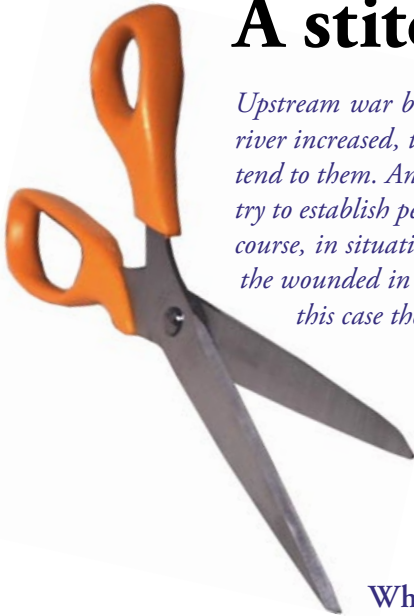


A stitch in time saves nine



Upstream war broke out between two rival parties. As the number of floating wounded and dead bodies in the river increased, the rescue workers hurried down stream to fish the bodies and wounded from the river in order to tend to them. Another team decided that they would journey upstream to try and mediate between the two sides to try to establish peace. It was their conviction that as far as is possible, it is better to get to the roots of a problem. Of course, in situations where the outbreak of war cannot be averted it is also important that somebody takes care of the wounded in an attempt to save their lives, but the better solution is to try to prevent war in the first place. In this case there will be neither wounded nor casualties.

This illustration is often used to explain different kinds of mission activities. There are many ministries whose primary objective is to treat existing problems. There are others, however, Wycliffe included, concentrating their efforts on prevention. Through the Word of God, we would like to hand people a ‘pipe of peace’ with which they can avoid becoming the ‘dead and wounded in the river’.

What is behind these thoughts?

We consider it to be important to be *holistic* in our approach to meeting the *spiritual and physical needs* of the people we work with. What does this mean? In his book *Transforming Mission: Paradigm shifts in Theology of Mission*, **David J. Bosch** defines it in the following way: ‘Holistic mission harmonises the two conceptions of mission that developed in practice throughout church history. One extreme viewed mission as a *purely spiritual activity*, turning a blind eye to people’s physical needs; the other focussed *simply on the encouraging humanisation of society*.’ (Back translation of *Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, page 353.)

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Let’s examine how exactly Bible Translation can be holistic:

THE SPIRITUAL ASPECT:

The Word of God has power to change lives. When someone hears or reads scripture in their own language, they have the opportunity to come to living faith in Jesus Christ. Bible Translation is *the foundation of the fellowship of believers*, the establishment of churches and congregations *and the growth of all these*. There is well-founded evidence to support the fact that those churches that had a mother tongue translation of the Bible were better able to withstand the stormy centuries of history and the impact of other religions. This foundational spiritual transformation is the source of all other transformations.

THE NEED ASPECT:

The power and the truth of the gospel can also change a person’s social environment and physical situation. Many people groups who were previously looked down on by their neighbours have found *self-respect* as a result of Bible Translation in the mother tongue. They understand that God hasn’t forgotten about them and that His words can be written in their language too. We Hungarians who have been literate for many hundreds of years perhaps find it hard to identify with the incredible joy and pride that these people groups, however small they may be, feel when they realise that their language is being preserved. Of course no one needs to persuade us of the significant role our language has played in the preservation of our national culture throughout our history. ▶

► But what is the relationship between these two aspects of Bible Translation and its associated ministries in practice?

Let's take *literacy* for example. The acquisition of literacy plays a foundational role in the *social development* of the individual. It has also been proved that an individual who has first learnt to read and write in their mother tongue, will find it *easier to learn to read another language*. This simplifies the transition from the local language to the official national language.

Literacy can also enable people to learn *basic hygiene rules* helping to prevent them from falling sick so often. They are also able to learn which medicines to use to treat various common sicknesses, eg: malaria.

Knowledge of the biblical guidelines for *abstinence* can have a practical effect, eg: in reducing the number of HIV infected individuals and thus the spread of *AIDS*. (We all know that this is a significant problem in many countries).

Bible Translation as a holistic mission has a far longer history than the 70+ years of Wycliffe Bible Translators. Bible Translation has been in existence since the birth of the church. Wycliffe Bible Translators simply recognised the need to build on and develop this tradition.

In many cases literacy classes can be used as an *evangelistic tool* when the teachers are believers. It seems that those believers who are literate *stand on more solid ground* and are less likely to be in danger of backsliding.

It is very important to put these present day activities into an *historical perspective*. Bible Translation as a holistic mission has a far longer history than the 70+ years of Wycliffe Bible Translators. Bible Translation has been in existence since the birth of the church. The Christian New Testament was first written in Greek, not in the language that Jesus spoke and in which he taught. Wycliffe Bible Translators simply recognised the need to build on and develop this tradition.

This article has attempted to provide a small insight into the many ways that these two areas overlap. God willing many Hungarians will join this worldwide ministry, since we already know what it means to hear and read God's Word in our own language. Please help us to share this blessing with other people groups of the world.

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Wycliffe Bible Translators, Hungary

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