knowledge, however, this is the only important exception to the generalization that Bibles are mainly read and heard by Christians, so partnership with the Christian community is vital to Scripture engagement.[7] For that reason, it is inaccurate to think of Condition 8 as on the same level as the other conditions discussed in this article. The issue of partnership permeates all of the other conditions, the success of the other conditions being dependent on the success of this condition.

Conclusion

If all eight of the above conditions are strong in a language area, then people in that area are very likely to use the local language Scriptures and

be transformed as they do so. If even one condition is too weak, the use of Scriptures can be seriously hindered. There are certainly other pervasive factors that contribute to these eight conditions, including the national political, economic, and social environment. It is natural therefore to wonder if the Eight Conditions for Scripture engagement suggested here is an exhaustive listing. While other factors might well be discovered, they are likely to fit naturally under the categorical groupings of these Eight Conditions of Scripture Engagement.

Does the system work? Within a year after my wife and I taught translators how to use this approach, they were so empowered that they made plans to eventually enable all the hundreds of translation teams in Papua New Guinea to learn this system. We returned to take part in a second workshop; this time they did most of the teaching.

The listing of these Eight Conditions or eight categories of factors used as a tool for evaluation can prevent surprises and help the church, missionaries, and Bible translators alike to focus on those activities that are likely to have maximum impact. It's the great longing of my heart that the people groups of the world will not only have the Scriptures in their heart language, but that the Scriptures will have greatest spiritual effect. **IJFM**

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Endnotes

[1] Of the many people who have helped me develop and refine these ideas, I am most grateful to my wife Sally, the originator of many key concepts, to fellow teacher Michelle Petersen, who has helped me clarify many of the concepts, and to Tim Hatcher, whose insights have contributed much to the re-thinking that finally led to this article.

[2] They were taught in our classes at the Graduate Institute of Applied Linguistics in Dallas, Texas, by Michelle Petersen at SIL Vancouver, and in other locations as well.

[3] Condition 8 was not included in earlier in-house drafts of this model. Interpersonal relationships with local leaders and inter-mission relationships were considered as somewhat different because they affect all the conditions. However, that approach did not give partnership issues their appropriate prominence.

[4] For the importance of social networks in the spread of the faith, see Gray and Gray, " Paradigms and Praxis, Part II: Why Are Some Workers Changing Paradigms?" pp. 63-73 in this issue of *IJFM*.

[5] Names of persons and this language are pseudonyms.

[6] This story has a happy ending, but not until a generation later when carefully researched Scripture Engagement methods were finally applied to that situation.

[7] It is possible that some Hindu and Buddhist communities would read the Bible if it were translated by a team that included their own people. Considering the success with the Islamic community, that approach needs to be tried. However, I am not aware of any current attempts to do so.