



From Unreached to Established

Church-Centric Bible Translation and the Establishing of the Church in Every People Group

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Executive Summary – This paper describes the current reality regarding Bible translation by contrasting two different paradigms. The dominant paradigm of Bible translation in recent decades has been focused on the delivery of a quality product. The paper argues that this “Bible-centric” paradigm is becoming misaligned with the needs of the rapidly growing global church and is also facing a crisis due to lack of personnel to fill key quality assurance roles. The emerging “church-centric” paradigm integrates Bible translation into the process of establishing strong churches, providing improved scalability and alignment with the global church’s needs. This paradigm is shown to be facing its own crisis, due to lack of accessible resources. The paper concludes by showing how Bible agencies can help resolve this crisis by collaboratively creating these resources and training the trainers of the global church, but that doing so will require a transition from the objectives and metrics of the product-oriented, Bible-centric paradigm to the capacity-building, church-centric paradigm.

Glossary of Terms

Certain important terms and their definitions as used in this paper are listed here:

- **Bible-Centric Bible Translation (BCBT):** a paradigm of Bible translation focused on the production of a quality Bible translation using an academic and linguistic process that is usually led by a translation agency and functions independent of (and sometimes in advance of) the theological and spiritual formation of the lingual church (see definition below). *The “Bible-centric” paradigm has as its focus the production of a Bible translation, with life transformation as the intended outcome.*
- **church network:** interconnected local churches that share a common leadership structure and doctrinal persuasion. *This term includes formally-structured, centralized networks such as some denominations, as well as less-structured, decentralized networks such as some house church movements.*
- **Church-Centric Bible Translation (CCBT):** a paradigm of Bible translation focused on the establishing and strengthening of a lingual church (see definition below) using a translation process that is led by leaders of the church and done by believers translating into their own language, as an integral part of their theological and spiritual formation. *The “church-centric” paradigm has as its focus the establishing of the church, with Bible translation as a means to that end.*
- **established church:** A church that is firmly rooted and grounded in sound doctrine (orthodoxy, c.f. Eph. 4:11-16; Col. 2:5-7; 1 Cor. 15:58) and is characterized by faithful living (orthopraxy, c.f. Eph. 4:1; Col 1:10; 1 These 2:12). *This term is not synonymous with a “planted” church, it is not referring to the structure or polity of a congregation, nor does it have in view the classic “three-self” definition (self-supporting, self-propagating and self-governing) as this rubric addresses the indigenization and degree of (in)dependence of the church, not its doctrinal integrity.*
- **gateway languages (GLs):** the smallest number of Languages of Wider Communication that covers 100% of the languages spoken collectively by the people groups of the world through patterns of multilingualism.
- **global church:** the household of God (Eph. 2:19), the body of Christ (Eph. 1:22-23), the sum total of all believers in the one faith (Eph. 3:8-10), from all languages and cultures (Matt. 28:19-20), and including all traditions that are faithful expressions of sound doctrine (Eph. 4:4-5), at the current time. *By extension, the ‘universal church’ is the global church through all time.*
- **language variant:** (also a *variety* or *lect*) a specific form of a language (or language cluster) that may include languages, dialects, registers, styles, or other forms in addition to a standard variety.
- **lingual church:** a portion of the global church that is linguistically homogeneous, speaking either the same language or variants that have a sufficient degree of mutual intelligibility, and including all traditions that are faithful expressions of sound doctrine (Eph. 4:1-6; 1 Tim. 6:3; Tit. 2:1). *This term is similar to (but distinct from) “ethnolinguistic church” and is proposed with the intent of affirming the unity of the global church, while also recognizing the ecclesiological and missiological implications (particularly in terms of effective use of Bible translations and biblical resources) inherent in the existence of one global church that speaks many languages.*
- **local church:** a portion of the global church comprised of baptized believers in close geographic proximity that meet together regularly to worship God through Jesus Christ, to be exhorted from the Word of God, and to celebrate the Lord’s Supper under the guidance of duly appointed leaders. *This*

term attempts to define the minimum qualifications that distinguish a local church in any people group from other gatherings of believers (e.g., a Bible study, a village/community meeting, etc.).

- **other languages (OLs):** in the Gateway Languages strategy, all languages that are not considered gateway languages. *This is not a synonym for ‘minority languages’ as some OLs are large and prestigious but may not necessarily be used by the regional church as a source language from which to translate.*
- **parachurch organization:** an institution that (usually) crosses church network boundaries and serves alongside the church by specializing in tasks that local churches may not be able to accomplish individually.
- **regional church:** local churches that share a common geographical location (e.g., a city “the church in Ephesus” (Rev. 2:1) or a region “churches of Galatia” (Gal. 1:2)) and, frequently, cultural distinctives (e.g., “the Western church,” “the church of the Global South”). *This term refers to the cross-section of all portions of the global church in a given region, regardless of their affiliation or patterns of existing relationships and leadership structures.*

1. Introduction

The intent of this paper is to build a bridge from the dominant paradigm of Bible translation (referred to as “Bible-Centric Bible Translation”) to the paradigm that is rapidly emerging (“Church-Centric Bible Translation”).¹ The paper contends that the Bible-centric paradigm has enjoyed significant effectiveness in recent decades, but is becoming outpaced by the needs of a rapidly growing global church.² This is neither criticism of the paradigm itself nor pejorative toward the many currently involved in it—far from it. The central premise of this paper is that the transition to the church-centric paradigm creates *new opportunities for Bible agencies to more effectively serve the global church*, by equipping her to achieve the true missiological objective of Bible translation: churches that are established in sound doctrine, with faithful theology, and mature leadership (Acts 15-18; 20:17-32; Tit. 1:1-5; 2:1).

The challenge for a paper like this is to provide sufficiently compelling evidence for the decline of one paradigm and the rise of another (in order to overcome skepticism and resistance to change), but to do so in a way that is not misunderstood as combative. Consequently, this paper is direct (but is not intended to be antagonistic) as it attempts to show that a decisive change in Bible translation paradigms is *urgently* needed. The overarching objective is to clarify what is changing and why it is changing so that we can collaborate toward a future where more Bible translation happens in more languages by more people with greater results than ever before.

This paper is written with the hope of clarifying the crucial role of global church leaders in the work of Bible translation. It is also intended to help catalyze a course change among the leadership (both executive and board level) of Bible agencies. An urgent need is facing the global church right now, and the Bible agencies are in the best position to decisively meet it. But they may not be able to do so without understanding and intentionally transitioning to the church-centric paradigm of Bible translation. This includes (among other things) adopting a new objective, new strategies to reach it, and new metrics to quantify progress toward it. Some agencies are already making the transition, others still have unanswered questions. This paper attempts to describe the transition, answer key questions, and suggest tangible ways forward.

To that end, this paper begins with a consideration of how the Bible translation movement arrived where it is now, the progress that has been made toward its objective, and the obstacles that lie ahead on

¹ This paper makes use of typology (used here to mean “a systemic analysis based on categories”) to compare and contrast the differences between these paradigms. It should be noted that the assertion of a *general* distinction between types does not imply that all examples of one type are alike in all details (i.e. counter-examples likely exist but do not necessarily invalidate the typology). Furthermore, the resemblance of typology to caricature need not be problematic, as long as it is understood only as clarifying in a general sense, not universally applicable in all contexts. As Gonzales observes, “Any typology is of necessity schematic. It may be illuminating, as long as it is not taken too literally. In this respect, a typology is like a caricature: When one sees a caricature of a person, one immediately recognizes the person by the exaggeration of prominent features, although no one could possibly have such features. Likewise, in drawing a typology... *one underscores those elements most characteristic of a particular type*. This helps clarify the issues and contrasts, as long as it is not understood as an actual description that makes all nuances superfluous” (1989:10, emphasis added).

² The use of analogies and metaphors in this paper is to illuminate two different paradigms of Bible translation and clarify the difference between reality and our varying perceptions of it. These conceptual devices may be helpful to that end, as long as their limitations are understood. For example, metaphors and analogies increase our comprehension of certain aspects of a concept while obscuring others. As Lakoff observes, “The very systematicity that allows us to comprehend one aspect of a concept in terms of another... will necessarily hide other aspects of the concept... In allowing us to focus on one aspect of a concept... a metaphorical concept can keep us from focusing on other aspects of the concept that are inconsistent with that metaphor (2008:10).” This suggests that, to the extent we use a single metaphor, we may find it difficult to perceive other aspects that do not fit with that metaphor.

the current trajectory (section 2). Next, it posits that the objective of world missions is the establishing of the church in every people group (section 3) and that Bible translation in the church-centric paradigm is a means to that end (section 4). Finally, it describes how the global church functions as a complex network (section 5) and suggests ways that Bible agencies can increase the capacity of the global church to achieve excellence in Bible translation.

2. Bible-Centric Bible Translation

In the early 20th century, the power of the translated Word of God was rediscovered, as missionaries realized that many people who spoke minority languages were not able to understand the Bibles in the languages of wider communication. This led to a paradigm of Bible translation that was focused on providing quality Bible translations in every language, which often meant translating into the languages of people groups where the church did not yet exist.³ Over time, this paradigm took the shape of teams of specialists in linguistics and translation who worked as pioneers, traveling the globe in advance of other ministries, with the intent of analyzing languages, developing writing systems, providing basic literacy training, and translating a New Testament (sometimes the whole Bible), before moving on to another place and doing it again. This pioneering work of translating the Bible and handing it off to others is described in *The Word that Kindles*, a book that was required reading for new recruits in at least one of these organizations:

We believe churches both at home and abroad have many spiritual needs, but this should not sidetrack us from our top priority—to provide the Word of God for those with no light at all... [We] are laying foundations by providing the basic document for evangelism, teaching and discipline by others... *We consider our work done once the Scriptures are available and there are those who have been taught to read and use them.* Members are encouraged to go on to other fields and pioneer again (Cowan 1986:206, emphasis added).⁴

The centrality of the Bible in this paradigm is expressed in statements like this:

The greatest missionary is the Bible in the mother tongue. It never needs a furlough, is never considered a foreigner and makes all other missionaries unnecessary.⁵

One of the assumptions of this traditional paradigm has been described as:

Our job... is to give people the Bible in their own language. The Holy Spirit will do the rest.⁶

³ It is important to note here that this movement started nearly fifty years *before* the epic shifts of globalization (including the advent of near-ubiquitous mobile communications technology) and the massive growth of the global church in the late 20th century.

⁴ Later in the same book, this point is repeated, “Some people have been called by God to mass evangelism, church planting and theological training ministries. We have not. The very difference of our tasks enables us to serve and complement each other. Their ministries will be better with the Bible in the language of the people than without it. Their ministries supplement ours and thus leave us freer to move on” (Cowan 1986:209).

⁵ This quote is attributed to William Cameron Townsend, the founder of Wycliffe Bible Translators (see Paredes 2016). Its focus on the missiological efficacy of the Bible in and of itself is similar to one made by Rev. Canon W. J. Edmonds of the British and Foreign Bible Society several decades before, in 1900, “The Word of God is the most living of all God’s oracles, the most evangelical of all evangelists, the most trustworthy of all God’s messengers” (Edmonds 1900b:15).

⁶ See SIL Papua New Guinea (2017:18). I am indebted to the authors of this assessment of Scripture Use patterns in Papua New Guinea for their clarity and candor in the reassessment of traditional assumptions like these.

Given the many good things that have occurred due to the increased availability of translated Scripture, it is understandable that this paradigm of “Bible-Centric Bible Translation” became increasingly “product” oriented. This orientation is sometimes expressed by a manufacturing metaphor, such as: the *Bible translation industry* is comprised of *corporations* (Bible agencies) whose *workers* (linguist-translators) *manufacture* (translate) *products* (Bible translations) that, once they pass inspection by the *quality controllers* (translation consultants), are *marketed* (Scripture Engagement) and *distributed* (by Bible Societies) to *customers* (the lingual church).⁷ Later in this paper we will consider a corresponding metaphor for the church-centric paradigm of Bible translation.

The Acceleration of the Bible-centric Paradigm

Over time, various methods have been employed to optimize the production of Bible translations. Because the Bible-centric paradigm employs a generally linear process (analogous to a manufacturing assembly line), there are three ways that the productivity of this model can be increased.⁸

1. **Increase the number of producers** (i.e. recruit more Bible translators).
2. **Increase the production rate** of the existing producers (i.e. produce translations faster).
3. **Decrease the size of product** being produced (i.e. instead of Bibles, aim for New Testaments or Scripture Portions).⁹

Each of these means of accelerating production increases the incline of the linear process, as shown in Diagram 1 (using simplified example data for illustrative purposes):

⁷ Aspects of this manufacturing metaphor are described by Jones: “We [translation consultants] have conceived of our work as a kind of Quality Control function, whereby we as consultants assure ourselves, the translation teams, our organizations, the proposed publishers of a Bible, and the Church at large that a given translation is a faithful rendering of the original message. In the wider manufacturing sector, quality control officers examine the products of a manufacturing process to assure stakeholders that they meet standards of quality as defined by the manufacturer. They then ‘sign off’ on the quality of the product they have examined. The consultant check has served a similar function for translations of the Bible for decades and we have adopted similar language in talking about what we do” (Jones 2018:2).

⁸ The productivity of the Bible translation industry (in general terms) can be represented by a simple equation: **Producers** (*number of teams*) x **Production Rate** (*products per team per year*) = **Productivity** (*products per year*). For example, if 100 teams of translators can each produce one translation product every ten years, the Productivity would be *10 Products/year*.

⁹ There is value in publishing Scripture portions sooner, but the smaller the production goal becomes, the less it materially addresses the stated objective of *Bible* translation. Thus, one could argue that this does not actually accelerate the process but merely achieves the milestone of “A Bible translation project is in progress for every people group that needs it” sooner.

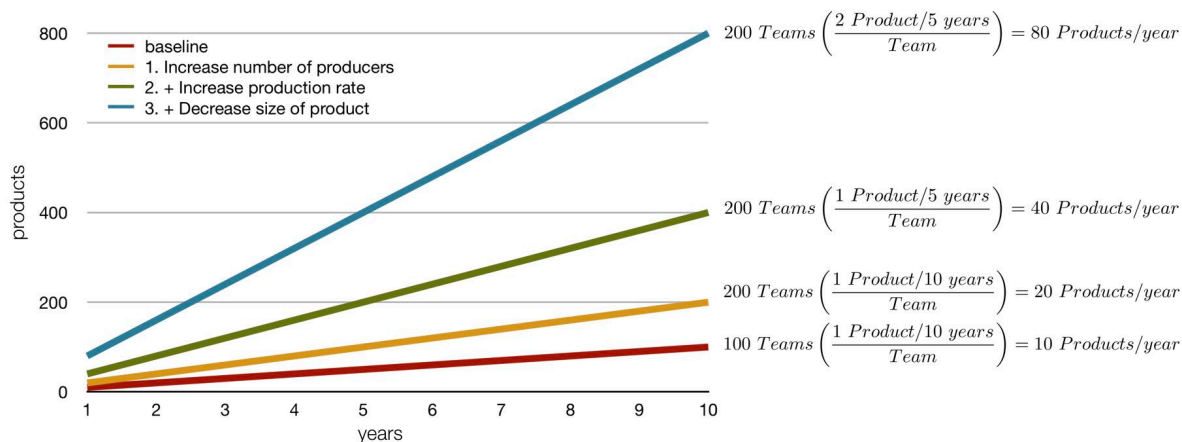


Diagram 1: Acceleration of linear Bible translation processes

The Advantages of the Bible-centric Paradigm

There are clear advantages of a linear, product-focused paradigm of Bible translation. Notably, it is relatively **easy to understand**. The needs are clear, both in terms of the percentage of work that has been completed in the Bible translation enterprise, as well as the numbers of remaining Bible translation needs. Bible translation projects in this model tend to have a clear starting point, clearly defined processes, and a definite end point.

Furthermore, linear production models are relatively **easy to quantify**. The number of translation projects that are completed, active, and needed can all be quantified.¹⁰ As shown in the example data in the chart above, simple math leads us to an understanding of the ways that the production rate can be accelerated. Combined with a year by which the global community agrees that all Bible translation work should be completed, we can calculate the precise number of translations needed each year to achieve it.

From there, it becomes a matter of providing the Bible translation “industry” with the resources needed to achieve the desired rate of production. Given the ease with which the model can be understood and quantified, it is also relatively **easy to fund**.¹¹

The Success of the Bible-centric Paradigm

This paradigm of Bible translation has blessed hundreds of millions of people around the world. In the last 20 years, the number of languages with a New Testament has nearly doubled (from 764 to 1,521) and the number of languages with a translated Bible has more than doubled (from 308 to 670). Because of the hard work of many faithful Bible translators, people groups around the world are today enjoying greater spiritual vitality because they now have Scripture in their own languages.

¹⁰ Though, as we shall see later in this paper, these numbers often do not reflect the perspective of church network leaders assessing their own translation needs.

¹¹ The ability of funders to understand the Bible translation need and generously donate in the hope of meeting it is evident in the annual contributions to the five largest Bible translation agencies of nearly \$300m (Every Tribe Every Nation 2017:46-53).

Assumptions and Misalignments of the Bible-centric Paradigm

Achieving excellence in any undertaking depends, at least in part, on distinguishing between reality and one's perception of reality. With that in mind, we will consider certain assumptions on which the Bible-centric paradigm is dependent, and how they are misaligned with reality. These can be categorized as *missiological issues* and *logistical challenges*.

Missiological Issues

Assumption #1: The translation is used by the lingual church

The most foundational assumption in the Bible-centric paradigm is that completed Bible translations are used by the lingual church for whom they were created. There are many examples of lingual churches becoming strengthened in the faith and increasing in their understanding of the Word after the completion of a Bible translation, but this frequently does not happen as expected. One large-scale assessment of the effectiveness of Bible translations produced in the Bible-centric paradigm found that as few as 1 in 3 of the translations surveyed are well-used by the lingual churches for whom they were created.¹²

Conversations with church leaders in various parts of the world suggest several potential reasons for a lingual church's lack of use of finished translations. One reason may be that the translation projects was undertaken by outsiders as an external (or parallel) process to the formation of the church in that people group, resulting in a lack of ownership of the process and consequent ambivalence toward (or rejection of) the product. In other contexts, the completed translation was undertaken in the wrong dialect and the church could not receive it as God's Word to them. Some translation projects may have begun in the correct dialect but took so long to complete that the language changed significantly in the intervening years, making the translation unusable. Still other projects delivered a printed Bible to a lingual church that was not yet able to read, resulting in an unsurprising lack of use of the product. For reasons like these, *the assumption that a Bible translation is used by the lingual church is often unfounded*.

Assumption #2: The translation achieves the desired missiological purpose

A second foundational assumption of this paradigm is that the completion of a translation directly leads to making disciples of that people group and teaching them to obey all that Jesus has commanded us (Matt. 28:19-20). In other words, the assumption is, "The use of the vernacular Scriptures always leads to transformed lives and communities" (SIL Papua New Guinea 2017:19).

Even in situations where some people are reading the Bible translation, there is still an immense gap between that and the actual missiological objective. As we shall consider later in this paper, the essential biblical mandate is to make disciples and (observing the implementation of that mandate by the apostles of the early church, as recorded in the New Testament) to establish churches in sound doctrine with mature leadership, and Bible translation may be a means to that end. But even when the church has been involved in a Bible translation project, *merely delivering a quality translation does not necessarily lead to a mature, well-established church*.¹³

¹² To their credit, the authors of this report have not minced words in their self-assessment: "Enormous investments have been made by SIL in PNG to accomplish the translation of each NT: on average some 20 years of work (in one case 52 years, by three consecutive teams), and at least 1 million USD in costs. Only an estimated 30% of these NTs are well-used" (SIL Papua New Guinea 2017:22).

¹³ In the Bible-centric paradigm, the default solution to the problem of Bible translations that are not used is "Scripture Engage-

Assumption #3: A translation of the New Testament (and the Old Testament, if possible) adequately meets the *complete* product need of the lingual church

An implicit assumption of the Bible-centric model is that a translation of Scripture portions, a New Testament, or even the entire Bible meets the entire biblical content need of the lingual church for which it was created. This assumption is misaligned with the reality of what a lingual church actually needs in order to be firmly established in sound doctrine and faithful theology. When it comes to the theological needs of the English-speaking church, our own church leaders, exegetes, and theologians consistently advise the use of extra-biblical resources (e.g., dictionaries, commentaries, grammars, etc.) that enable one to understand the author’s intent and identify what the original hearers understood.¹⁴ But when it comes to the global church, the assumption seems to be that what is needed by the church in other languages is only a translated Bible (often only a New Testament)—or at least that providing the extra-biblical exegetical resources that foster sound hermeneutics is someone else’s problem.¹⁵

Church leaders around the world consistently maintain that after Scripture portions are translated, they need the entire New Testament, then the entire Old Testament (not always in that order), then study notes for the entire Bible, then a Greek New Testament and Hebrew/Aramaic Old Testament (together with corresponding grammars and lexicons) available as interlinears in print and digital formats, then a commentary that further elucidates the author’s intent and context of the original recipients. If the entire product-oriented goal of Bible-centric Bible translation were suddenly finished (even the most extreme goal of a complete Bible translation in every language variant), *the work of equipping the global church for discipleship, sound doctrine, and faithful theology would still be far from finished.*

ment” (promoting and encouraging the reading and use of the Bible). Encouraging people to read the Bible is a noble goal, but by itself, this may accomplish little with regard to the actual missiological objective. That is, the objective described by the New Testament authors has much less to do with merely getting people to read the Bible and much more to do with the formation of sound doctrine by equipping leaders to faithfully interpret and apply Scripture in their cultural contexts. They are not the same thing and the former does not necessarily result in the latter.

¹⁴ Carson reminds us: “While the goal is certainly to preserve as much meaning as possible, translation is an inexact discipline, and something is invariably lost in any basic translation. One is constantly forced to make decisions—which is one of the fundamental reasons why there are commentaries and preachers [who understand the original languages]” (2003, ch. 3). Fee concurs: “For the most part, then, you can do good exegesis with a minimum amount of outside help, provided that the help is of the highest quality. We have mentioned three such tools: a good translation, a good Bible dictionary, and good commentaries” (Fee and Stuart 2014:33). Osborne suggests that full understanding of the biblical texts requires much more than merely a good translation: “Deductive study utilizes stages 3-6 [grammatical, semantical, and syntactical study] together as separate but interdependent aspects of exegetical research. Here all the tools— grammars, lexicons, dictionaries, word studies, atlases, background studies, periodical articles, commentaries—are consulted in order to deepen our knowledge base regarding the passage and to unlock the in-depth message under the surface of the text” (Osborne 2010:30-32).

¹⁵ As we shall see, one of the characteristics of the “church-centric” paradigm is that the leaders of lingual churches are increasingly taking responsibility for providing these resources for themselves, and are requesting the content, tools, and training needed to achieve their objective.

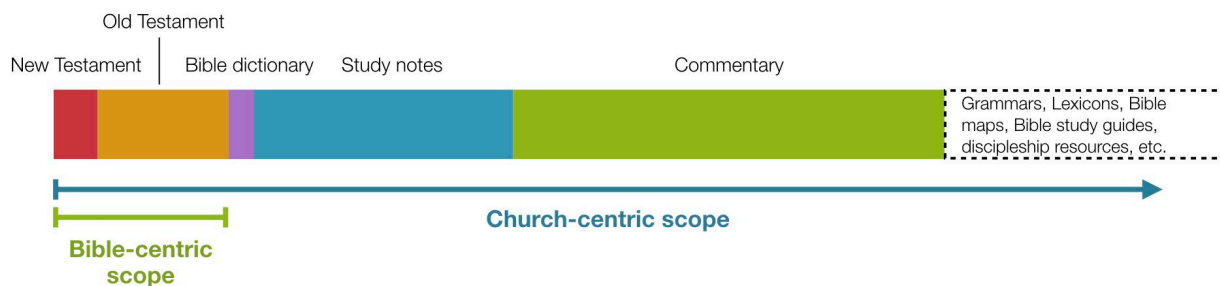


Diagram 2: The vastly larger scope of translated biblical content in the Church-centric paradigm

Of course, no one is suggesting there should be a double standard, and, presumably, all would agree that the entire global church must be equal participants in theological formation and biblical study, so it follows that a production goal of merely a translated Bible in every language—as important as it is—is an incomplete missiological objective. Those who are serious about meeting the actual need of the global church, in terms of formation of sound doctrine and faithful theology, must recognize that even a full Bible translation in every language is only a waypoint to that destination. We must start talking about a strategy to collaboratively provide *everything else* as well, including (but not necessarily limited to) translation training resources, exegetical notes, grammars, lexicons, dictionaries, word studies, atlases, and commentaries.¹⁶

Logistical Challenges

Assumption #4: Translated Scripture products do not decrease in effectiveness over time

The implicit assumption is that once a translation is finished, its effectiveness is undiminished through time. For languages without a literate history, an additional assumption is that the presence of translated Scripture will have a stabilizing effect on the language.¹⁷ The reality is that the effectiveness of a Bible translation has a shelf life. All languages change, and small languages without a strong literate tradition tend to change rapidly.¹⁸ Informal reports from church leaders in many parts of the world suggest that most translations of Scripture published one or more generations ago (approximately 20 years) need to be revised in order for the lingual church to be able to use it.¹⁹ If this is indicative of a general pattern, there could be as many as 600 published Bible translations (including whole Bibles and New Testaments) currently considered to be “finished” that may actually be in need of revision before they will be

¹⁶ The point is not whether or not every lingual church will want or need all these resources in their own languages, but that many (if not most) are explicitly stating they do. Thus, making such resources available without unnecessary restrictions in the Gateway Languages, together with the tools and training that facilitate their translation and distribution will greatly increase their availability and usefulness to the global church.

¹⁷ This assumption is evident by the reality that, in general, translation projects consider revisions to be anomalies, rather than something that is to be expected and planned for periodically. This “one and done” mindset is still predominant in the Bible translation community today.

¹⁸ This is reflected in sociolinguistic survey policies in some parts of the world that recognize that languages can change significantly in a very short amount of time. Consequently, some policies prescribe a shelf life of ten years for sociolinguistic assessments, after which a reassessment is mandatory (Jore 2015).

¹⁹ In general, this is not referring to merely cosmetic revision, but to the kind of revision that requires such pervasive changes the translations are frequently abandoned altogether in favor of creating entirely new ones.

useful to the lingual churches for whom they were created. Within another 10 years, that number could climb to 1,000.²⁰

A translation reflects the language at a point in time, but the existence of a translation does not necessarily halt or significantly impede language change. To the contrary, *many translations that are listed as “finished” today are urgently in need of revision.*

Assumption #5: The number of Bible translations that are still needed is both knowable and accurate

The foundational assumption that undergirds the countdown of “translations still needed” is that the actual number of lingual churches that need translations has been correctly identified, or at least is not grossly misaligned with predictions of translation need. The reality is that the alignment between the “external view” of the remaining translation need (i.e. “translation may need to begin in 1,636 languages”) is often significantly misaligned with the assessment of the need by the lingual churches themselves.²¹

It is rare for lingual church leaders to decide for themselves that they do not need a translation of the whole Bible in their language and in multiple formats. They consider it extremely important that their people group also be among the ones who understand the “whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:27). Given this, and in light of the rapid expansion of the church into thousands of people groups in the last few decades, a very different perspective of Bible translation need emerges.

For example, consider a conservative estimate that includes text, audio, and language variant needs, as determined by the leaders of each lingual church for themselves and in anticipation that the church will extend to every people group and language (Matt. 24:14; 28:18-20; Rev. 7:9). This church-assessed total global Bible translation need (including both Old and New Testaments) could be the sum of:

- **6,389** (assuming 90% of the world’s 7,099 lingual churches desire a translation)
- **+ 950** (assuming 25% of the ~3,800 lingual churches that speak known dialects desire a translation)²²
- **+ 109** (assuming 1% of the 10,899 language variants need an additional script or cultural variant translation)
- **+ 5,450** (assuming 50% of all lingual churches across all language variants need at least one additional format such as an audio Bible)

²⁰ This is based on the data in “Age of Existing Scripture” (progress.Bible 2018). According to the data in this report, approximately 600 translations were published 20 or more years ago, approximately 1,000 translations were published 10 or more years ago.

²¹ At the time of writing, this is the projected number of new Bible translation starts commonly held by most Bible agencies (Wycliffe Global Alliance 2017). This number is based on many variables, including the external assessment of the sociolinguistic vitality of the languages that do not yet have Scripture. Languages that are not considered sufficiently viable are generally not listed in the “known needs” tally. This is understandable, but two key points should be considered here: First, the external assessment of translation need is almost always misaligned with the lingual church’s self-assessment of their need. Second, the traditional framework for the external assessment of translation need has generally been constrained by the “scarcity” of the pre-digital era, where low-cost, rapidly iterative translation processes were not possible. This mindset is clearly evident in statements like this one by Gilman (Secretary of the American Bible Society in 1900): “The initial cost of making a version is too great to be overlooked by those who are called on to inaugurate and superintend it. *Not every spoken dialect is worthy of being perpetuated by such a book as the Bible*” (Gilman 1900:33, emphasis added).

²² This estimate may be quite low, both in terms of the number of total dialects and the percentage of those dialects where the church desires a translation. No comprehensive survey of the number of dialects globally has been conducted, thus the number listed here reflects only the ones discovered so far.

This gives a total need of **12,898**. Subtracting completed Bibles (~700) and audio Bibles (~1,100, *note: statistics for complete Bibles are not available, so this number also includes languages with only audio New Testaments*) leaves a remaining global Bible need today that is **well over 10,000**.²³

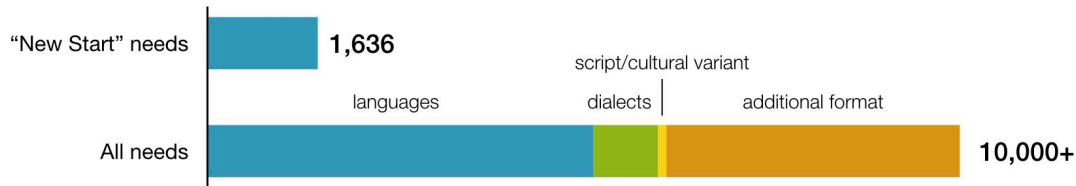


Diagram 3: Different perceptions of Bible translation need

If this looks like it is comparing apples to oranges, it is, which is precisely the point. In terms of quantifying the need, the focus of many Bible agencies is the quantification of the remaining “new starts” needed. By contrast, the view of the Bible translation need for many lingual church leaders is what is *actually* needed, in its entirety, published, available in multiple formats, and in use. The objective here is to show the significant misalignment between the perspectives.²⁴

Furthermore, the assumption that the actual number of “translations still needed” is knowable assumes that the need is fairly static and the activity of every entity involved in Bible translation—including every church network in the entire global church—is accounted for in a global and timely rollup of all the data. With the continued rise of the global church and the subsequent shift from Bible-centric Bible Translation to Church-Centric Bible translation, this seems decreasingly probable. It may be that these transitions will produce so much concurrent translation activity by so many lingual churches that *the actual number of “translations still needed” will become increasingly difficult (if not impossible) to ascertain*.²⁵

The Cost of Bible-Centric Bible Translation

The price tag of achieving the objective of the Bible-centric model is estimated to be \$1,300,000,000 (\$1.3 billion), as of 2017.²⁶ This is to provide the Bible (or key portions) in the languages of the world, but it is unclear whether it reflects the number of languages that outsiders assume need translation or if it takes into account the higher number of language variants that church network leaders assert need translation. It does not have in scope the provision of other exegetical and biblical resources. It also does not appear to have in scope the revision of existing Bible translations that have become outdated due to

²³ This data does not attempt to quantify or account separately for sign languages. References for these calculations include Simons and Fennig, *Ethnologue: Languages of the World, Twentieth Edition*; Global Recordings Network, “Registry of Dialects”; Wycliffe Global Alliance, “Scripture & Language Statistics 2016”; and Faith Comes By Hearing, “Celebrating 1000.”

²⁴ The tendency to quantify “new starts” has become much more prevalent since 1999, with the widespread adoption of Vision 2025 that described the objective in terms of translations in progress rather than finished: “by the year 2025 a Bible translation project will be *in progress* for every people group that needs it” (emphasis added). See Franklin (2012) for the history surrounding the adoption of the vision.

²⁵ For example, three of the largest church networks involved in church-centric Bible translation estimate over 400 Bible translation projects started in 2017. At the time of writing, however, only a relatively small percentage of this activity is reflected in the progress.Bible global Bible translation progress reporting database.

²⁶ “While the cost of each Scripture translation varies considerably, depending on many factors, including the availability of translators, the remoteness of the region, and the translation methodology used, ETEN estimates the total cost to eradicate Bible poverty is \$1.3 billion. This number was derived from research Seed Company did in 2015, which created an estimate that the cost to finish the task of Bible translation was \$1.48 billion” (Every Tribe Every Nation 2017:135).

language change and are no longer useful to the lingual church, nor provide for ongoing revision of Bible translations over time. This amount is apparently for the one-time delivery of a product that is assumed to meet the need of the church indefinitely.

The Looming Crisis of Bible-Centric Bible Translation

Even if the \$1.3 billion dollars is raised in a timely manner, the Bible-Centric paradigm of Bible translation is facing a serious crisis that is expected to worsen over the next decade. The essence of the crisis is due to the model's general reliance on translation consultants to "sign off" on a translation before publishing, and the anticipated decline (due to retirement and attrition) of the aggregate number of consultants at the same time that the number of translations needing their stamp of approval is rapidly increasing (Monson 2017). In terms of the manufacturing metaphor, existing product assembly lines are moving faster than ever and new assembly lines are starting up, but not only are the quality controllers unable to keep up with the rapidly increasing number of products needing inspection, the number of available quality controllers is decreasing.²⁷

The Crisis, Quantified

At the time of writing, there are 2,584 active Bible translation projects across the Bible agencies (Wycliffe Global Alliance 2017). In the past year, three of the largest church networks engaged in Church-Centric Bible Translation started over 400 new translation projects and these same networks expect to double the number of new translation starts in 2018.²⁸ Many New Testament translation projects started by these networks in preceding years are already completed and the teams are moving on to the Old Testament. In addition to these hundreds of active translation projects in the church-centric paradigm, many new church networks are realizing they can meet their own need for Bible translation and are starting new Bible translation projects of their own.

In sharp contrast to the large and rapidly increasing number of active Bible translation projects globally (possibly 4,000 and climbing by the end of 2018), the total number of Bible translation consultants today is 284 (Monson 2017:7).²⁹ That number is expected to decrease by 36% (101 of 284) in the next ten years and, though progress is being made to train new consultants, the number of new consultants is anticipated to be insufficient to replace them.³⁰

The emerging paradigm of Church-Centric Bible Translation may be able to address the misalignments and overcome the crisis facing the Bible translation movement. Before addressing this new paradigm,

²⁷ The ETEN Alliance acknowledges the worsening nature of this crisis: "As more translations are started and target languages are less widely used, inevitably there will be a shortage of consultants to advise translators. There is a limited supply of persons who can do such work, and as the rate at which translations are initiated increases, the deficiency is aggravated. This is particularly an issue for Old Testament translation since the text is three times as long as the New Testament and there are fewer qualified consultants available" (Every Tribe Every Nation 2017:105).

²⁸ These numbers were verbally reported by church network leaders in December 2017.

²⁹ Regarding this number, Monson states, "This data encompasses Wycliffe, Seed Company, SIL, and many other organizations that use Insite [a personnel database]. This data also includes many non-Western consultants" (2017:6).

³⁰ "Even if we were hiring new consultants or consultant-track workers at this same rate, we must remember that we'd only be getting half the capability at first. The consultants we'll lose have decades of experience and multiple advanced degrees accumulated over a lifetime. New CiT [Consultant in Training] hires simply haven't lived long enough to have acquired that expertise... Now, hiring CiTs at the same rate that we lose our senior consultants would at least be a start. Ideally, we'd hire more than we're losing. But we're doing neither" (Monson 2017:7-8).

we will first take a step back to consider world missions and the biblical concept of establishing the church.

3. World Missions and the Church

Jesus gave to his disciples a mandate to “make disciples of all people groups” which included “baptizing” new converts and “teaching them to obey everything Jesus has commanded” (Matt. 28:18-20). We see in the account of the early church in Acts and Paul’s letters (in particular) that the apostles understood that this disciple-making mandate was to be accomplished in the context of local churches. The importance of the church in God’s plan is clear in Scripture. The church is the household of God (Eph. 2:19), brings glory to God (Eph. 3:21), is the pillar and foundation of truth (1 Tim. 3:15), and displays God’s manifold wisdom among the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places (Eph. 3:10). In light of this, Winter is correct that ministries involved in achieving the objective of world missions should seek to align their ministry with the essential work of establishing the church.

There needs to be deliberate, intentional effort to establish (church) fellowships of believers no matter what else is being done in a given situation... Thus, even if an agency specializes in medical work, or orphan work, or radio work, or whatever, it must be aware of, and concerned about, the interface between that activity and the church-planting function” (Winter 1999:12).

A biblically-informed missiology involves far more than merely evangelism and church planting. It necessarily includes, among other things, an intentional process of establishing churches in sound doctrine and training mature leaders who teach faithful theology.

The Biblical Concept of Establishing the Church

The account of Paul’s apostolic work in Galatia on his first missionary journey illustrates how his understanding of the mission of the church involved not merely preaching the gospel among the unreached (Rom. 15:20) but following through with an intentional process of establishing the church.³¹

When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, **strengthening** the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God. And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed (Acts 14:21–23, ESV).³²

³¹ The semantic range used in the New Testament to describe the concept of “establishing the church” is broad and includes numerous overlapping terms that address such things as the **firmness of one’s faith** (e.g., στηρίζω “*cause to become stronger; more firm*” (Rom 1:11; 16:25; 1 Thess. 3:2, 13; 2 Thess. 2:17; 3:3; Jam. 5:8; 1 Pet. 5:10; 2 Pet. 1:12; Rev. 3:2; Act. 18:23), βεβαιόομαι “*increasing in inner strength*” (1 Cor. 1:8; Col. 2:7; Heb. 13:9), ριζόομαι “*to become strengthened; rooted*” (Eph. 3:17; Col. 2:7), στερέωμα, στηριγμός “*stability; a state of inner strength*” (Col. 2:5; 2 Pet. 3:17)), the **increase of capability** (e.g., οικοδομέω, ἐποικοδομέω, οικοδομή “*increase potential; strengthen*” (Acts 9:31; 20:32; Rom. 14:19; 15:2; 1 Cor. 3:9-10, 12, 14; 8:1, 10; 10:23; 14:3-5, 12, 17, 26; 2 Cor. 5:1; 10:8; 12:19; 13:10; Eph. 2:20; 4:16, 29; 1 Thess. 5:11; 1 Pet. 2:5), σθενόω “*cause to become more able or capable*” (1 Pet. 5:10), ἐντρέφω “*provide instruction and training*” (1 Tim. 4:6)), **growth** (e.g., αὐξάνω “*to cause something to increase*” (Col. 1:10; 2:19), **maturity** (e.g., τέλειος “*full grown; adult*,” τελειότης “*maturity*” (Jam. 1:4; Phil. 3:14-15; Col. 1:28; Eph. 4:13; Heb. 6:1)), and **being fully equipped** (e.g., καταρτίζω “*to make someone completely adequate or sufficient; to cause to be fully qualified*” (2 Cor. 13:11; Gal. 6:1; Heb. 10:5; 13:21; 1 Pet. 5:10), ἄρτιος “*qualified; proficient; complete*” (2 Tim. 3:17)). Definitions for these terms are from Louw and Nida (1996).

³² Emphasis is added to many of the biblical passages cited.

Similarly, on Paul's second journey, he and Silas "went through Syria and Cilicia, **strengthening** the churches" (Acts 15:41). The result of their ministry was that "the churches were **strengthened** in the faith, and they increased in numbers daily" (Acts 16:5). The work of establishing was also a central purpose of Paul's third missionary journey: "After spending some time [in Antioch], he departed and went from one place to the next through the region of Galatia and Phrygia, **strengthening** all the disciples" (Acts 18:22-23).

The biblical concept of establishing churches is further clarified in Paul's letters to the churches. He wrote to the church in Rome that he longed to see them, "that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to **strengthen** you—that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine" (Rom. 1:11–12). He told the church in Thessalonica that he sent Timothy to them "to **establish** and exhort you in your faith, that no one be moved by these afflictions" (1 Thess. 3:2-3). In his second letter to them, he prayed that God would "comfort your hearts and **establish** you in every good work and word... But the Lord is faithful. He will **establish** you and guard you against the evil one" (2 Thess. 2:17-3:3).

The process of establishing a church in this way is undertaken by leaders who teach and equip:

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to **equip the saints** for the work of ministry, **for building up the body of Christ**, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may **no longer be children**, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to **grow up in every way** into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, **makes the body grow so that it builds itself up** in love (Eph. 4:11-16, ESV).

As we consider the development of a church through time, Scripture seems to suggest four stages at which a given church may exist.³³

A. No Church – No church body exists yet (Rom. 15:20). The pioneering work of biblical missions is to preach the Gospel and plant churches in these regions.

B. Forming Church – A church that is growing to maturity. Paul preached the Gospel in Lystra, Iconium, and Pisidian Antioch on the outbound leg of his first journey, then strengthened and encouraged these churches in the early stages of formation on the return (Acts 14:21-23).

C. Failing Church – A church that is no longer growing in maturity. Ephesus used to be an established church (see next point), but by the time Revelation was written, it was in danger of losing its lampstand and is exhorted to repent (Rev. 2-3).

D. Established Church – A church that is sound in doctrine and practice, able to withstand hardship without moving, believes and teaches theology that is both contextual and faithful, and is led by biblically-qualified, mature leaders (Syrian Antioch, Acts 13). *Note: even some of the most strongly-established*

³³ It is important to recognize that, particularly with larger lingual churches (spread across many world regions, people, cultures, and church networks), the spiritual formation of a lingual church is unlikely to be homogeneous. For example, in the English lingual church, some elements are mature and well-established, while others are clearly failing. What is in view here is the presence of *some* elements of a lingual church whose leadership is established.

churches in the New Testament were consistently encouraged to keep pressing on in their maturity (e.g. Colossians), suggesting that ‘established’ is not a destination to be achieved, but an ongoing pursuit of a healthy church.

By showing the progression of a church to maturity through time, these four stages could be visualized as in Diagram 4.

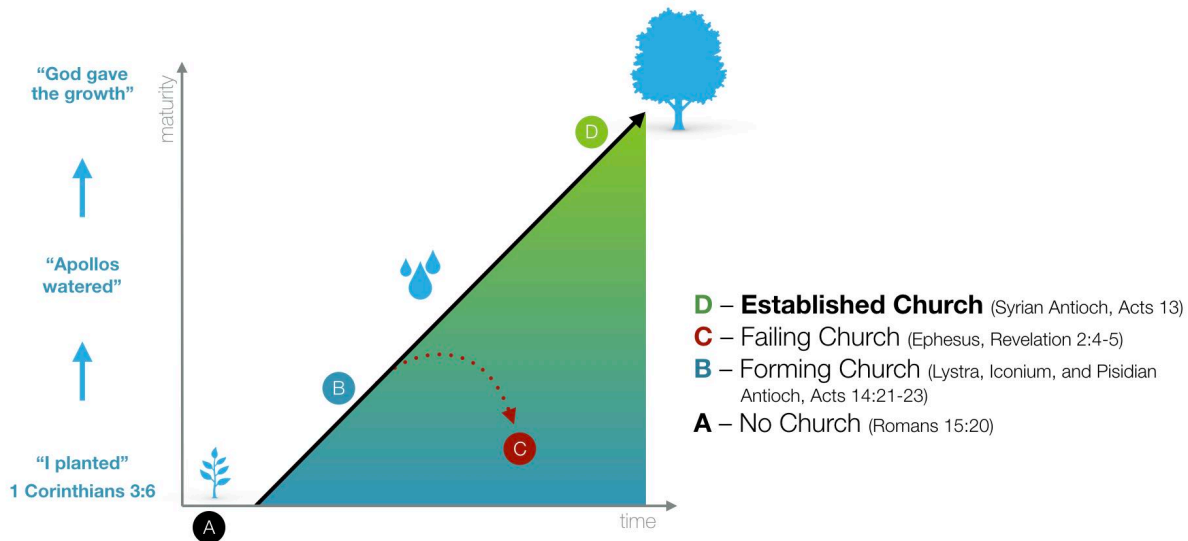


Diagram 4: Existential states of the church

The Objective of Establishing

The process of establishing a church has a clear objective: a church that is fully equipped, has full capacity for understanding, and maintains sound doctrine. Paul told the Colossians, “Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ” (Col. 1:28). There are other important aspects of a fully established church, but these are of particular importance in the context of a lingual church that is translating the Bible into its own language.³⁴

1. **Fully Qualified and Equipped** – Paul told the Corinthians that his prayer for them was “...that you be made complete (*“become fully qualified/equipped”*)... Finally, brethren, rejoice, **be made complete**, be comforted, be like-minded, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you” (2 Cor. 13:9–11, NASB).³⁵ Paul told Timothy, “All Scripture is breathed out by God and prof-

³⁴ Two important points should be mentioned here. First, the focus of this section could sound dry and religious to some, but this is not at all the case. Rather, the ‘maturity’ in view here at the personal level is that of disciples of Jesus who love God with all their heart, soul, and mind, and their neighbors as themselves (Matt. 22:37-40), who are characterized by the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 2:22-24), who willingly engage in every good work (Eph. 2:10), and who joyfully serve others by the abundant grace God has given to them (1 Cor. 12:6; Phil. 2:12; Heb. 13:21). Second, the concept of “establishing” here does not have in view the maturity of the church as an institution, though this is important. Instead, it is referring to the faithfulness of a church’s teaching and maturity of its leadership. Said differently, it is possible (as the cults have aptly demonstrated) to have a self-sustaining, self-governing, and self-replicating church that preaches heresy, which is obviously antithetical to the objective of church planting as modeled by the apostle Paul.

³⁵ The term (κατάρτισις) in 2 Cor. 13:9,11 is sometimes translated ‘restoration’, as in the ESV: “Your restoration is what we pray for... Aim for restoration...” In this context, the term may be better understood as “to make someone completely adequate or sufficient for something—‘to make adequate, to furnish completely, to cause to be fully qualified, adequacy” (Louw and Nida 1996:679), as reflected in the NASB (“this we also pray for, that you be made complete... Be made complete”), the NLT (“We pray that you will become mature... Grow to maturity”), and the ASV (“this we also pray for, even your own perfecting... Be perfected”).

itable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be **complete** (“*qualified, proficient*”), **equipped** (“*completely adequate*”) for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16-17, ESV).³⁶

2. **Full Capacity for Understanding** – The author of Hebrews tells us that the ability to consume solid food is a mark of maturity: “But solid food is for the **mature**, for those who have their **powers of discernment** (“*capacity for understanding*”) trained by constant practice to distinguish good [doctrine] from evil (Heb. 5:14, ESV).³⁷ Paul prayed that the Philippians’ love would keep on growing “more and more together with **all knowledge and discernment** (“*complete capacity for understanding*”), so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ” (Phil. 1:9–10, ESV).³⁸
3. **Firmness of Faith and Doctrine** – Paul told the Ephesians that one of the marks of spiritual maturity is doctrinal stability: “...that we may no longer be children... **carried about by every wind of doctrine**, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes” (Eph. 4:14, ESV). In his letter to the Colossians, Paul rejoiced “to see your good order and the **firmness** of your faith in Christ.” He then exhorted them to continue to walk in Christ, “**rooted and built up** in him and **established** in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving” (Col. 2:5-7, ESV). Peter exhorted his readers to watch out for erroneous teaching: “You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and **lose your own stability** (“*firm position*”)” (2 Pet. 3:17, ESV).

When Establishing Does Not Happen

Paul told the Corinthian church they had not progressed in maturity as he expected, which prevented them from being able to consume solid food and required him to continue feeding them with spiritual milk:

But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. **I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it.** And even now you are not yet ready, for you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way? (1 Cor. 3:1-3, ESV)³⁹

³⁶ The importance of the Word of God in the growth toward full maturity is alluded to by Paul in his final speech to the elders of the Ephesian church: “And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is **able to build you up** and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified” (Acts 20:32).

³⁷ The term αἰσθητήριον means “to have the capacity to perceive clearly and hence to understand the real nature of something—‘to be able to perceive, to have the capacity to understand, understanding.’... ‘those whose capacity to understand has been disciplined by exercise to distinguish between good and bad’” (Louw and Nida 1996:383). Brown observes, “But what is most serious about their spiritual ignorance is that, being unfamiliar with God’s word, they do not know his mind on important doctrinal, ethical and spiritual issues. His truth is a word of *righteousness* and those who master its message learn how to *distinguish good from evil*. This does not come to anybody without effort” (1988:104). Jamieson, et. al agree that it refers to those “able to distinguish between sound and unsound doctrine” (1871:452).

³⁸ Louw and Nida translate this “...that your love will keep on growing more and more together with your knowledge and complete capacity for understanding” (383).

³⁹ The author to the Hebrews uses the same metaphor of a child failing to grow and connects it to an important concept (“unskilled in the word of righteousness”): “About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. For though by this time **you ought to be teachers** you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, for everyone who lives on milk is **unskilled in the word of righteousness**, since he is a child...” (Heb. 5:11-13, ESV).

In Peter's second epistle, he warns that some things in Paul's epistles are hard to understand (presumably corresponding to the "solid food" mentioned in the preceding passages):

His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which **ignorant** ("unschooled") and **unstable** ("not established") people **distort** ("misinterpret"), as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction (2 Pet. 3:16, NIV).⁴⁰

This passage suggests that biblical texts vary with regard to how easy they are to understand. Some, such as some of Paul's writings, are harder to understand than others. This text indicates a connection between a person's biblical training and doctrinal formation and their ability to correctly interpret texts that are hard to understand. If a sufficient degree of instruction and doctrinal training is a prerequisite for understanding difficult texts, the implications for Bible translation are significant.⁴¹

4. Church-Centric Bible Translation

The church-centric paradigm of Bible translation has existed for most of the history of the church. The general pattern appears to be one where a leader (pastor, teacher, etc.) recognizes the lack of adequate biblical understanding among his own people and translates the Bible, using available resources (notably, the original languages) and often working with a small team of editors and reviewers.⁴² Among others, this general pattern holds true for Ulfilas, translating into his own Gothic language in the 4th century, to Luther and his team translating into German in the 16th century, and the many church leaders involved in the Gateway Languages strategy in the 21st century.⁴³ In "The Church and the Translation and Distribution of the Bible," Edmonds (of the British and Foreign Bible Society) asserts the centrality of the church in Bible translation:

Bible Societies are mere instruments, but *the translation and distribution of the Word of God is the duty of the living Church*; it cannot be neglected without grave consequences. Whatever else was done, or not done, this branch of the ministry of truth was never, I repeat the word, *never* neglected in the early Church (Edmonds 1900b, emphasis added).⁴⁴

⁴⁰ The people to which this verse refers are "untaught" (NASB), "unlearned" (KJV). They are not stupid but uninstructed (Davids 2006:304). They are "unstable" (ἀστήρικτος), the same term used of the "unsteady souls" who are enticed and misled by the false prophets spoken of by Peter in the preceding verses (2 Pet. 2:14). This suggests the possibility that Peter is not referring here to malicious misinterpretation by false prophets, but to inadvertent misinterpretation by those who have been unwittingly influenced by the teaching of the false prophets and do not realize they are committing grave hermeneutical errors with these texts.

⁴¹ This is especially true if, as many translators and theologians assert, Bible translation is inseparable from the work of hermeneutics and 'doing theology.' "Although the translator may not describe the reflection and analysis that leads to translation as 'doing theology,' this is without doubt what it is" (Noss 2002:333). "And the notion that one can translate responsibly without interpretation is, quite frankly, shockingly ignorant of the most basic challenges facing translators" (Carson 2003, ch. 3). "Translators are more than those who simply manipulate language—they are also interpreters... Translation is not an objective transposition of the original text and its meaning, since it is a byproduct of the hermeneutical decisions of the translator... Every translator 'does theology' and makes theological decisions during the translation process..." (Sánchez-Cetina 2007). "The best translation will come from those who are immersed in the modern context and are as conversant as possible with the life and times of the biblical world. Contextualization completes the hermeneutical circle as it transfers the meaning of Scripture into the present situation" (Wolf 2003, ch 5).

⁴² The "inside-in" model describes the initiation of a translation by a leader from within the lingual church, by using resources in another language (whether a Gateway Language or the original languages, or both) and translating into the native language of the translator. The contrasts between the "outside-in" and "inside-in" models are described in "The Gateway Languages Strategy" (Jore 2017a).

⁴³ Luther began his translation of the German Bible in the Wartburg, but worked closely with Melanchthon "his linguistic superior" (Metaxas 2017:274) and then others in the polishing of the New Testament and translation of the Old Testament (see Schaff and Schaff 1910:347 and Freedman 2016). Many other examples of the church-centric model of Bible translation are described (though not by that label) in *The Murderous History of Bible Translations* (Freedman 2016).

⁴⁴ In the 4th century, Chrysostom, commenting on the enduring nature of the writings of the Apostle John, wrote, "Syrians, and Egypt-

Bible Translation in the 21st Century

Around 1980, the global church began to expand rapidly into thousands of previously unreached people groups all over the world. This rapid growth was influenced by two factors in particular. In 1974, the Lausanne Congress clarified the missiological focus of making disciples as referring to all *people groups*, defined by ethnolinguistic criteria, rather than nation states defined by geopolitical criteria (Johnstone 2011:168). Years of research and discussion ensued, refining the definitions and scope of the task. Around the same time an explosive growth in the number of evangelical missionaries occurred, particularly from Africa, Asia, and Latin America.⁴⁵

The rapid expansion of the church into previously unreached people groups through Church-Planting Movements (CPM) has extended the breadth of the church, but created a serious and urgent need for theological training and development of the leaders of these churches. The seminary model of leadership training has not been able to scale adequately to meet the need for concurrent training of many hundreds of thousands of new church leaders.⁴⁶ This eventually resulted in the emergence of a new paradigm of leadership training called “Church-Based Theological Education” (CBTE) that implements a multiplicative training model (as described in 2 Tim. 2:2). It is highly scalable, as it is relatively inexpensive and is distributed—leaders are trained in the context of the churches they serve.

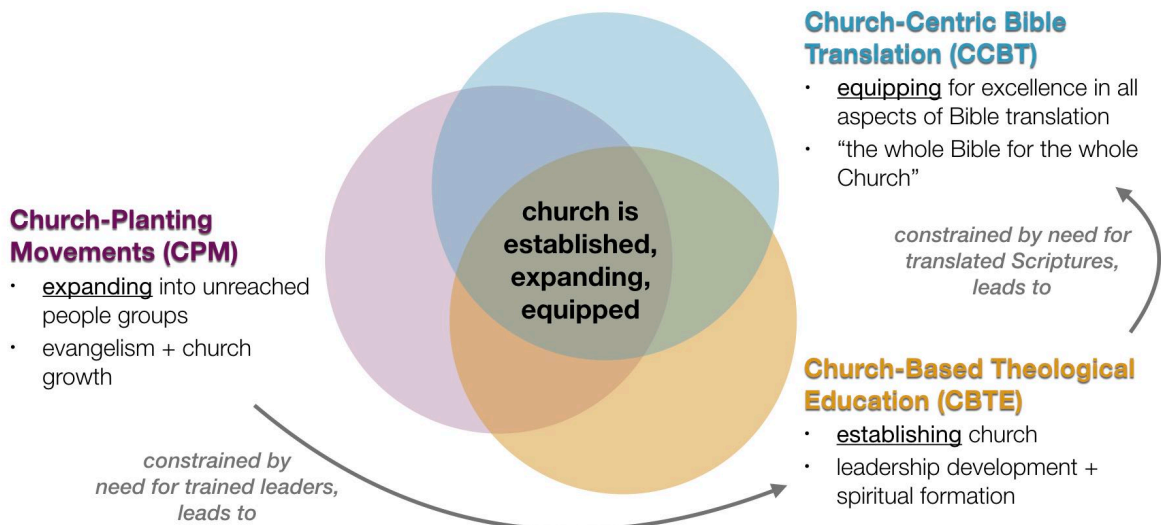


Diagram 5: Church-Centric Bible Translation in context

tians, and Indians, and Persians, and Ethiopians, and ten thousand other nations, translating into their own tongues the doctrines introduced by him, barbarians though they be, have learned to philosophize” (quoted in Schaff 1889:6).

⁴⁵ “The mobilization of Christians in missions since 1900 has been astonishing. From 17,400 in 1900, the number rose slowly to 43,000 in 1962, but then came the explosive growth that followed the Awakening around that time, with some 200,000 in 2000 and maybe even 300,000 in 2010. This has happened even as non-evangelical denominational missions collapsed, with the new wave of fervent evangelical missionaries more than replacing them. Note that from 1980 onwards the massive increase in missions was in AfAsLA [Africa, Asia, Latin America], and especially Asia” (Johnstone 2011:228). Movements such as AD 2000 and Discipling A Whole Nation (DAWN) were instrumental in expanding the global church into previously unreached people groups.

⁴⁶ The seminary paradigm works well in some contexts but implements a centralized model (often requiring leaders to move to another location away from their churches) which contributes to other challenges, including being relatively expensive, difficult to scale efficiently, and often creating long periods during which local churches are without their leaders.

This paradigm of training new leaders from people groups all over the world is effective and scalable, but it is constrained by another limitation: deep, life-changing spiritual transformation is only possible when the Word of God is understood well. This is creating an immense increase in the felt need by believers in hundreds (if not thousands) of people groups for a translation of the Bible—and other theological resources that are necessary for in-depth study of the Bible—in their own languages.

Where the Church is Established

The most important factor contributing to excellence in Bible translation among **lingual churches that can be considered established and mature** is the provision of unhindered access to exegetical, original-language, and other biblical resources that enable the best possible understanding of the original texts. When these resources—together with effective Bible translation training resources—are made available in the Gateway Languages spoken by these global church leaders, these elements of the global church are equipped with the essential components that enable them to achieve excellence in Bible translation.

Where the Church is Not Yet Established

The Scripture passages mentioned above (1 Cor. 3; Heb. 5:12-14) suggest that the expected progression of a new church is from an “infant” who consumes only the “milk” of Scripture (the elementary teachings) to a mature adult who is able to consume all the “solid food” of Scripture. Possibly the most important consideration for Bible translation among lingual churches that are not yet established is to **cease focusing on acceleration of Bible translation as the highest good**. In the aggregate, the church-centric paradigm of Bible translation is already indicating it could scale to be more capable (in terms of concurrent translations) and faster than previous paradigms. But, perhaps *a translation project should generally not be accelerated beyond the capacity of the leaders of the lingual church (Heb. 5:14; 2 Pet. 3:16)*.

This is *not* suggesting that Bible translation should not be accelerated! Instead, it is observing that the most effective way to accelerate Bible translation may be to focus on the training and equipping of the lingual church so that they are able to translate more effectively. As a lingual church studies the Bible and begins to translate the Scriptures, their capacity for understanding will (usually) increase as well, which improves their ability to translate with excellence—a virtuous cycle of increasing spiritual maturity and excellence in Bible translation. The objective is to build up the capacity of these leaders for faithful interpretation and teaching of sound doctrine, and *there is great urgency to achieve this without delay*. But this is different than merely achieving the fastest possible time to completion of a Bible translation, as in the following case study.

Establishing the Church Through Bible Translation: An Example

In 1987, Jeeyoung An and his wife, Jin-Sook, began work with the Gwahatike people of Papua New Guinea. They had been sent there as Bible translators, but they believed that Bible translation is a tool to fulfill the Great Commission, and that the essential work of ministry is making disciples in the context of the local church. So instead of initiating a linguistic translation process parallel to the church, Jeeyoung directly engaged with and began serving the church.

The leaders of the village church had a problem. They were responsible for the Sunday services, but they did not know the Bible, nor how to preach. Jeeyoung understood that these young men were the ones who were to equip the church for ministry, and that his job was to equip them to understand and teach

the Bible (Eph. 4:11ff). So, day by day, Jeeyoung did not translate the Bible, but instead taught the leaders of the church how to study it. He specifically focused on helping them learn hermeneutics—to understand the historical and cultural context of the books of the Bible, as well as the meaning of key theological terms in the texts. The results of this approach are significant.

- Through the study of the Bible, **all of the church leaders came to understand the Gospel and placed their faith in Christ.** They had been involved in the form and structure of the church but did not know Jesus.
- Jeeyoung did not know their language so they studied in the trade language (Tok Pisin). Over time, they began to understand the true meaning of the biblical texts and recognized the deficiencies of using the trade language for Bible study and preaching. They **became motivated to translate the Bible into their own language**, because they could communicate the meaning better.
- As the leaders of the church became established in faith and sound doctrine, they **began working together to translate the New Testament into Gwahatike.**
- After the publication of their own New Testament, they decided to postpone translating the Old Testament so that they could **begin the same church-centric approach to Bible translation with the people groups near them.**

On a chart of “time to completion,” the Gwahatike New Testament was neither the fastest nor the slowest translation. In fact, the speed with which the New Testament was being translated seems to not even have been an important consideration, because Jeeyoung was not focused on the translation of the New Testament as the end in itself. It was merely a means of strengthening and establishing the Gwahatike church.

Where There is No Church

There is an assumption held by some that **Bible translation is a prerequisite to church planting.** This assumption may stem from the Bible-centric paradigm’s historical conception of Bible translation as a pioneering endeavor that (usually) takes place in advance of other ministries, providing them with a translated Bible that makes their work more effective.⁴⁷ This assumption is evident when people talk of unreached peoples “dying and going to hell” and the solution is “they need the Bible in their language.” There is an inherent danger in this way of thinking, as Grudem and Poythress observe:

...danger arises if we let the demands of evangelism take control of translation. In its original setting, *almost every book of the Bible was addressed first of all to the people of God*, not to outsiders. If we translate primarily with outsiders in mind, we already run the danger of distorting our perception of the purposes of the Bible. In addition, this argument hints at a desire to translate the Bible in a way that would smooth over the difficulties for unbelievers. This sort of goal is dangerous, because it

⁴⁷ In some people groups, a Bible translation was completed before a church was planted and people came to Christ reading the Bible in their own language. Observing this correlation, one could easily assume causality (i.e. *After* the Bible was translated people came to Christ, therefore *because* the Bible was translated people came to Christ), and then necessity (i.e. *Only* after the Bible is translated...). Confirmation bias could be difficult to avoid at this point. But the reality is that there are many examples where people groups have been “reached” and churches planted long before the Bible has been translated. Conversely, the mere presence of a translated Bible in a people has frequently *not* resulted in the expected transformation of the people group. None of this diminishes the value of Bible translation (as lingual church leaders the world over will testify) but it does suggest—as surveys like the *Scripture Use Research and Ministry* report from Papua New Guinea indicate (2017)—that there are many factors involved in the transformation and spiritual growth of a people group and to assume that Bible translation is a prerequisite to church-planting and leadership training may not be warranted.

opens the way to compromise elements of the Bible that are unpalatable to unbelievers (2000:178, emphasis added).

Carson reminds us that communication of the Gospel does not depend exclusively on the translation of the Bible:

Translation of the Scriptures is not the only thing needed for adequate communication of the gospel: God has equally mandated the training and deployment of evangelists and pastor/teachers. Failure to account for this aspect of our task may unwittingly encourage a ‘translation’ that is to some degree a perceived *replacement* of human agents (1985:213).

When strategies for reaching unreached people groups include “translate the Bible” as an important tactic, it raises the question, “How much of the Bible needs to be translated before planting a church?” Presumably, a translation of the prophets and Leviticus are not required, so what actually is needed? Answers to this question frequently center on stories from the Bible that clearly communicate the Gospel.

Instead of starting with Bible translation, strategies for reaching unreached people groups often involve the use of evangelistic media that communicate the Gospel through Bible stories in languages that are understandable. Evangelists and church planters may work with those who are receptive to the Gospel, using a language of wider communication to translate and confirm the usability of stories in the vernacular. Once a church is planted, the focus becomes establishing the church and developing the leaders. As the church grows in maturity, **Bible translation occurs as a co-requisite to the spiritual formation of the church**, and proceeds commensurate to their capacity for understanding (as described above).

A Growth Metaphor

Earlier in this paper, we posited that a *manufacturing* metaphor is often used to describe the Bible-centric paradigm of Bible translation. By contrast, a *growth* metaphor seems more appropriate for the church-centric paradigm.

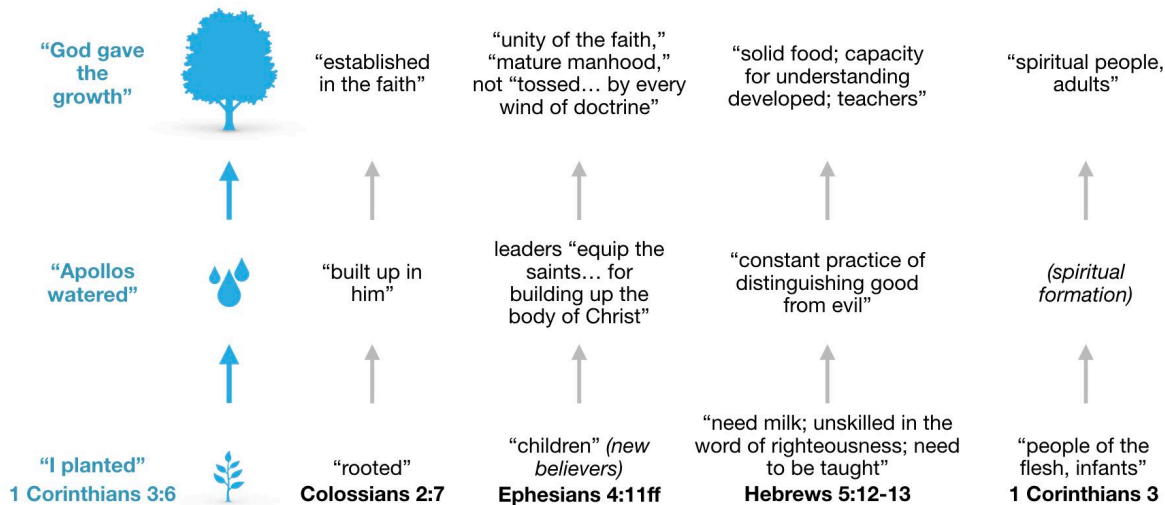


Diagram 6: Establishing the church

Making disciples of unreached people groups (Matt. 28:19-20) is undertaken by

- **gardeners** (church leaders with similar vision and purpose to Paul and Apollos, c.f. 1 Cor. 3:5) who
- **plant the seed** (evangelize unreached people groups and plant new churches, c.f. Matt. 13:1-23; Acts 14:20-23),
- **water it** (teach disciples to obey everything that Jesus has commanded, c.f. Matt. 28:20),
- **weed and prune the young plant** (protect and warn the church against false teachers and unsound doctrine, c.f. 1 Tim. 4:1), and
- **provide for its nourishment** (equipping the leaders of the new church to study, understand, teach, and (if needed) translate the Bible into their own language, c.f. Acts 20:27; Tit. 1:5-9; Heb. 5:11-14) so that
- **it grows to full maturity** (is established in sound doctrine, faithful theology, and has mature leaders, c.f. Col. 2:1-8) and
- **produces new seed** (plants other churches, c.f. Acts 13:1-3) which grow into
- **new seed-bearing plants** (the church planting and establishing process is continued through subsequent generations, c.f. 2 Tim. 2:2).

The foundational shift that is occurring in the emergence of Church-Centric Bible Translation is reflected in this metaphor. The focus on delivering a “finished” Bible translation as rapidly as possible is transitioning to a focus on establishing the church and equipping leaders for ongoing translation of the Bible (and other theological resources) into their own language, as part of the means of achieving that objective. In this context, it would be unnecessary to have in view a linear Bible translation project with a definite start, clearly-defined stages, and a definite end. The general pattern is often far more iterative and fluid.

For example, lingual church leaders may produce their first “complete” New Testament in a matter of months, and it may be distributed through the community for testing and review for several more months. But they may not be fully relying on it yet, focusing instead on rigorous comparison of their translation with other translations that some of them can understand. This generates much conversation, discussion, and a continually growing understanding of the biblical texts and context. This, in turn, feeds into the revision process that is constantly ongoing, and eventually results in another release of the “complete” New Testament, perhaps containing a number of books that are considered reliable and others that are still in review. This process may continue for some time, with frequent review, use, revision, and republishing as needed.

This iterative and perpetual process is reflected in another metaphor that considers translation as a constantly turning wheel. In “Ladders and Wheels,” King observes, “there is a constant cycle of researching the source text (enhancing accuracy), reflecting on the target culture (enhancing clarity and naturalness), and revising the translation.”⁴⁸ This cyclical process aligns closely with the concept of biblical interpretation entailing a hermeneutical spiral “from text to context, from its original meaning to its contextualization or significance for the church today” (Osborne 2010:21).⁴⁹

⁴⁸ “This [wheel metaphor] directs attention more at the process than the product in translation work. A Bible translation organisation with this underlying model for its work might be more concerned about whether the outputs of translation work are being used and fed back into the church... rather than completing certain production goals” (King 2015:7-8).

⁴⁹ This kind of iteration was not possible before the invention of new technologies in the digital era that enabled abundance (e.g., ease of

In this fluid, highly active, community-engaged paradigm of Bible translation, it can be difficult to determine when a translation is “complete” in the way a product-oriented paradigm expects. Even when there is a dedication and a celebration, it may be for the latest revision, not for a translation that is “finished” with the assumption that no further work will be done on it. When the lingual church owns the entire process of translation and publishing, the relentless pursuit of excellence may continue perpetually.

Addressing the Misalignments

In a preceding section of this paper, we posited that the Bible-centric paradigm of Bible translation is misaligned with certain missiological and logistical factors that the church-centric paradigm may be able to address. They are considered here in general terms (recognizing there will always be exceptions).

1. **The use of translated Scripture** – Bible translation in the church-centric paradigm is initiated and driven by the felt need of the lingual church for the Bible in their own language. Consequently, the lingual church tends to have strong ownership of all aspects of the work and is highly motivated to both create and use the translation of the Bible in their own language.⁵⁰
2. **The missiological effectiveness of translated Scripture** – Bible translation in this paradigm is undertaken by church leaders who recognize that the spiritual formation of the lingual church is hindered by the need for better understanding of the Scriptures than is possible through use of translations in other languages. The entire process of Bible translation is integrated directly into the theological formation of the lingual church and the equipping of leaders to study and interpret the Scriptures faithfully.
3. **Meeting the complete product need of the lingual church** – As observed above, some lingual church leaders are already identifying and seeking to meet the need for far more biblical content than merely a Bible translation. Original language, exegetical, and theological education resources are being sought (or created, as needed) by church leaders for use in study and teaching of the Bible. A key consideration for many global church leaders is that the licenses under which existing resources are made available must not be time bound, or in any way limit their translation, adaptation, redistribution, and use of the resources.
4. **Effectiveness of translated Scripture through time** – Once the necessary biblical resources are available in the Gateway Languages and lingual church leaders have been trained in their use, a lingual church can not only meet their own Bible translation need, but maintain the trustworthiness of their translation by ongoing revision through time.
5. **Meeting the full scope of the global church’s Bible translation need** – By integrating Bible translation into the process of establishing the church in a people group and providing the necessary resources in the Gateway Languages under open licenses, every lingual church is provided with the requisite resources to meet their own Bible translation needs, in any language variety and format.

collaborating, editing, (re)publishing, etc. at very low cost) to replace the scarcity of the pre-digital era. See Diamandis and Kotler (2012) and Shirky (2010).

⁵⁰ The concern with the use of translated Scripture by the lingual church (or lack thereof) is not new. In the context of the possibility that new Bible translations might be “still-born” unless they were actually used “to preach and expound the gospel of Christ,” Gilman observes, “At the Missionary Conference of 1888, one well qualified to speak laid it down as a fundamental principle that ‘no Bible can be permanent that does not spring out of the actual necessities of a living church’” (1900:33).

The Cost of Church-Centric Bible Translation

The objective of the church-centric paradigm of Bible translation is not product-oriented (shipping a Bible translation) but is capacity-oriented (equipping the church for Bible translation and much more beyond). Consequently, attempting to put a product-oriented price tag on it may be both impossible and unnecessary, particularly as local churches and donors in the countries where Bible translation is needed are increasingly funding their own work. All of this makes a direct cost comparison with the Bible-centric paradigm fruitless.

What *can* be quantified is the amount of funding needed to provide essential biblical, exegetical, and translation training resources, as described in the Gateway Languages Strategy.⁵¹ As of 2017, the cost of equipping the entire global church for excellence in Bible translation by providing translations of the resources described in this strategy in every Gateway Language is estimated at less than \$50 million.⁵²

The Looming Crisis of Church-Centric Bible Translation

Globally, church networks are rapidly joining the church-centric Bible translation movement. The need for Bible translation is immense, and the concept of being able to meet their own needs is an idea whose time has come. But the church networks joining the movement discover early on that there is a massive lack of biblical resources, original language resources, and translation training resources. As explained in “The Gateway Languages Strategy,” the resources that exist tend to be in English and restricted by licenses that make them practically inaccessible to most of the global church. Work has begun to make the needed resources available without restrictions in the Gateway Languages of the world, but there is much that remains to be done before these resources will be ready for use.

The church-centric paradigm of Bible translation may be able to rapidly scale to meet all the needs of the global church, but it cannot do so without key resources. A means of decisively meeting this immense need is the subject of the final section of this paper.

5. A Way Forward for Bible Translation

The immense crisis facing the global church as it engages in the church-centric paradigm of Bible translation could be decisively resolved if the best teachers, content creators, and consultants of the Bible-centric model were to be **strategically re-tasked to help global church leaders meet this need**. This will require a significant change in focus, from producing Bible translations to equipping the global church to produce their own Bible translations. It is a transition from addressing a problem to addressing the source of the problem.

Regarding the need for this kind of transition, Jones has come to a similar conclusion: “Bible translation agencies themselves will need to increasingly adapt to become equippers and mentors for church schol-

⁵¹ The Gateway Languages Strategy, including the current list of languages, is available online at unfoldingword.org/gateway.

⁵² This amount takes into account the average cost of producing a foundational set of exegetical and translation resources in each Gateway Language using contributors from church networks that speak the language, and estimates the cost of involving translation consultants, theologians, and exegetical advisors in the review and checking of the resources. It should also be noted that this is the total estimated cost, but a significant amount of the work has already been completed in several gateway languages.

ars participating in Bible translation” (2015:47).⁵³ This call for re-tasking the Bible translation agencies by no means implies that they have been doing the wrong thing. Gonzales correctly observes that a missiological transition like this is due to the success of prior paradigms, not their failure:

But to send the same kind of missionaries we did a hundred years ago, to do the same task, implies that the task was not done, when all facts indicate the opposite. The missionary movement did succeed. It is precisely because it succeeded, and strong churches now exist in practically every country to which missionaries went, that new forms of mission must be found (1989:127).

In order to understand how Church-Centric Bible Translation works, it is important to understand how the global church functions as a massive, complex network. This helps explain many things, including the growth of the church, the preservation of sound doctrine across tens of thousands of churches, and the pursuit of excellence in Church-Centric Bible Translation.

The Global Church as a Complex Network

Networks are comprised of “nodes” (the elements that comprise the network) and “edges” (the connection between the nodes). A node that is simultaneously connected to more than one other node is a “hub” and the distribution of hubs determines the dynamics of the network. A network with only one hub, to which all other nodes connect is a *centralized* network. A network where every node is also a hub is a *distributed* network. Finally, a network of interconnected hubs (a decentralized network or “network of networks”) is a *complex network* (Diagram 6).

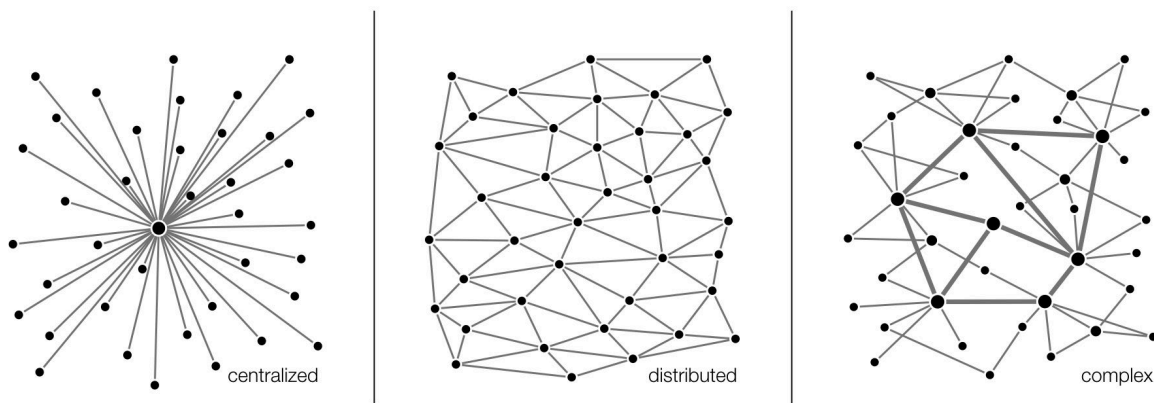


Diagram 7: Types of networks

Complex networks of people do not have a centralized management structure.⁵⁴ They have multiple hubs—people who are disproportionately more connected (in terms of relationships and influence) to more people than most others are. In the aggregate, these hubs of a complex network are critically im-

⁵³ He goes on to observe that as important as the transition is from production to equipping others and increasing their production capacity, not everyone will find it easy to do so: “Translation consultants have focused their energies and training on directly supporting the production of excellent translations. Mentoring and reproducing their expertise in others are not strong suits for many of today’s Bible translation consultants. These skills are much needed today to expand the kingdom’s Bible translation workforce in line with the growing need” (Jones 2015:47).

⁵⁴ Brafman and Beckstrom state that the third principle of decentralization is “an open system doesn’t have central intelligence; the intelligence is spread throughout the system. Information and knowledge naturally filter in at the edges, closer to where the action is” (2006:39).

portant, as they have immense influence on the other nodes of the network. For an idea or information to move rapidly through the entire network, the hubs are key. Connect enough of the hubs and the entire network will be affected. Fail to reach a critical number of hubs, and only a subset of the network will be affected.⁵⁵

The growth of a network is dependent on the multiplicative function of a node becoming a hub by connecting to (and sometimes first creating) other nodes. This is true for the growth of an algae bloom (one cell dividing into two), the spread of an epidemic (an infected host infecting another host), or the rise in popularity of a video on YouTube (one friend telling other friends about it). It is also true for a church leader planting new churches, as well as for the transmission of the knowledge, resources, and training for Bible translation through networks of church leaders. This multiplicative function can be counted in “generations” and visualized in Diagram 8.

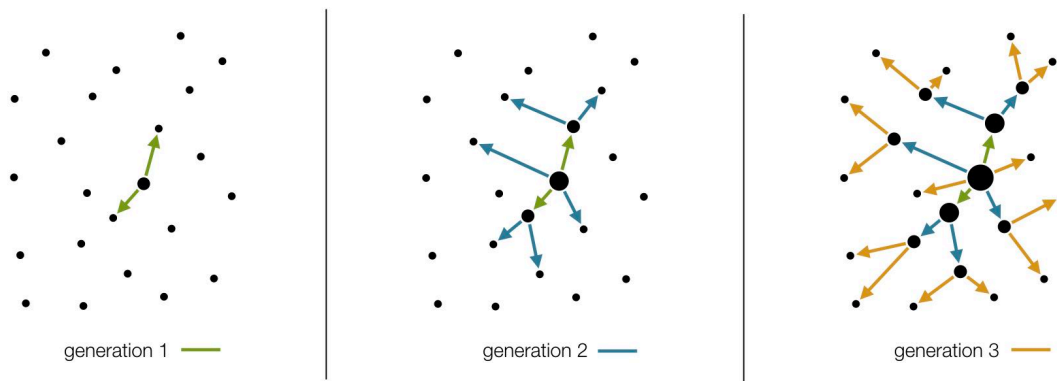


Diagram 8: Growth of a network

The Network Dynamics of the Global Church

This same multiplicative expansion process is described by Paul in his instruction to Timothy: “...what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also” (2 Tim. 2:2). It is this “teaching of teachers” that changes the growth from linear to exponential. In *The Spontaneous Expansion of the Church*, Allen describes the growth of the early church in a similar way:

The Church expanded simply by organizing these little groups [of new Christians that resulted from others sharing the Gospel with them] as they were converted, handing on to them the organization which she had received from her first founders. It was itself a unity composed of a multitude of little Churches [a complex network] any one of which could propagate itself, and consequently the reception of any new group of Christians was a very simple matter (1962:143).

⁵⁵ Gladwell describes hubs (or Connectors) as “people on whom we rely more heavily than we realize... people with a special gift for bringing the world together” (2006:37). Brafman and Beckstrom describe two kinds of people that could be considered hubs: “A champion is relentless in promoting a new idea. Catalysts are charismatic, but champions take it to the next level... Catalysts inspire and naturally connect people, but there’s nothing subtle about the champion” (2006:99). Barabasi and Frangos show that hubs are critical to the function of a complex network: “Power laws mathematically formulate the fact that in most real networks the majority of nodes have only a few links and that these numerous tiny nodes coexist with a few big hubs, nodes with an anomalously high number of links. The few links connecting the smaller nodes to each other are not sufficient to ensure that the network is fully connected. This function is secured by the relatively rare hubs that keep real networks from falling apart” (2002, ch. 6).

To the extent that the church-centric model of Bible translation employs the same principle of “teaching teachers” (rather than “doing” or even “teaching doers”), it will also scale in a non-linear fashion. The critical path for the scaling up of this paradigm is through the hubs of the global church.

The Hubs of the Global Church

Within the complex network of the global church, leadership is non-hierarchical and primarily based on influence (Gal. 2:2,6; 1 Thess. 1:7-8; 1 Thess. 2:13-14; 2 Cor. 8-9).⁵⁶ This was true for Paul, who urged others to follow the example that he and other leaders of the church were setting (Phil. 3:17, 2 Thess. 3:9).⁵⁷ Though he could exercise his authority as an apostle of the church, yet for love’s sake, Paul preferred to appeal instead (Philem. 9-10). The leadership of the global church today is similar to that of the early church, with regard to different “areas of influence” as described by Paul:

But we will not boast beyond limits, but will boast only with regard to **the area of influence God assigned to us**, to reach even to you... our hope is that as your faith increases, our **area of influence** among you may be greatly enlarged, so that we may preach the gospel in lands beyond you, without boasting of work already done in another’s **area of influence** (2 Cor. 10:13-16, ESV).⁵⁸

Leaders have the responsibility to serve those in their own area of influence. A leader of a local church has responsibility and direct influence within that church (Heb. 13:7). A leader of a house church network that spans many countries and people groups has a correspondingly large area of (usually indirect) influence.⁵⁹ In terms of their influence on those to whom they are connected, each of these leaders functions as a hub in the global church network. It is in this context of a global church network with interconnected hubs (overlapping areas of influence and responsibility) that a church-centric paradigm of Bible translation is emerging.

Building Capacity Within Church Networks

As the church expands into more people groups and as leaders are raised up and trained in sound doctrine, the most urgent need in Bible translation is for building up the capacity for excellence within

⁵⁶ This does not mean there are no hierarchically-structured denominations, as there clearly are, but that the leaders of these denominations form part of the leadership of the global church, which is not organized as a hierarchy and functions as a network. “In a decentralized organization [or network], there’s no clear leader, no hierarchy, and no headquarters. If and when a leader does emerge, that person has little power over others. The best that person can do to influence people is to lead by example.... This doesn’t mean that a decentralized system is the same as anarchy. There are rules and norms, but these aren’t enforced by any one person. Rather, the power is distributed among all the people and across geographic regions” (Brafman and Beckstrom, loc 264).

⁵⁷ Even secular literature recognizes Paul’s function as a hub in the early church: “The well-traveled Paul, with his extended circle of friends and followers, was one of the most influential hubs of early Christianity. Hubs, often referred to in marketing as ‘opinion leaders,’ ‘power users,’ or ‘influencers,’ are individuals who communicate with more people about a certain product than does the average person” (Barabasi and Frangos, loc 2124).

⁵⁸ The term Paul uses here is *κῆνόν*, which refers to “an area of activity, defined geographically and functionally—‘area, sphere, territory’” (Louw and Nida 1996:706).

⁵⁹ In “India Leadership Study,” D.R. David provides a helpful framework for thinking about church leadership in terms of influence. He writes, “Since leadership is a process of influence, it is useful to employ a classification of leadership based not on formal job titles, or on levels of education, but on breadth of sphere of influence.” He goes on to say, “These categories, of course, are merely conveniences. Many ministries do not fall neatly into a single classification... we can see this typology as a continuum from very narrow and focused influence to very broad influence... All five types of leaders are crucially important for the growth and development of the church” (2002). The five leadership types proposed in the paper are: *Type 1 Leaders* (Small Group Leaders), *Type 2 Leaders* (Self-supporting Local Supervisors, volunteers working in their own local area), *Type 3 Leaders* (Full-time Local Leaders, e.g., local church pastors, church-planters and missionaries), *Type 4 Leaders* (Regional Leaders, ministry is generally indirect, work with and through the local leaders), and *Type 5 Leaders* (National Leaders, influence throughout the entire country, or internationally).

church networks themselves. This constitutes a transition from Bible translation as a parachurch-driven process that is parallel to the formation of the church, to a process internal to and driven by the leadership of the lingual church. Bible agencies have built up significant expertise over the years and can play an extremely important role in this transition. Now, as the global church begins to take on the mantle of the Bible translation task as part of establishing churches and leaders, the Bible agencies have an opportunity to serve and strengthen church network leaders to do so with excellence. Jones observes:

While the Bible agencies have historically served the church as a vendor-like guild of skilled professionals producing high quality translations of Scripture, there is an opportunity today to craft a new relationship, whereby the Bible agencies use their expertise to equip the church to steward its call to provide God’s message for the nations in the languages they understand best (2015:37).

Suggestions for Building Capacity

Specific ways in which Bible agencies and theological training institutions can equip the global church for excellence in Bible translation include the following:

- **Complete the Gateway Languages strategy** — Collaborate with church network leaders in each Gateway Language to translate, adapt, and verify the quality of the exegetical resources, original languages resources, and theological building blocks that can be used for Bible translation and creation of theological resources. This constitutes a strategic departure from an exclusive focus by Bible agencies on languages without Scripture to a focus on equipping church networks for translation of the Bible and other resources into these languages.
- **Make Bible translation training massively scalable** — Church-Centric Bible Translation would greatly benefit from the creation of a video training series that is translated into each of the Gateway Languages and provides anyone with foundational training in principles of Bible translation.⁶⁰ With the training in video format, translators can self-educate at their own pace and turn to trainers and consultants when they need help.
- **Create a compendium of Bible translation consultant knowledge** — The individual knowledge of a translation consultant is very helpful to a translation team. The value to the global church of the aggregate knowledge of Bible translation consultants globally is beyond measure. The distillation of the knowledge and experience of translation consultants into a format that is comprehensible and massively redistributable would provide leaders of church networks with an invaluable resource that would strongly predispose them toward excellence in Bible translation.⁶¹
- **Train trainers within church networks** — Working with the leadership of church networks, train their trainers in the use of the tools, resources, and techniques for sound hermeneutics and effective translation. It is critical to distinguish between “training others to do” and “training others to train

⁶⁰ This video resource could use the information in the open-licensed translationAcademy resource as both source material and as a reference work (see translationacademy.org).

⁶¹ This is not the first time that such a compendium of Bible translation knowledge has been proposed. Edmonds suggested something similar over a century ago: “You will see that there must be accumulating on both sides of the Atlantic in the great Bible Houses treasures of experience, of difficulties already encountered, and of the best ways in which to meet them, which must be of large advantage to future laborers if those results can be made available for them... If [a translator] is not aware of the process of thought and reverence through which other minds have gone, he is losing an opportunity of weighing his own judgment by the collective judgment of his predecessors, and, in fact he is sacrificing centuries of past experience... I trust that all the great Bible Societies will more and more compare notes and make themselves into a standing committee of translation to offer guidance to translators, and spare the missionaries the mistakes into which which they are very liable to fall” (1900a:24).

others,” and focus on the latter so as to achieve a non-linear growth rate. This objective may provide an opportunity for Bible agencies to collaborate with seminary faculty, theologians, and Bible scholars.⁶² Care must be taken to correctly separate the roles and functions of the Bible-centric paradigm and *not merely recreate them in the church-centric paradigm*. (We shall consider the role of the Bible translation consultant in the church-centric paradigm below.)

- **Help foster inter-denominational cooperation** — In several parts of the world, inter-denominational partnership toward reaching the unreached people groups is already happening (usually started by prayer movements). In other regions of the world, unity of the church across denominational lines has not yet meaningfully begun. Many parachurch organizations have a tremendous legacy of inter-denominational partnership and may be in a position to promote and foster unity in Church-Based Theological Education and Church-Centric Bible Translation. Without unity in the church, both movements will be seriously crippled.

In each of these suggestions, what is in view is effective and gracious collaboration across the global church. There is an urgent need for Bible scholars, theologians, exegetes, teachers, consultants, and others, each functioning in their area of expertise to work together to strengthen and equip lingual church leaders.

The Translation Consultant and the Church

When a new English translation of the Bible is published, the English lingual church does not look to translation consultants to approve it. This is because a sufficient number of English lingual church leaders have access to and ability in the original languages (i.e. Greek/Hebrew texts, lexicons, grammars), knowledge of the context of the biblical authors and recipients (i.e. historical, cultural, geographical, and ecological), and are able to use sound hermeneutics and translation principles to bring all of it together to assess the trustworthiness of the new translation for themselves, and on behalf of those who trust them.⁶³

The role of the Bible translation consultant was invented in the Bible-centric paradigm to fill this function on behalf of a lingual church that did not yet have the capacity to do this for themselves.⁶⁴ As useful as this role has been, it is important to recognize two things about it. First, it is a construct of one relatively recent paradigm of Bible translation and thus may not be necessary in other paradigms. Second, it was constructed to bridge a gap that only exists when Bible translation precedes the establishing of the leadership of a lingual church with the capacity and resources to confidently and reliably assess their own translations for themselves. Thus, to assume the global church will always need translation consul-

⁶² Noss observes that much translation training has lacked an explicit connection to the formation of indigenous theology: “The training that we have offered to translators has been primarily prescriptive, problem-oriented, relating almost exclusively to the translation task itself. Understanding of theological implications has been assumed to have been acquired in formal theological training that the translator may or may not have acquired. Anticipation of the Church’s use of the translated Bible as the foundation for its theological reflection has generally been overlooked in translator training programs” (Noss 2002:340-241).

⁶³ That said, there is great value in including skilled translation consultants in an advisory and training role, which is quite different than the role of the one who “signs off” on the trustworthiness of a translation. Note: the concept of the trustworthiness of a Bible translation and the means by which lingual churches choose (or not) to trust a translation is addressed in “Trustworthy and Trusted” (Jore 2017b).

⁶⁴ In the 1960s, Dr. Eugene Nida was instrumental in defining the role and function of a Bible translation consultant (Robertson 1996:141-142).

tants to “sign off” on the trustworthiness of a translation is to assume that world missions will fail to achieve the objective of establishing a strong church in every people group.

In light of the intensifying crisis of the Bible-centric paradigm, and the rapid rise of the church-centric paradigm, perhaps we are at a point where the Bible translation movement should intentionally shift the focus from recruiting and training more consultants on behalf of lingual churches and instead increase the capacity of the lingual church leaders themselves. One church network explains the value of translation consultants to church leaders in this training capacity like this:

People currently trained as consultants are very valuable to the Church-Centric Bible Translation paradigm. They are needed to help to train Quality Checkers [church leaders tasked with becoming exegetical and translation specialists], create curriculum for training programs, and also to be accessed for help when the local church identifies a need. Their role is to support what the church needs (Operation Agape 2017:12).

This may require new institutional structures and missiological models that focus on equipping church network leaders with the content, tools, and training needed for them to become solid theologians and exegetes who are able to interpret and translate Scripture faithfully, and who will teach others to do the same.

Going Slower Now in Order to Go Faster Later

The Bible translation movement has been focused on acceleration for many years, with particular urgency since the widespread adoption of Vision 2025. This acceleration has been linear in nature, with increasing efforts to ramp up production of Bible translations. A transition from this linear, product-focused trajectory to a capacity-building trajectory may reduce the number of Bible translation projects that are “completed” (in traditional terms) in the short term. The best use of some translation consultants, for example, may not be checking finished translations (production orientation) but creating the resources and providing the training that equips the entire global church to confidently check their own Bible translations (production capacity orientation).

In the short term, this will create “negative space” between the two paradigms of Bible translation, as shown in the chart below. The early stages of exponential growth look like failure, compared to the early stages of linear growth. The leadership (both at the executive and board levels) of organizations that transition into the church-centric paradigm of Bible translation should be aware of the tension this will create, but also that the tension will resolve in later stages of exponential growth (Diagram 9).⁶⁵

⁶⁵ “When you think linearly, when your operations are linear, and when your measures of performance and success are linear, you cannot help but end up with a linear organization, one that sees the world through a linear lens... Such an organization cannot help but have many of the following characteristics: Top-down and hierarchical in its organization; Driven by financial outcomes; Linear, sequential thinking; Innovation primarily from within; Strategic planning largely an extrapolation from the past; Risk intolerance; Process inflexibility... Strongly invested in status quo... Not surprisingly, given all of these characteristics, linear organizations will rarely disrupt their own products or services. They haven’t the tools, the attitude or the perspective to do so. What they will do, and what they are built to do, is to keep getting bigger in order to take advantage of economies of scale. Scale—but linear scale—is the *raison d’être* of the linear organization” (Ismail, et. al 2014:loc 499-510).

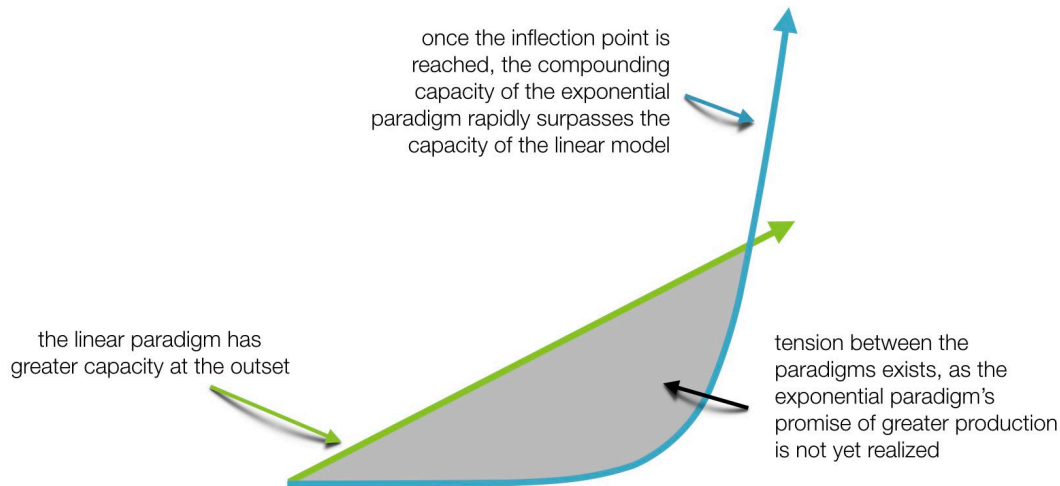


Diagram 9: The “negative space” between linear and exponential trajectories

As more church networks are connected, trained, and able to not only produce Bible translations but train others to do so, the growth of the aggregate capacity of the global church will compound. Once the inflection point is reached (and assuming the pattern holds), the production capacity of the global church for Bible translation will rapidly accelerate past even the most optimistic models of linear production acceleration.

Defining New Metrics for Success

The metrics of the Bible-centric paradigm focus on the initiation and completion of translation projects. In the church-centric paradigm, the speed of delivering translated products does not correlate in any meaningful way to the achievement of the true missiological objective: the establishing of the church in a given people group and language. Thus, even though new translations will be started (and published) in the new paradigm, new metrics are needed to measure success.⁶⁶ Kuhn explains the significance of this departure from one paradigm to another, and why there will be some overlap between them:

The transition from a paradigm in crisis to a new one from which a new tradition... can emerge is far from a cumulative process, one achieved by an articulation or extension of the old paradigm. Rather *it is a reconstruction of the field from new fundamentals...* During the transition period there will be *a large but never complete overlap between the problems that can be solved by the old and by the new paradigm.* But there will also be a decisive difference in the modes of solution. When the transition is complete, the profession will have changed its view of the field, its methods, and its goals (2012:85, emphasis added).

⁶⁶ Choudary, et. al. explain the difference between pipeline metrics (focused on production) and platform metrics (focused on networks), “Unfortunately, the traditional metrics used in organizing and running pipeline businesses quickly break down in the context of a platform—and developing alternative metrics that effectively measure the true health and growth prospects of a platform business is far from easy... Pipeline metrics are designed to gauge the efficiency of this value flow from one end of the pipeline to the other... This kind of (admittedly simplified) analysis doesn’t work when we shift our focus to a platform business. As we’ve seen, *platforms create value primarily through the impact of network effects...* In specific, platform metrics need to measure the rate of interaction success and the factors that contribute to it... Thus, *the most important metrics are those that quantify the success of the platform in fostering sustainable repetition of desirable interactions.* The end result: positive network effects and the creation of enormous value for everyone involved, including the users of the platform as well as the sponsors and managers of the platform” (2016:184, 186-187, emphasis added).

The key to achieving the objective of Church-Centric Bible Translation and identifying new metrics that quantify its achievement is to think in terms of equipping the leadership of church networks in ways that enable compounding growth patterns. In light of this, metrics that could be helpful for assessing and quantifying the progress of the church-centric paradigm include the following:

- **Opened Gateway Languages (GLs)** – Gateway Languages where a complete catalog of essential biblical resources and technology tools for Bible translation is available without restrictions to anyone who speaks the language.
- **Unlocked Other Languages (OLs)** – Non-gateway languages in which bilingual elements of the global church are now unblocked, due to the availability of essential biblical resources and tools in a Gateway Language they can use.
- **Equipped Church Networks** – Church-planting and theological education networks (whether formal denominations or informal associations of congregations) that have received the training, resources, and tools that they need for Bible translation and creation of other biblical resources in the languages they speak.
- **Producing Church Networks** – Church-planting and theological education networks with Church-Centric Bible Translation projects that have used the available resources to complete their first iteration of Bible translation (e.g., New Testament published for lingual church review).
- **Training Church Networks** – The transition from linear growth to exponential growth happens as recipients of the resources and training to produce trustworthy Bible translations (“students”) become trainers and equippers of others (“teachers”).

6. Conclusion

This paper argues that the Bible-centric paradigm of Bible translation has enjoyed some success in delivering quality translations in the past several decades, but has become misaligned in key ways and is unable to scale to meet the need of the rapidly growing global church. By understanding the emerging church-centric paradigm of Bible translation and strategically transitioning to it, Bible agencies will be able to collaborate with global church leaders to meet their most critical needs for resources and translation training. In so doing, these Bible agencies will be far more effective in achieving the most critical missiological objective: established churches in every people group, with full capacity for translation of the Bible and teaching of sound doctrine by mature leaders.

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