When the Church Translates the Bible

Dynamics and Implications of Church-Centric Bible Translation

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Except where otherwise noted, all Scripture is from the Christian Standard Bible *(Holman 2017). All emphasis in citations is mine, unless indicated otherwise.*

Executive Summary – This paper presents "Church-Centric Bible Translation" as a theologically formative and capacity-building paradigm of Bible translation. Through multilingual and multimodal interaction with the Scriptures, shaped according to biblical patterns of church and mission, the church that speaks a given language progressively builds their biblical understanding, theological maturity, and translation experience. This iterative process aligns the church's production of a Bible translation with their growing capacity, ensuring that the pace of the process is commensurate with their ability to reliably and confidently assess the trustworthiness of their translation of the Bible.

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Introduction

The idea of God's people collaborating together to translate the Bible into their own languages is profoundly simple to grasp and yet tinged with complex challenges. It is a historically attested model of Bible translation older than the church itself, and yet it is also a modern phenomenon with unique nuances and implications.[1]

The central premise of this paper is that within the emerging paradigm of "Bible translation by the church" (that is, into their own languages) is a second paradigm pertaining to the *process* by which a lingual church meets their own Bible translation needs.[2] Where the church already has well-trained, faithful leaders and sufficient understanding of the Bible, a focus on (accelerated) production of a Bible in their own language is both warranted and likely to succeed. In such scenarios, to the degree that the church is equipped with adequate biblical resources, an effective translation methodology, and appropriate technology, it is reasonable to anticipate the production of a trustworthy translation. This is the traditional "book publishing" (i.e., manufacturing) model.[3] But where the church is young (or does not yet exist) and is not yet theologically well-formed, an emphasis on accelerated production is neither helpful nor necessary. Instead, a completely different approach is called for, one that implements biblical patterns of church and mission while integrating Bible translation into the life of the church.

The primary objective of this paper is to illuminate this approach, which is referred to as "Church-Centric Bible Translation" (CCBT). It does so by contrasting the two different patterns mentioned above, both of which exist within the overarching paradigm of "Bible translation by the church." A corollary objective is to argue that meeting every Bible translation need globally is not only directly connected with the establishing and equipping of the church in every people group, but is interdependent with it such that both can—and must—occur simultaneously.

The paper addresses these objectives in six sections. The first suggests there are two prototypical scenarios in which a lingual church engages in translating the Bible into her own language—one focused on production of a Bible translation and the other focused on the formation of the church with the capacity to produce a Bible translation.[4] The second section considers key biblical principles and patterns together with various conceptual frameworks with a view to helping clarify the interconnected topics of the church, the mission of the church, and Bible translation from a biblical perspective. In the third section, shifting missional paradigms are explored with a view to understanding the contemporary context for Church-Centric Bible Translation. In the fourth section, the established and emerging paradigms of Bible translation are compared, noting the implications of the two variants of the established and the two variants of the emerging paradigms. The fifth section considers how several aspects of Bible translation shift in significant (and sometimes disruptive) ways when the paradigm shifts and a lingual church translates the Bible into their own language. In the sixth and final section of the paper, practical next steps are proposed with a view to serving the Bible-translating global church.

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1 cf. Nehemiah 8:8 where we see leaders engaged in oral hermeneutics and translation for the purpose of establishing and building up: "They read out of the book of the law of God, translating and giving the meaning so that the people could understand what was read."

2 The term "lingual church" refers to an element 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 (cf. Ep 4:1-6; 1Ti 6:3; Tt 2:1).

3 cf. Jones, "Signing Off, Giving Input."

4 These scenarios are described in terms of their distinctive features, but in actual practice every scenario where the church translates the Bible into her own language(s) is somewhere on a continuum between the two endpoints. Furthermore, the nature of the translation process will likely change over time as the church becomes more experienced in translation, more biblically knowledgeable, and more theologically mature.

1. Two Scenarios Where the Church is Translating the Bible

When you think of the church translating the Bible, what comes to mind? Consider these two actual scenarios that depict very different endpoints of what we might call the "Bible translation capacity" spectrum:

Scenario 1: In Indonesia, leaders in a lingual church recognized that they needed a translation of the Bible in their language.[5] Their denomination had many pastors in that language who were theologically trained, with many having degrees in biblical studies. They already had considerable informal experience in on-the-fly translation of the Bible because of their need as pastors and teachers to translate and interpret the Bible from Indonesian into their language every Sunday. A local seminary was supportive of their desire to translate the Bible, as was a Bible translation organization of international repute. If the leaders of the lingual church in this context asked you, how would you advise them as to what they should do next?

Scenario 2: After years of praying together across denominational lines, several leaders of the church in Chad sensed the Holy Spirit calling them to reach the unreached people groups in their country with the good news of Jesus Christ. With careful oversight by a network of church leaders, Muslims were hired from one of the people groups to translate a set of simple Bible stories. The stories were checked by church leaders, then recorded in audio format so that evangelists could use them in several villages across the people group. God moved in a powerful way, and many people came to Christ, including an imam and the chief of one of the tribes. Now, this young church—knowing much more about animistic Folk Islam than the Bible, living in a hostile context, with no theologically trained leaders and no viable means of sending leaders to seminary—wants to translate the Bible into their own language. If the leaders of the lingual church in this context asked you, how would you advise them as to what they should do next?

In the scenario from Indonesia, the lingual church clearly has considerable theological capacity and biblical understanding throughout a rich network of trained leaders and mature disciples of Jesus. In such scenarios, it is likely that—with the introduction of an effective translation methodology, appropriate computer technologies, and adequate biblical resources in a Language of Wider Communication (LWC) that they understand—the lingual church will be able to rapidly produce a trustworthy Bible translation in their language.

But what happens if the very young church in Chad attempts to accelerate Bible translation into their own language beyond their very limited capacity to do so with excellence? Conversely, since they do not yet have the capacity to produce a trustworthy translation of the entire Bible in their own language, should they do nothing and wait for someone else to do it for them? Or is there a way that they could simultaneously grow in their theological capacity while also learning to translate the Bible into their own language?

1.1 Why We Want to Accelerate Production

For people who love God's Word and believe that it is "living and active" (Hb 4:12) and essential for "life and godliness" (2Pe 1:3; 2Ti 3:16-17), it logically follows that they would also want to decrease the amount of time someone must wait before they receive access to it. Generally, this leads to a desire to "accelerate Bible translation" so that people can get access to it sooner. However, those who share the concern for ending Bible poverty as rapidly as possible are usually also concerned that the Bible translations provided to people be (at a minimum) *trustworthy*. By which we mean that the translations faithfully communicate the author's original

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[5] Recounted in Jones and Tunliu, "Church-Driven Bible Translation."

intent to the original recipients in light of their original context in the receptor language. And herein lies the conundrum.

Reliable affirmation of the trustworthiness of a Bible translation requires both linguistic ability (fluency in the language of the translation) and Bible translation capacity. Capacity here refers generally to the degree to which the biblical text is understood, together with the ability to effectively apply reliable translation principles to faithfully communicate the meaning of the text in the receptor language in ways that are comprehensible, appropriate, and appealing. Thus, **it is unwise to accelerate Bible translation production beyond the theological and translation capacity of the lingual church** for whom it is intended. When this happens, there is no way to reliably and confidently ascertain the trustworthiness of the Bible translation, because **the only people who have the necessary linguistic ability to confirm it do not yet have the Bible translation capacity to do so**.[6]

In such scenarios, it is not uncommon for the lingual church to enthusiastically (and unwittingly) affirm the translation that they will later discover contains errors that they could not have discerned at the level of theological and translation capacity they had when the translation was first created. Sadly, this is not a hypothetical concern. Some lingual churches have been encouraged by well-intended people to use an accelerated means of production (e.g., a new methodology or innovative technology) that pushed the speed of translation beyond the capacity of the church to reliably affirm its trustworthiness. The lingual church checked the translation with *confidence*, but, because they did not know what they could not yet know about the Scriptures and how to translate them faithfully, their confidence was not matched with *reliability*. Years later, they would discover that the translation they created, preached from, and even memorized contained significant errors that they could now recognize. They will attempt to correct the errors, but with considerable difficulty, due to the anchoring effect and remarkable persistence of original (and, in this case, deeply flawed) Bible translations.

Some might argue that this is not a problem, this is actually evidence that the paradigm works. After all, the church is building up their own Bible translation capacity such that they are now able to correct their own errors, as the churches in major languages do. Others might argue the opposite, that this proves very few lingual churches have the capacity to produce trustworthy Bible translations at this point in time. There may be some truth in both of these assertions, but it is important to note that they are both operating from the same production-oriented assumptions. Meaning: the traditional Bible translation process focuses on the production (as rapidly as possible) of a quality product that is the result of a linear process: **Produce → Publish → Engage**.

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6 I explore this in more detail in "Trustworthy and Trusted." Gravelle describes use of Artificial Intelligence and Translation Service Providers as recent innovations in acceleration of production of Bible translations. He gives the example of the Hijazi language of western Saudi Arabia, where an organization "has applied a hybrid model that involves a translation service provider (TSP) company ... The TSP provides highly trained and experienced translators who are bilingual speakers of the source and target language. In the early stage, it could take AI translation six months to achieve the same quality TSP can produce from the start. Both can produce fairly good translation quality early on, followed by rapid iterative improvements. The TSP process has a jump start of at least two years in speed and cost savings over manual translation because it begins with pretrained native speaker translators" ("Today's AI Natural Language Processing: A Game Changer for Bible Translation," 8). It is important to note what is *not* addressed in this analysis focused on speed of production. Namely, the trustworthiness of the translation produced by the (reportedly non-Christian) translators employed by the TSP could be reliably and confidently verified because several diaspora Hijazi Christians were involved in the checking, including some with degrees from theological education institutions. The scenarios we are concerned with in this paper are those where no such theological capacity yet exists in the church that speaks the language of the Bible translation.

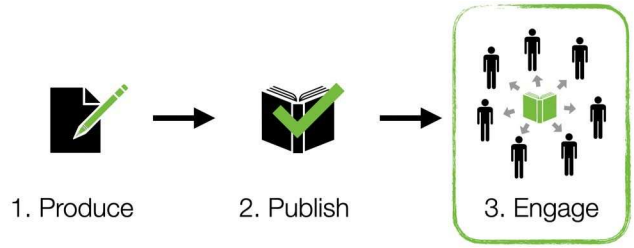

Diagram 1: Bible Translation as Manufacturing Process

This approach to Bible translation is an expression of the traditional "book production" (or "manufacturing") system. It is so widely used that it is generally taken as a given. Could there be another way of producing Bible translations?

1.2 Another Way of Producing Bible Translations

If we conceive of Bible translation essentially as the production of a book, we will tend to think in terms of a linear, sequential process, with a clear start and a clear finish involving the publication of the translated book (whether in text, audio, or video formats) as the end of the process. But the end goal of Bible translation is not the production of a translated book. The actual goal is generally expressed in terms of the engagement of people with a Bible translation in their language in such a way that God's Word deeply impacts them, leading to the making of disciples, the transformation of lives, and the building up of the church (among other things). This is not news—everyone knows it is all about impact. Nonetheless, it is important to note this, because the established paradigm of Bible translation (including agencies, donors, etc.) generally focuses on the production process and *assumes the impact happens as a given*.[7] Standard Bible translation metrics tend to count what can be easily counted (e.g., new translation starts, published books, etc.) and assume that the *actual* objective of engagement and impact follows as a matter of course.

Why do we tend to think this way? The established paradigm of Bible translation (which we will consider below and generally describe here as "experts doing Bible translation for (and sometimes with) the lingual church") is still largely operating from the assumptions and patterns that were dominant when that paradigm of Bible translation first came into existence. Back then, there were *many* essentially (and sometimes completely) monolingual language communities. Thus, if a Bible translation did not exist in a given minority language, it was likely that they would not have access *at all* to God's Word.[8]

The world is vastly different today, in light of the compounding effects of globalization, urbanization, and the ubiquity of mobile technology. Truly monolingual societies are so uncommon they tend to make international news headlines when one is discovered. Multilingualism is increasingly the norm, everywhere, with the result that most people groups have at least some access to Scripture via multilingual patterns and Bible translations available in Languages of Wider Communication.[9]

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7 These assumptions have remarkable durability, even in the face of considerable evidence that the production of a Bible translation by cultural outsiders on behalf of the lingual church is generally not as effective as was once believed. For one such report, see "Scripture Use Research and Ministry," 2017.

8 These are reflected in the origin stories of the founders of some of the Bible translation agencies. For example, the story of Cam Townsend is connected to the story of a man in Guatemala who could not understand the Spanish translation Cam gave him and uttered the words that eventually led Cam to launch SIL and Wycliffe Bible Translators in order to translate the Bible into minority languages: "If your God is so great, how come he does not speak my language?" (Stone, *The Story of the Bible*, 151).

9 Citing the research of several authors in recent decades, Buschfeld, Ronan, and Vida-Mannl observe that multingualism is not a recent phenomenon, but that "a number of current trends, mostly related to globalisation and immigration ... have strongly

A second important factor that has changed since the early days of the established paradigm of Bible translation is the growth of the global church. Not only were there more monolingual societies back then, many (perhaps most) of them were entirely unreached people groups, with no indigenous gospel witness or indigenous church presence. Since then, the church has continued to multiply such that it is increasingly rare to find people groups with no believers at all, and many of them now have flourishing churches.[10]

Thus, in many (if not most) people groups today, Scripture in the common language is already in use by the church, through patterns of multilingualism. As in the example above from Indonesia, the common language Bible translations are often expressed to those who do not adequately understand them through "oral proxy" (or "on-the-fly") translation—someone provides a verbal translation and explanation where needed in the vernacular.[11] The point is not to suggest this is sufficient, but to accentuate the reality that *multilingual Scripture engagement is already happening* before a formal Bible translation exists in the vernacular. This pattern is particularly (though not exclusively) evident in Disciple-Making Movements (DMMs), where Discovery Bible Studies are usually a foundational aspect in the multiplication of disciples. Trousdale provides a helpful description of the process and outcome:

> The challenge in making obedient disciples is to teach obedience. In the context of Disciple Making Movements, we have seen that the best tool to teach obedience is Discovery Bible Study (DBS). ... The Discovery Bible Study uses the inductive method of Bible study. Its purpose is not to build knowledge, even though **people do develop their understandings of biblical teachings as they develop sound doctrine**. Rather, it is a careful analysis of the Word of God in order to discover what are the principles of life for a disciple, for a Christian leader, and for the church. As people discover these principles, they align their lives to them. So **the primary purpose of the DBS is to help people (nonbelievers and believers) discover and understand the teachings of Jesus in a way that leads them to obedience** (2 Timothy 3:15–41).[12]

There are many other examples of how the church in people groups all over the world is already engaging with and applying Scripture to their lives. Consequently, we can shift our thinking in order to consider how we might accelerate the *impact* of Scripture without needing to first publish a book. For example, what if we were to conceive of the ministry of Bible translation as **an ongoing theological and translation-informed dialog in the context of practical ministry that leads to the spiritual maturation of a young church**? The impact of Bible translation in this kind of scenario occurs *concurrently* to the iterative production of the translation over time. Thus, **engagement** precedes (and is the driver for) **production** of a Bible translation that, in time, can be completed and **published**.

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increased the number of bilingual or even multilingual speakers. ... As the trends of globalisation and migration have kept increasing rather than going down [in the last 15 years] ... these numbers can be expected to be even higher today. Bi- and multilingual language acquisition and use have thus clearly turned into a majority phenomenon ... . This has created much-needed competition for the once-predominant model of the monolingual language learner and has attracted much scientific attention, especially since the late 1990s" (*Multilingualism*. ch. 1, § "1.2 Some Facts and Figures," 7). Coupland notes how the relatively fixed geo-locations of largely monolingual peoples in the past (as depicted in traditional maps with demarcated language boundaries) is changing with the greater mobility of the globalized era: "The descriptive and comparative tradition in linguistics in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was an 'artefactual' tradition, according to which languages were connected to timeless peoples, who were topographically plotted on a particular area of distribution ... We now see that the mobility of people also involves the mobility of linguistic and sociolinguistic resources, that 'sedentary' patterns of language use are complemented by 'trans-local' forms of language use, and that the combination of both often accounts for unexpected sociolinguistic effects" (*The Handbook of Language and Globalization*, ch. 16, § "Two Paradigms").

10 Much of the recent progress among unreached people is due to Church-Planting Movements and Disciple-Making Movements. These are not always visible to "above-ground" (traditional) denominations, depending on the hostility of the surrounding culture to evangelism and efforts to win converts to Christianity.

11 Note the nearly identical pattern to God's people in Ne 8:8 "They read out of the book of the law of God, *translating and giving the meaning so that the people could understand* what was read."

12 Trousdale, *Miraculous Movements*, ch. 6, § "Discovery Bible Study (DBS)."

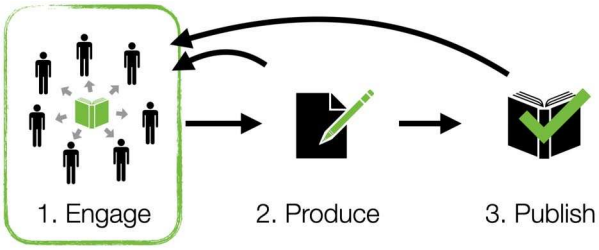

Diagram 2: Bible Translation as Part of the Life of the Church

As the diagram above illustrates, the engagement of the church with Scripture is often the driving force behind the need to produce more Bible translations. Not everyone in the lingual church understands the common language translation sufficiently. But this does not necessarily imply that a separate "Bible translation production" process should now be initiated. There may be scenarios (as in the example above from Indonesia), where well-trained, theologically established leaders can produce a Bible translation rapidly in their own language through a traditional "book publishing" process. But the number of lingual churches who already have leaders with the requisite expertise and resources available to them is likely to be relatively low, compared to the number of Bible translations needed in the entire global church.

In this way, by avoiding the traditional assumption that acceleration of production is the greatest need, *translation production does not accelerate beyond a lingual church's capacity*. Because engagement is already happening, the introduction of a translation element into the theological formation of the church that is already in progress results in an **acceleration of the desired *impact* of Bible translation**, long before the production and publishing processes are complete. These will happen in due course, through multiple iterations of testing the translation in actual use.[13]

This phenomenon is referred to as "Church-Centric Bible Translation" (or, when it occurs in disciple-making movements, "Movement-Led Bible Translation") and it is fundamentally different from other models that start with production in order to publish a translation with which the church can engage.[14] In order for us to be able to interact more fully with this concept, we will need to first look to Scripture to identify the general patterns of a biblical model of church and mission. This will form the basis for a model of Bible translation that focuses on building up the theological and translation capacity of the church, rather than a publishing model driven by production of a translated book (whether in text, audio, or video formats).

2. The Church and Her Mission

In this section, we will consider foundational elements in a biblical model for equipping the Bible-translating church. Then, we will explain the term "theological formation" and show how it provides the essential pattern for equipping the church to attain the capacity needed for excellence in Bible translation. Finally, we will consider historical developments in the church that enable us to understand why "the church" exists in

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13 When Bible translation exists as part of the life of the church, the translation that is iteratively produced is already in active use. Thus, it avoids the well-known problem of unused Bible translations "sitting on shelves" (or stacked up in warehouses) that typically occurs when translation production occurs as a process disconnected from the life of the church.

14 Foundational work on the topic of "Church-Centric Bible Translation" has been laid in Jore, "From Unreached to Established." The definition provided there is: "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" (§ "Glossary of Terms").

such different expressions. Together, these will form the general framework for our consideration of Bible translation when undertaken by the lingual church to meet their own needs.

2.1 Toward A Biblical Model for Equipping and Expanding the Church

As stated in the introduction, the central premise of this paper is that in scenarios where the church is young (or does not yet exist) and is not yet theologically well-formed, an emphasis on production of a Bible translation is neither helpful nor necessary. Instead, a more effective approach is one that implements biblical patterns of church and mission while integrating Bible translation into the life of the church. In this section, we will depict some of the essential elements of the biblical model of church and mission. This will provide the theological basis for the Church-Centric paradigm of Bible translation that integrates translation with engagement in Scripture so as to increase capacity for excellence in Bible translation.[15]

Before we go any further, it is important to establish up front that the assertion (and depiction) of a cohesive pattern of church and mission in the New Testament is not therefore a referendum castigating all ecclesiastical traditions that differ from the model. Instead, the biblical model serves as the standard by which all other expressions of church and mission can assess and improve their effectiveness. It provides the pattern against which every contemporary expression can continually adapt, as needed, for greater alignment to God's design for his church. God's gracious purpose in designing the church as he has is for the good of his people and the advance of the kingdom of God to every people group and place. To the extent that the church implements the essential patterns as depicted in the biblical model, it will benefit from all the goodness of God's good design for the joyful flourishing of his family.

2.1.1 The Church Is the Family of God

We begin by noting the foundational importance of understanding that the church is the family of God.[16] The New Testament is replete with statements pertaining to the true identity of believers as children of God (and, thus, the church as God's family) including these:[17]

- to all who did receive him, he gave them "the right to be children of God" (Jn 1:12–13)
- all those "led by God's Spirit are God's sons... by [the Spirit of adoption] we cry out, 'Abba, Father!' The Spirit himself testifies together with our spirit that we are God's children, and if children, also heirs—heirs of God and coheirs with Christ..." (Ro 8:14–17; Ga 4:4–6)
- we are "no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then God has made you an heir" (Ga 4:7)
- we are "God's sons... God's children" (Ro 8:19, 21)

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15 Most of the content in this section is addressed in detail in a previous paper ("Rediscovering the Way of King Jesus") and is provided here in summary form.

16 I address the concept of the church being the family of God in detail in "The Equipping Servants of the Early Church," § "2.3.1 The Church is the Family of God" and "Rediscovering the Way of King Jesus," § "3.2 The Church is the Family of God (Everything Else is Parachurch)."

17 Poythress provides a helpful summary of some of the theological implications of our being adopted into God's family "... Christians are called 'sons of God' and 'children of God,' in pointed contrast to non-Christians who are outside God's family (1Jn 5:1-5). To be called a child of God has many implications. We have intimate fellowship with God the Father (Ro 8:15). Jesus Christ is our elder brother (Ro 8:29). We are legally adopted out of a situation of bondage (Ga 4:1-7). We are no longer slaves (Ga 4:7; Ro 8:15). We are to receive the full inheritance from God as coheirs with Christ (Ro 8:17). We are conformed to the pattern of death and resurrection-life established through Christ (Ro 8:11-13). We share in the common family Spirit, the Holy Spirit (Ro 8:14-15). We are remade in God's image (Ro 8:29). We are born from God (1Jn 5:4; Jn 1:12-13). As obedient children, we are to imitate the good character of our Father (Ep 5:1; 1Pe 1:14-17)" ("The Biblical Basis of the Church as Family," § "The People of God as a Family in the New Testament").

- Jesus is "the firstborn among many brothers and sisters" (Ro 8:29)
- the "children of the promise" are "God's children... the offspring" (Ro 9:8)
- we are "called sons of the living God" (Ro 9:26, quoting Ho 1:10)
- "God's people... are faithful brothers and sisters" (Co 1:2)
- we are to "love one another deeply as brothers and sisters" (Ro 12:10)
- through faith we "are all sons of God in Christ Jesus" (Ga 3:26)
- God "predestined us to be adopted as sons through Jesus Christ for himself" (Ep 1:5)
- we are "...no longer foreigners and strangers, but... members of God's household" (Ep. 2:19)
- we are to "be imitators of God, as dearly loved children" (Ep 5:1)
- we are to conduct ourselves as "children of God who are faultless" (Php 2:15)
- God is "bringing many sons and daughters to glory" (Hb 2:10)
- we are to endure suffering as discipline, because "God is dealing with you as sons. For what son is there that a father does not discipline?" (Hb 12:7)
- because of the Father's love that he has lavished on us, we are now "called children of God" because "that is what we are!... we are God's children" (1Jn 3:1–2)
- "God's children" do what is right (1Jn 3:10)
- the one who conquers "will inherit these things, and I will be his God, and he will be my son" (Re 21:7).

God is the true Father[18], Jesus is the firstborn son and heir[19], and the church is God's family[20], having received the Spirit of adoption such that followers of Jesus are coheirs with Him[21] and truly brothers and sisters[22]. These (together with many similar passages in the New Testament) emphasize in no uncertain terms the ontological reality of the church being God's family—united in Christ from (someday) every people group and language (Mt 28:19–20; Ep 2:12–19; Re 7:9). But, when we look at the church today, we encounter a dilemma, as Snyder notes, because we see "not only the community of God's people; we find also a proliferation of denominations, institutions, agencies, associations, and so forth. Such structures obviously have no explicit biblical basis. How should we view them?"[23]

To begin with, we must recognize that God's family is the means by which God adds to his family, causes it to grow to maturity, and ministers to the community in which the church exists. The fulfilling of these functions requires some degree of structure that enables communication and coordination between family members. Different structures may be assembled by God's family for different purposes and for different durations, all

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18 cf. Jn 6:32; Ro 8:19, 21; Ep 1:3; Hb 12:7.

19 cf. Ro 8:29–30; Php 2:9–11; Co 1:15, 18; Hb 1:2, 6; Re 1:5.

20 cf. Mt 23:8–9; Ro 9:26; Ep 2:19; 5:1; 1Ti 3:14–15; 1Jn 3:1–2.

21 cf. Ro 8:14–16; Ga 4:4–6; Ro 8:17; Ga 4:6–7.

22 cf. Mk 3:31–35; Mt 23:8–9; Mt 25:35–40; Co 1:2; Ro 12:10.

23 Snyder, "The Church as God's Agent for Evangelism," § III:1 "Church structure and para-church structures," 337. Elsewhere, Snyder observes: "The New Testament and the writings of the first church fathers show that the early church saw itself primarily as a charismatic community or as an organism, not as an institution or an organization. With the gradual institutionalization of the Church, however, the idea of the Church as organization became more prominent and largely crowded out the charismatic/organic view, especially in the West. Thus "in the history of theology the Church as assembled community of the faithful has been too often neglected in favor of the Church as institution," notes Hans Kung (*The Community of the King,* ch. 4, § "The Steward of God's Grace").

in service to the working together of the family of God to achieve the mission of God, led by the Spirit of God. Snyder articulates this clearly:

> In dealing with the whole question of church structure, then, we should **make a very clear distinction between the church as the community of God's people and all parachurch structures**, whether denominations, mission agencies, evangelistic organizations, education institutions, or other ecclesiastical forms... It is critically important—especially when we are dealing with a worldwide, multicultural situation—to emphasize that **the church is a people, not an organization; it is a community, not an institution.**[24]

The central premise of this section is that **the church is God's family and every structure utilized by God's family to fulfill its functions is essentially a parachurch structure**.[25] They do not replace the church or define the church, and they should not be permitted to fragment the unity of the church into factions.

In the West, the prevalence of institutional churches and parachurch organizations tends to shape perception of the church along institutional lines. But if we take off the institutional lenses, so to speak, what we see is a complex network of family relationships. In the same way that an extended biological family is connected through influential relationships (e.g., brothers and sisters to each other, to their parents, to each other's children, etc.), the family of God does as well. Here, the relationships are as older/younger siblings all having the same Father and Jesus as our oldest brother. But the patterns of influence that emerge from these relationships form a complex network. While all siblings in God's family are equal in value, their relational influence is not the same. While everyone is a node in the complex network, some of the nodes are "hubs" to which many other disciples are connected. Why does this matter? Because the life of the church is expressed through these relationships, and this has implications for everything from discipleship to leadership to equipping the church for effectiveness in Bible translation.

2.1.2 Leadership in the Family of God

The New Testament depicts two leadership functions in the family of God.[26] Elders (i.e., the older brothers of God's family) have a localized function that emphasizes the formation of long-term, high trust relationships conducive to nurturing and protecting God's family within a given region. The function of those referred to in the New Testament as *diakonoi* is that of "equipping servants" who have a translocal scope of ministry, in that they serve and equip the church in various ways in multiple localities. God's design for leadership in his family enables the church to expand and strengthen concurrently. An essential aspect of this design is that

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[24] Ibid. Note that Snyder refers to "the community of God's people" where I emphasize the familial reality of God's people. He goes on to note three benefits of this distinction between the church and parachurch structures: "(i) That which is always cross-culturally relevant (the biblically-understood church) is separated from that which is culturally bound and determined (parachurch structures). Thus one is free to see the church as culturally relevant and involved and yet not as culturally bound, (ii) One is free also to modify parachurch structures as culture changes, for these are not themselves the church and there fore are largely culturally rather than biblically determined. (iii) Finally, this distinction makes it possible to see a wide range of legitimacy in denominational confessions and structures. If such structures are not themselves the church and are culturally determined, then whole volumes of controversy and polemics lose their urgency and become merely secondary. Widely varying confessions are freed (at least potentially) to concentrate on that which unites them — being the people of God and carrying out the evangelistic task — while relegating structural differences to the plane of cultural and historical relativity. Thus the crucial consideration for structure becomes not biblical legitimacy but functional relevancy" (Ibid, 338).

[25] It is important to recognize that my use of the term "parachurch" here is according to its essential definition—I am not using it here as an abbreviated form of "parachurch organization." Snyder notes: "Ralph Winter has suggested calling such structures *infrachurch* structures to emphasize their subordinate but supporting relationship to the church and to avoid making a complete break between the Christian community and its structures" (*The Community of the King*, § "The Form of the Church," 189).

[26] This is a brief summary of a more detailed study in Jore "The Equipping Servants of the Early Church," § "4.5 The Two Leadership Functions in the New Testament Church" and § "4.6 The Interdependence of Elders and *diakonoi*."

leadership includes pluralities of interconnected and mutually submissive leaders across both key functions: elders (shepherding and teaching) and equipping servants (*diakonoi*: equipping and expanding).

Local Shepherding (*presbyteros*, *episkopos*, *poimainō*) – Paul called for the Ephesian elders (*presbyteros*) and told them the Holy Spirit had appointed them as overseers (*episkopos*) to shepherd (*poimainō*) the church of God (Ep 20: 17, 28). Paul told Titus that an elder (*presbyteros*) is an overseer (*episkopos*) of God's household (which is the church, 1Ti 3:15). Peter wrote that elders (*presbyteros*) should shepherd (*poimainō*) God's flock, overseeing (*episkopeō*) willingly, not exercising dominion against them, but being examples to the flock (1Pe 5:1–3).[27]

The primary work of **elders** interconnects with other elders, as well as with the equipping servants. As the shepherds and "father figures" (not by title, but by their function) of local churches, the **elders** tend to the church in a particular geographical region for which they have responsibility (Ac 14:21–23; 20:17; Tt 1:7). The elders who oversee a network of churches in a given region function as a united plurality of leaders. The relationship of elders to the churches is close, enduring, and consistent, enabling them to develop deep relationships with the disciples in the church, so as to model the Christian life, teach them in accordance with sound doctrine, and care for their needs (1Pe 5:2–3). *An example of this is the elders of the church network in Ephesus (Ac 20:17–38). When Paul wanted to instruct the church at Ephesus, he taught the plurality of elders who were tasked with serving and caring for the churches.*

Translocal Equipping (*diakonos*, *doulos*, *syndoulos*, *hypēretēs*) – Paul referred to Epaphras as both a faithful servant (*diakonos*) of Christ and also a servant (*doulos*) of Christ Jesus (Co 1:7; 4:12). He referred to Tychicus as a fellow servant (*syndoulos*), and faithful servant (*diakonos*, Co 4:7; Ep 6:21). He referred to Timothy (and himself) as a minister (*diakonos*) of a new covenant and a good servant (*diakonos*) of Christ Jesus (2Co 3:6; 1Ti 4:6). He referred to Phoebe as a servant (*diakonos*) of the church in Cenchreae (Ro 16:1). He referred to Apollos and himself as servants (*diakonoi*) through whom the Corinthians believed and that the church should think of them as servants (*hypēretēs*) of Christ (1Co 3:5; 4:1). Paul referred to himself as a servant (*diakonos*) of the gospel (Ep 3:7; Co 1:23) and a servant (*diakonos*) of the church (Co 1:25).[28]

The **equipping servants** move between gatherings of God's family to strengthen, encourage, and serve them.[29] They help maintain unity of doctrine and purpose across the entire church network (1Co 7:17; 14:33; 2Co 11:28). They strive to equip the church for the work of ministry (Ep 4:11–16), and labor diligently so that the church grows to full maturity (Co 1:28; 4:12; 2Co 13:9, 11). *Paul's work with the Ephesian elders is an*

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27 In his instructions to both Timothy (1Ti 3:1–7) and Titus (Ti 1:6–9) regarding the appointment of elders, Paul indicates that this function in the church is limited to men who meet certain qualifications, including that they are "the husband of one wife."

28 Ellis notes that the term *diakonos* occurs in close connection with terms like "coworker" (1Co 3:5...) but has "a somewhat more specialized meaning... it refers to workers with special activities in preaching and teaching, both among Paul and his coworkers (1Co 3:5; 2Co 3:6; 6:4; Ep 3:7–8; Co 1:7, 23; 1Ti 4:6) and among his opponents (2Co 11:15, 23; cf. Ellis 1993, 102–3; Georgi, 27–32). Like "the brothers," the *diakonoi serve in local congregations* (Ro 16:1; Php 1:1; 1Ti 3:8) as well as on missionary circuits and, as teachers, they are mentioned as deserving of pay (Ga 6:6; Longenecker, 278–79)" (Ellis, "Coworkers, Paul and His." In *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, § "1.2.3. Minister (Diakonos), 185."

29 Banks observers, "This does not mean that links between local churches were absent. On the contrary, Paul both initiated and encouraged fellowship between them in a variety of ways. But he sought to build up enduring relationships of an organic, or only loosely organized, rather than institutional, character. This took place through the exchange of letters from their apostle (Co 4:16), the visits of individuals from one group to another (e.g., Ro 16:1), the sending of financial aid during time of need (e.g., 2Co 8:11–13) , the burden of prayer on each other's behalf (e.g., 2Co 8:14), and the passing on of greetings and news through intermediaries. These scattered Christian groups expressed their unity not by fashioning a corporate organization through which they could be federated with one another, but rather in a range of organized personal contacts between people who regarded themselves as members of the same Christian family. This is so even with respect to the foundation church in Jerusalem. Paul is eager to gain its recognition of his missionary endeavors so as to avoid any division in the Christian movement between its Jewish and Gentile wings (Ga 2:1–10), for a denominationalism of this kind would be totally abhorrent to him (*Paul's Idea of Community*, ch. 4, § "The Relationship between the Heavenly and the Local Church").

example of this. When he meets with them, Paul is leading a team of (presumably) equipping servants ("...Sopater son of Pyrrhus from Berea, Aristarchus and Secundus from Thessalonica, Gaius from Derbe, Timothy, and Tychicus and Trophimus from the province of Asia" Ac 20:4). They have just come from encouraging and strengthening the churches of Macedonia and Troas (Ac 20:1, 6), and are en route to the churches of Tyre, Caesarea, and Jerusalem (Ac 21:3–4, 8, 17).

In 1 Timothy 3:4–15, Paul states that leadership in God's church is leadership of God's family. Qualification for leadership of both elders and servants (*diakonoi*) depends, among other things, on managing their own families well. In the case of elders, especially, Paul makes a direct connection between being able to care for an earthly, biologically connected family with being able to take care of God's family, the church:

> He must manage his own household competently and have his children under control with all dignity. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of God's church?) (1Ti 3:4–5).
>
> Servants (*diakonoi*) are to be husbands of one wife, managing their children and their own households competently (1Ti 3:12).

Paul then states categorically that God's household (a family of families) *is* the church of the living God:

> I write these things to you, hoping to come to you soon. But if I should be delayed, I have written so that you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in **God's household, which is the church of the living God**, the pillar and foundation of the truth (1Ti 3:14–15).[30]

Thus, we see that the organizing framework for leadership in the church is leadership in God's family. This has immense implications for responsibility, authority, and ministry in the church. For one, Jesus makes it clear that our relationship to one another in the family of God does not have special titles or hierarchical rank, but is that of siblings: "But you are not to be called 'Rabbi,' because you have one Teacher, and **you are all brothers and sisters**. Do not call anyone on earth your father, because **you have one Father, who is in heaven**" (Mt 23:8–9).

In the church, leaders function as older brothers who guide, protect, and care for their younger siblings, aligning their authority with the instructions of the Father. Paul's teachings emphasize that church leadership involves service, example, and nurturing relationships, with leaders expected to guide by living in obedience to Christ. This family-oriented model fosters mutual care, with members encouraged to follow leaders by imitating their obedience to Jesus, thus aligning their lives with the gospel.

2.1.3 Equipping + Expanding the Church

As we observe the work that Jesus continued to do after his ascension (cf. Ac 1:1–2) through the church filled with the Holy Spirit (cf. Ac. 2:1–47; 4:31), we note two concurrent functions in the church. It is simultaneously being equipped for ministry and also expanding into new places. This pattern is evident throughout Acts and the Epistles, and is summarized in Acts 14:21–23. Here, Luke describes the essential elements of the work that Paul and Barnabas were sent out by the Holy Spirit to do:

> After they had **preached the gospel** in that town and **made many disciples**, they returned to Lystra, to Iconium, and to Antioch, **strengthening the disciples** by **encouraging them** to continue in the faith and by telling them, "It is necessary to go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God." When they

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[30] Poythress notes that "the phrase 'these instructions' is most naturally understood as referring to the contents of the letter as a whole. Thus the letter [1 Timothy] as a whole has the purpose of indicating 'how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household'" ("The Biblical Basis of the Church as Family," § "The People of God as a Family in the New Testament").

had **appointed elders for them** in every church and prayed with fasting, they **committed them to the Lord** in whom they had believed" (Ac 14:21–23).

This general pattern is visible throughout all of Paul's ministry. The essential functions of "the work" Paul did (cf. Ac 13:2, 14:26), as depicted by Luke, can be summarized as:

- **EVANGELIZE**: They *preached the gospel* and *made many disciples.*
- **EQUIP**: They *strengthened the disciples* by *encouraging them* to continue in the faith, and by telling them to expect suffering as disciples of Jesus ("It is necessary to go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God").
- **ENTRUST**: They *appointed elders* in the churches and *committed them to the Lord*.

This "Evangelize → Equip → Entrust" pattern is sometimes referred to as the "Pauline Cycle" because it is visible throughout all of Paul's work—it is the essential pattern that he used in all his ministry.[31]

It is important to note the two core objectives in the biblical model of church and mission, as depicted through what Paul did and taught. The first objective is **equipping existing churches to grow to maturity**. We see this in Acts 13:1, where we are told that there were prophets and teachers in the church at Antioch. The essential function of those gifted as apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers (Ep 4:11–16) is that of equipping disciples for ministry, to build themselves up to maturity in Christ.

The work of equipping the church is often summarized in the biblical texts as two key ministry functions. The first is "**establishing**" (or "strengthening") which is often associated with terms like "rooting," "grounding," "increasing capacity," and "increasing firmness of character"). The second ministry function that is often closely connected to establishing is "**encouraging.**" This has in view the powerful effect that a loving older sibling has on a younger member of the family who is suffering and afraid and who needs to know that they are not alone and that it is worth it to press on in spite of hardship. Paul and Barnabas established and encouraged the Galatian churches (Ac 14:21–23), Judas and Silas encouraged the brothers and sisters in Antioch and strengthened them (Ac 15:32), Timothy was sent back to establish and strengthen the Thessalonians (1Th 3:2), Paul strengthened the churches in Syria and Cilicia (Ac 15:41) as well as in Galatia and Phrygia (Ac 18:23), etc.

The second objective in the biblical model of church and mission is **expanding the church** by increasing the number of people groups and places where the church exists and is equipped to grow to maturity. We see this in the rest of Luke's narrative of the first missionary journey, and specifically in Acts 14:4, 14 where Paul and Barnabas are designated as "apostles" in the sense that they were "sent out" from the church at Antioch with a specific mission to expand the church. The rapid growth of the early church followed a multiplicative pattern, particularly evident during Paul's first missionary journey when the gospel spread throughout the entire region of Pisidian Antioch (Ac 13:49). Later, Paul's equipping of disciples to make disciples in Ephesus resulted in so much disciple-making that in only two years "all the residents of Asia, both Jews and Greeks, heard the word of the Lord" (Ac 19:10).[32]

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31 The "Pauline Cycle" is depicted by various authors with different elements, depending on the level of abstraction employed in the description. For example, Hesselgrave suggests ten elements in his depiction of the cycle: 1. Missionaries Commissioned → 2. Audience Contacted → 3. Gospel Communicated → 4. Hearers Converted → 5. Believers Congregated → 6. Faith Confirmed → 7. Leadership Consecrated → 8. Believers Commended → 9. Relationships Continued → 10. Sending Churches Convened (see Hesselgrave, *Planting Churches Cross Culturally*, ch. 3, § "The Pauline Cycle").

32 Paul emphasized the importance of teaching in this process, instructing Timothy to entrust sound doctrine to faithful people who could, in turn, teach others (2Ti 2:2). The key qualification for teaching was not expertise but faithfulness and obedience to what had been learned. This obedience-based teaching model ensured that sound teaching could spread throughout a growing network of churches.

As we saw in the previous section, there are two general localities where these ministries occur:

1. Some ministry is **local**, where disciples are in synchronous and diachronic (consistent through time) relationship with one another.
2. Some ministry is **translocal**, where relationships are asynchronous due to the movement of equipping servants between different localities.[33]

Thus far, we have seen that the biblical model of church and ministry begins with understanding that the church is God's family. The leadership functions in the family of God are expressed through relational influence and account for the equipping and expanding of the church both locally and translocally.

2.1.4 The First Principles of the Kingdom

The essence of the apostolic message in the New Testament to all the churches is the proclamation of the gospel of the kingdom and the character transformation that flows from it into every aspect of the lifestyle patterns of disciples of King Jesus. New Testament authors use different metaphors to illustrate this two-part pattern, including building (laying a foundation → building on it, 1Co 3:9–14), agriculture (planting a seed → watering it, 1Co 3:6–9), human development (giving milk to an infant → becoming able to consume solid food, 1Co 3:2; Hb 5:12–14), and education (being a student → becoming a teacher, Hb 5:12).

The gospel that Jesus and his Apostles preached is centered on Jesus as King (Mk 1:14–15; 1Ti 6:15), bringing salvation to all who acknowledge him as Lord, believe in his resurrection from the dead (Ro 10:9–10; 1Co 15:1–5), and obey him as his disciples (Ro 1:1–6; Hb 5:9). The gospel also emphasizes the ongoing expansion of his kingdom on earth, in anticipation of it coming in fullness when the King returns. The essence of Jesus' commission to his disciples is the advance of the good news of King Jesus into every people group and language (Mt 28:19–20). In this context, personal salvation is important, but as the initiation of the life of a disciple who has been given important spiritual gifts to be used for ministry and meaningful work in the advance of God's kingdom. As Bird defines it:

> The gospel is the announcement that God's kingdom has come in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, the Lord and Messiah, in fulfillment of Israel's Scriptures. The gospel evokes faith, repentance, and discipleship; its accompanying effects include salvation and the gift of the Holy Spirit.[34]

In order to differentiate the biblical "gospel" from merely the "plan of salvation," the term *kerygma* is sometimes used. It is translated as "gospel proclamation" and refers to the message of the gospel of Jesus as King (cf. Ro 16:25; 1Co 15:14). Dodd shows that the form and content of the *kerygma*, can be "recovered from the New Testament with reasonable accuracy." He continues:

> [The *kerygma*] recounted in brief the life and work of Jesus Christ, His conflicts, sufferings, and death, and His resurrection from the dead; and it went on to declare that in these events the divinely guided history of Israel through long centuries had reached its climax. God Himself had acted decisively in this way to inaugurate His kingdom upon earth. This was the core of all early Christian preaching, however it

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[33] Snyder observes that interconnection of the churches is a basic pattern in the New Testament that can easily be missed. "We may call this 'translocal networking'—the maintaining of frequent, vital interconnection among the hundreds of local church bodies, utilizing the comings and goings of the apostles and their associates and many hand-carried letters and oral messages. This networking certainly was not a denominational structure or formalized association. But on the other hand, neither did it mean that each local body of believers was totally independent. Rather, the model of the early church was interdependence and vital interconnection. The term 'independent church' would have made no sense in the first century" (*The Community of the King,* ch. 9 "The Form of the Church," § "Structure in the Early Church").

[34] Bird, *Evangelical Theology*, Part I, § 1.3 "What is the Gospel?"

might be elaborated, illustrated, and explained.[35]

It is important to remember that when New Testament authors refer to Jesus as "the Christ" they are making a declaration of his Kingship. The name "Jesus Christ" should not be read as the first and last name (or interchangeable names) of the second person of the Trinity, but as a declarative statement: "Jesus (is) the King." Bates observes that when Paul speaks of Jesus Christ "Christ is not a last name or a meaningless addition; it is an honorific designation. It means Jesus the Messiah, Jesus the long-anticipated but now-ruling Jewish-style universal king."[36]

In the early church, those who responded to the proclamation of the gospel became part of the church—the family of God (1Ti 3:15)—and were instructed in the principles and normative lifestyle patterns in the family of God.[37] These lifestyle patterns are called the *didache* ("teaching") which are rooted in and flow from the *kerygma*. Paul notes this tight correlation of the gospel and sound teaching when he told Timothy that "sound teaching... conforms to the gospel concerning the glory of the blessed God, which was entrusted to me" (1Ti 1:10–11).[38]

The New Testament contains many examples of the *kerygma* followed by the *didache*, including the following:

The Kerygma and Didache in Various Epistles

	Kerygma	***Didache***
Romans	ch. 1–11	12–16
Galatians	1–4	5–6
Ephesians	1–4:16	4:17–6
Colossians	1–2	3–4
Hebrews	1–11	12–13
1 Peter	1:1–12	1:13–5:14

In these letters, the centrality of Christ's life, death, and resurrection as the fulfillment of God's promises to Israel and the inauguration of his kingdom (the *kerygma*) is followed by instruction on how those who have received the gospel and are now part of the family of King Jesus should therefore live (the *didache*).

The *didache* flows from and is empowered by (and inseparable from) the *kerygma*. Thus, the focus of the disciple is not on "doing" the long list of things that God wants us to do, but is instead "becoming" in Christ the kind of person who naturally thinks, speaks, and acts in Christlike ways. When the New Testament authors speak of having "one faith" (Ep 4:5), being of the "same mind" (2Co 13:11), rejecting "false doctrine

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35 Dodd, *Gospel and Law*, ch 1. "Preaching and Teaching," 9.

36 Ibid., ch. 4, § "Allegiance in Paul's Letters." Elsewhere, Bates suggests we should "cease treating Jesus and Christ as if they are interchangeable words. Let's aim to be intentional and precise in how we refer to him. ... because the meaning of Christ is not readily apparent to the average person, but king is, call him instead King Jesus. Calling him King Jesus is a way to preach the gospel every time you refer to him" (Ibid., ch 1, § "Calling Jesus the Christ: Now"). McKnight reminds us "that 'Christ' is the Greek translation of the Hebrew word Messiah. The word *Messiah* means 'anointed King' and 'Lord' and 'Ruler.' Lord means, well, 'Lord,' and the word Son here certainly means the anointed king of Israel..." (*The King Jesus Gospel*, ch. 4, § "The Jesus of the Gospel").

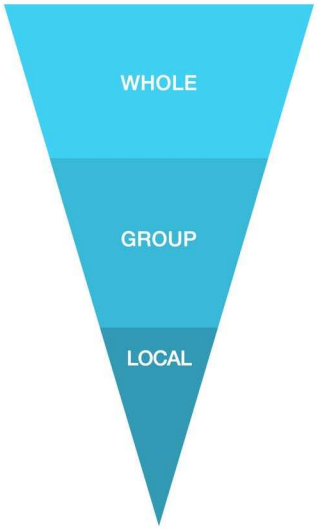
37 Dodd, *Gospel and Law*, ch 1. "Preaching and Teaching," 10.

38 Dodd comments that this order "seems to have been thoroughly characteristic of the Christian mission; it is precisely this order, first *kerygma*, then *didache*, which we have seen to be general in the New Testament writings" (Ibid.).

that does not agree with sound teaching" (1Ti 6:3), urging the church to "agree in what you say" having "no divisions among you" and being "united with the same understanding and the same conviction" (1Co 1:10), the foundation and essence of that unity is the *kerygma* and *didache*. This is the biblical center that avoids the extremes of, at one end, factions segregated over denominational nuances and, at the other, the sacrificing of core theological truth on the altar of cheap ecumenical harmony.

2.1.5 The Unity of the Church

Since the inauguration of the Protestant missionary enterprise by Carey, Western missionary endeavors have expanded the church into new nations, usually as "branded Christianity" (allegiance to organizational or denominational identities in a manner that fragments the unity of the church).[39] It has been observed that organizations that "promote a particular brand of Christianity will have difficulty completing the Great Commission."[40] This is especially true when the church in a given region begins to translate the Bible into their own language. One of the most important factors predisposing success in reaching unreached people groups with the gospel and the success of Bible translation training for leaders in the church is the degree to which the church is already setting aside their differences and rediscovering unity.[41]



Universal – all time (historical), all existence (living, asleep) – "to him be glory in the church" (Eph. 3:21); "Christ is the head of the church" (Eph. 5:23)

Global – all believers alive on earth today – "This is what I command in all the churches" (1 Cor. 7:17); "…we have no other custom, nor do the churches of God" (1 Cor. 11:18)

Geographic – all believers in a given region – "the church throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria" (Acts 9:31); "the church of God at Corinth" (1 Cor. 1:2)

Ethnic – all believers from a given people group (ethnic identity) – "…so do all the Gentile churches" (Rom. 16:4)

Lingual – all believers that speak a given language – "…you purchased people for God by your blood from every… language" (Rev. 5:9)

Large assembly – believers assembled together in large fellowship – "meeting together in the temple (Acts 2:46)

Small assembly – believers living as the family of God – "and… [meeting together] from house to house" (Acts 2:46); "the church that meets in their home" (Rom. 16:5)

Diagram 4: The Unity of the Church from Every Perspective

How does God see his church? Paul tells the Ephesians there is "one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all (Eph. 4:5)." We can see this unity portrayed in Scripture at different "zoom levels." If we zoom out, we see the church global and universal. If we zoom in, we see different groupings of the church by size, ethnicity, location, etc. as in the diagram above.

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39 Watson and Watson note, "What distinguishes a branded Christian institution is the insistence that all related churches and any churches they start adhere to a particular and peculiar perspective and associated practices related to the Bible, as well as their particular group history. All branded Christianity–focused groups are Bible-based and history-based. They may require a strict or loose adherence to their doctrine and/or practices. Their doctrine, however, is at best a subset of what Scripture has to say, and at worst contains extrabiblical teachings and practices based on their church history. All worship styles, leadership styles, and governance styles are mostly extrabiblical, even though all denominations will claim a biblical background or basis for their practices" (*Contagious Disciple-Making*, ch. 4).

40 Ibid.

41 This assertion is based on observation (my own and corroborated by several colleagues) of various church networks in different regions of the world, including Sudan, Chad, Singapore, and Latin America.

2.1.6 Summary of the Biblical Model

The diagram below attempts to bring the essential elements of the biblical model of church and mission together, taking into account the different ministry functions involved together with the "Evangelize → Equip → Entrust" progression displayed as an idealized growth to maturity over time.

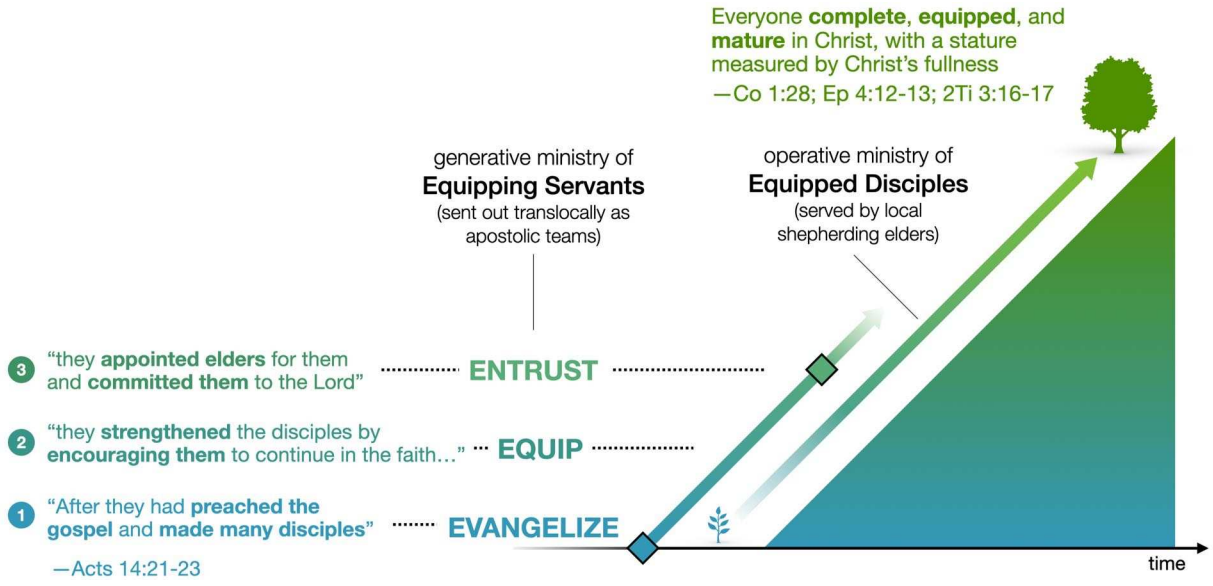

Diagram 3: An Overview of the Biblical Model

The following is a concise summary of the biblical model of church and mission:[42]

1- **The church is the family of God**—people from every nation, tribe, people, and language, adopted as sons of God by his grace and living in relationship with one another as brothers and sisters; all formalized structures instituted to facilitate the ministry of the church are parachurch and disposable.[43]

2- There is **only one church** and though it is a complex network that may be considered from many perspectives (e.g., global to local) and logical groupings (e.g., regional, ethnic, lingual, etc.), the church is singular—unity composed of great diversity.[44]

3- The life of the church is in **small gatherings of God's family** ministering together, augmented by larger gatherings as needed and where possible.[45]

4- The **ministry patterns** of God's family gathered together emphasize sharing Scripture, fellowship, a shared meal (during which the Lord's Supper is remembered), prayer, singing, and ministry to one another through spiritual gifts. [46]

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42 I have briefly outlined the general elements above and explained the model in more detail in "Rediscovering the Way of King Jesus," § "A Brief Summary of the Way of King Jesus."

43 Ibid., § "2.1 The Church is the Family of God."

44 Ibid., § "3.3 The Unity of the Church at Every 'Zoom Level'."

45 Ibid., § "2.2 The Gathered Family"

46 Ibid.

5- The **leadership of the church is plural, interconnected, and familial**, expressed in relational influence as co-equals under one Master; it is defined by spiritual gifting rather than position or title.[47]

6- The **two general functions of leadership in the church** are local shepherding (elders who protect, nurture, and teach) and translocal equipping (servants who expand, strengthen, and encourage).[48]

7- The **message of the church** is the gospel (*kerygma*)—the good news that Jesus is King and that all are invited to enter his kingdom by repenting, becoming loyal to Jesus, receiving forgiveness of sins, and being adopted into his family—and the ensuing patterns of gospel-transformed lifestyle and relationships (*didache*).[49]

8- The church in each place is united as the family of God and is **God's plan for bringing the tangible expression of his kingdom** into that place, by ministering to the needs—physical, social, mental, and spiritual—of the people in it.[50]

9- The **mission of the church** is the making of disciples in every people group and place who are equipped to grow to maturity in Christ and to make disciples of others who are equipped to do the same (i.e., theological formation).[51]

10- The **expansion of the church** is the formation and connection of new gatherings of God's family to the one church, and it occurs through patterns of evangelizing, equipping, and entrusting.[52]

2.2 Introducing a Term: Theological Formation

In order to clearly and succinctly communicate the essential pattern of the biblical model of church and mission, it is helpful to have a term that both encapsulates it and differentiates it from other traditions and patterns. In a previous paper, I proposed the term "theological formation" to that end.[53]

Theological Formation: The biblical model of establishing the church in the gospel (*kerygma*) and teaching (*didache*), equipping disciples of Jesus to build themselves up in unity to maturity as God's family through obedience to his Word, and encouraging them to persevere through hardship to that end (cf. Ac 14:21–23; Ep 4:11–16).

The term Theological Formation is distinct from terms like "theological education" and "spiritual formation."[54] An important distinction between Theological *Formation* and Theological *Education* is that the latter almost always employs a structured, curricular model of teaching students **what to think** theologically. Theological Formation is fundamentally different in that it is first principles-based and highly relational, and it emphasizes teaching disciples **how to think** theologically in categories that are both culturally relevant and

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47 Ibid., § "2.3 Leadership in God's Family."

48 Ibid., § "2.3.2 Two Leadership Functions in the Church."

49 Ibid., § "1.5 Paul's Message."

50 Ibid., § "2.4.2.1 The Ministry of God's Family to the Community."

51 Ibid., § "2.4.2.2 Missions: The Proclamation and Application of the Gospel of the Kingdom."

52 Ibid., § "2.3.4 Equipping and Expanding the Church."

53 The term "theological formation" is proposed and explained in Jore, "Rediscovering the Way of King Jesus," § "1.5.5 Proposing a Term: Theological Formation" and Appendix E – "Theological Formation and Other Frameworks."

54 The expanded form of the term "Theological Formation" (i.e., "Church-Centric Theological Formation") is also used, cf. Jore "From Unreached to Established," § "Bible Translation in the 21st Century," 19.

biblically faithful. The table below contrasts "Theological Education" with "Theological Formation."[55] For a comparison with additional ministry frameworks, see "Rediscovering the Way of King Jesus," Appendix E – "Theological Formation and Other Ministry Frameworks."

Contrasting Theological Education and Theological Formation

	"Theological Education"	**"Theological Formation"**
PARTICIPANTS	**teacher → class** (professional context)	**equipping servants → church as hermeneutical community** (ecclesial context: church network, lingual church, etc., Ac 13; 14:21–26)
MODE	usually **formal** education – time-bound, curricular study program with definite commencement and conclusion, credits/accreditation	may be **non-formal** – process of laying foundations + fostering progression toward maturity in sound doctrine (orthodoxy) and lifestyle (orthopraxy) (1Co 3:1–15), "equipping the church for ministry" (Ep 4:11ff)
ESSENCE	**academic formation** of individual ("learning the script") / connotes: teaching "what to think" / dogmatics / systematic theology / critical thinking	**theological formation** of church / formation and expression of sound doctrine in own language and culture / learning "how to think" theologically + "how to live" as God's family / ministry to one another + community around them (1Ti 3:15)
TASK / SCOPE	**training leaders** for church leadership	**discipleship = evangelism → equipping the church → entrusting leaders** (Mt 28:19–20; Ac 14:21–23; 1Ti 2:7; 2Ti 1:11; Pauline Epistles), sound hermeneutics + "whole counsel of God" (2Pe 3:16; Ac 20:27)
PROCESS	**knowledge transfer** to individual student by credentialed seminary faculty for leadership in the church	**"entrusting"** of the faithful (elders + equipping servants) with "deposit of sound doctrine" for the establishing + equipping of the entire church (Ep 4:11; 1Ti 6:20; 2Ti 1:12,14)
CONTEXT	in **classroom** for optimal academic competence	in the **church** for mutual + reciprocal edification (priesthood of all believers,1Pe 2:9) leading to spiritual maturity
TRAJECTORY	**terminal** (singular, putting "tools on the toolbelt" of clergy and church staff to "make Sunday happen")	intentionally **multiplicative** (non-linear progression, one-to-many teaching of teachers, equipping of equippers, etc., 2Ti 2:2)
ORIENTATION	**professional (clergy/church staff)** / development of theological expertise / academic scholarship	**familial (mature church on mission together)** / ecclesial + missional formation of entire church / presenting "everyone mature in Christ" (Co 1:28)

One of the strengths of the term is that it indicates not only the notion of growth to maturity, but also the formation (or even "formulation") of faithful theology in sociolinguistic categories that are relevant and meaningful to the church in their cultural and linguistic context. It also forms the basis for understanding Church-Centric Bible Translation and how it is different from other expressions of Bible translation done by the church.

So far in this section, we have outlined the contours of the biblical model of church and mission and introduced the term "theological formation" to encapsulate the essential pattern of equipping the church to

[55] The contrast depicted in this table is intended to depict the most typical aspects of the two approaches, but there is not necessarily a hard line dividing the two. It is probably most helpful to consider these as endpoints on a spectrum.

grow to maturity. We will now consider how a movement of disciples can become institutionalized, and eventually exist in different structures (movemental and institutional) in the same geographic location.

2.3 Understanding the Movemental Church

A common tendency is to read into the New Testament texts the ecclesiastical traditions with which we are most familiar. It is so common, in fact, that we usually do not even realize we are doing it. Theological institutions typically teach a system that aligns with a denominational tradition. Even non-denominational institutions tend to assume an institutional structure of church that relies on a similarly institutional parachurch structure to implement the mission of the church. Inevitably, these very common practices tend to constrain our ability to recognize and understand the patterns of church and mission (which are unified in the biblical model) that are otherwise clearly evident in the New Testament.

In the last few decades, mission leaders around the world have begun to look to the New Testament itself, apart from Western (or other) ecclesial traditions. They were motivated by a desire to understand why traditional church-planting models were so costly, slow, and generally ineffective—especially in regions of the world that are hostile to Christianity. In so doing, they began to rediscover the principles and practices of the church that led to it "turning the world upside down" (Ac 17:6) in a relatively short amount of time, even in the face of brutal hostility against it. One of the frameworks that helps to illuminate the differences between "church as we know it" and the model of church and mission in the New Testament is called "Four Stages of a Movement" and is depicted in the diagram below.[56]

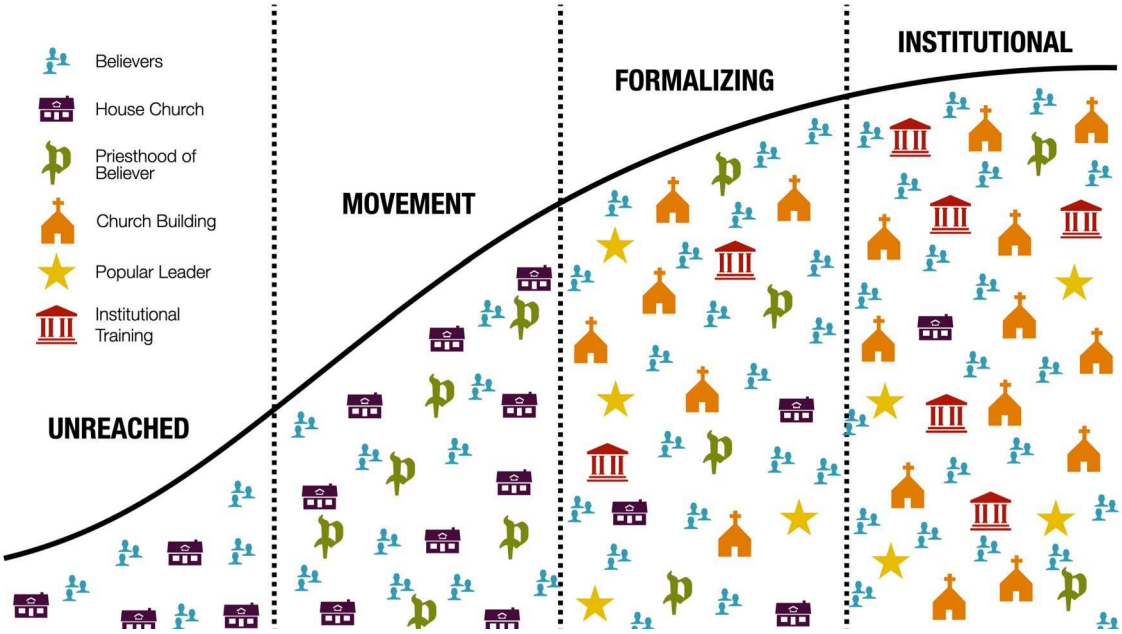

Diagram 5: Four Stages of a Movement

The general characteristics of these stages are depicted in the table below. The intent is to summarize the most typical elements of the stages, recognizing that there will always be exceptions, counter-examples, and

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[56] The diagram here is similar to the one in "4 Stages of a Movement." Smith, Steve, Neill Mims, and Mark Steves. Mission Frontiers, no. Nov/Dec (2015). http://www.missionfrontiers.org/issue/article/4-stages-of-a-movement. For a more detailed consideration of the differences between "church as we know it" and the biblical model, see Gerke, Damian. *In the Way: Church As We Know It Can Be a Discipleship Movement*, 2020.

overlaps. As Gonzalez notes, "Any typology is of necessity schematic. It may be illuminating, as long as it is not taken too literally. ...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."[57] The general characteristics of the four stages are explained below:[58]

1. **Unreached Phase:** Initial stage where outsiders introduce faith, emphasizing the priesthood of all believers. Informal liturgical structures, gatherings in unconventional spaces. Leadership develops through mentoring and a focus on direct engagement with God.
2. **Movement Phase:** Missionaries are replaced by empowered locals, leading to rapid growth. Liturgical structures stay simple. Local leaders form networks, receiving on-site training. This stage witnesses the fastest growth in the movement.
3. **Formalizing Phase:** Movement begins standardizing elements. Churches adopt physical structures, leadership training becomes formalized. Credentialing emerges, and a shift towards professional leadership marginalizes the laity. A clearer clergy/laity divide emerges, leading to increased intimidation of the laity.
4. **Institutional Phase:** Formalization peaks with purpose-built churches and societal acceptance. Leadership training moves to institutions like seminaries. Professional leadership dominates, and lay involvement decreases. Motivating the laity for ministry becomes challenging, and growth typically levels off.

As we observe the church in various regions of the world, it becomes evident that the "four stages" pattern can repeat itself in the same place over time. There are regions in the Middle East, for example, where the church exists in two very different expressions: an above-ground visible church that is quite similar to traditional churches in other regions of the world and an "invisible" church that is movemental in nature. In some circumstances, the same people are pastors in the institutional churches on Sunday morning and also equipping servants of a disciple-making movement that meets in their home on Thursday nights—and the two expressions of the church exist and function completely independently of one another. Not only is this due to the extremely different dynamics of church between the "Movement" and "Institutional" expressions (see the table above), but also because the government is only willing to tolerate the visible churches to the extent that they are not engaged in evangelism of Muslims. The disciple-making movements in the same region are composed almost entirely of former Muslims who are now Jesus followers, thus constituting an existential threat to the traditional church.[59]

The diagram below depicts the "four stages" pattern as it repeats itself, resulting in different expressions of the church in the same place and time:

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57 Gonzalez, *Christian Thought Revisited*, ch. 1.

58 cf. Trousdale, *The Kingdom Unleashed*, ch. 6, § "The Continuum of Movements to Institutions." The characteristics of each of the four stages are explored more fully in "Rediscovering the Way of King Jesus," § "3.1 From Movement to Institution."

59 I am not advocating or endorsing the bifurcation of the church into "above ground" and "below ground" elements. The intent here is merely to acknowledge that it sometimes does happen and to attempt to understand some of the reasons for it.

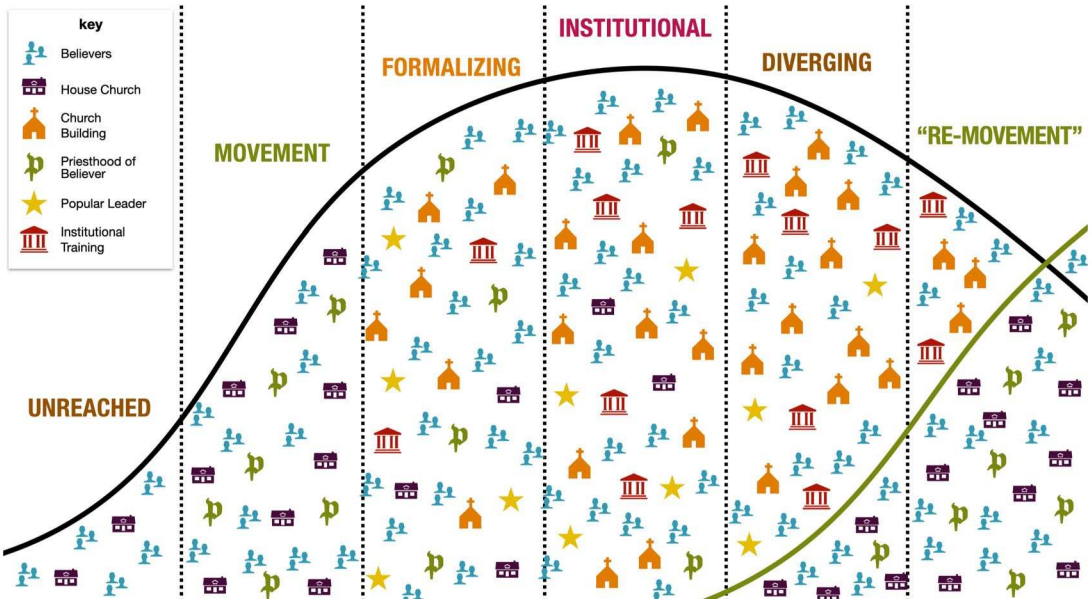

Diagram 6: When the "Four Stages" Pattern Repeats Itself

This framework is useful in a general sense for understanding how a movemental expansion of the church can formalize into an institutional expression of the church and it can also help explain the general contours of the historical development of the church in the West. The patterns of church and mission depicted in the New Testament are of the proclamation of the gospel in "unreached" places leading to a multiplication of disciples that continued the progression onward.[60] The diagram below shows certain key developments in the history of Western Christendom, starting with the New Testament era ("Unreached" → "Movement").[61]

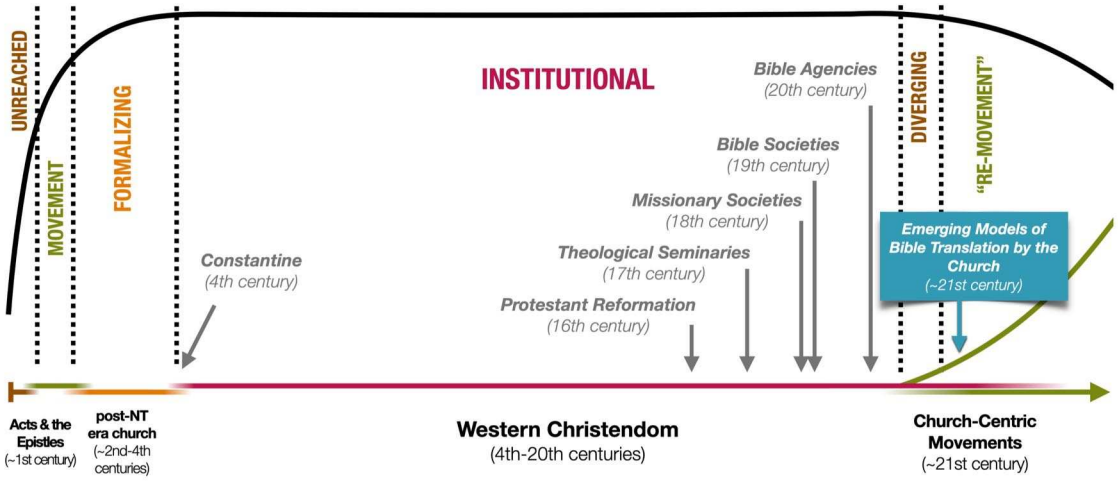

Diagram 7: Development of Western Christendom as Stages of a Movement

In the early 2nd century, shortly after the writing of Acts and the Epistles, the church began to show signs of formalizing. Leaders started to organize in hierarchies, with offices of the church and positional titles coming

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60 I explain this further in "Rediscovering the Way of King Jesus," § "1.4.3 The Progression: Multiplication" and in "The Equipping Servants of the Early Church," § "2.3.3 The New Testament Church Grew Exponentially on Multiple Occasions."

61 The diagram is intentionally simplified, so it does not show the movemental progressions that occurred after the 4th century, e.g., Patrick's missionary work in Ireland, the Wesleyans, etc. The intent here is to show the general pattern, against which the exceptions stand out clearly, precisely because they were anomalies at the time.

into existence for the first time, notably that of the bishop.[62] This formalizing process continued into a fully institutionalized structure with the emperors Constantine and Theodosius ending persecution of Christians and subsequently establishing Christianity as the state religion of the Roman Empire in the 4th century. Thus, Christendom in the West became the dominant expression of the church for some 1,600 years.

During the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century, the Reformers returned to Scripture apart from received tradition and rediscovered the doctrine of salvation by God's grace alone through faith (soteriology). But they generally did not do the same for the doctrine of the church (ecclesiology) or the mission of the church (missiology). A few notable changes were made (e.g., rejecting apostolic succession and the papistry), but these amounted to essentially incremental changes to the received ecclesiology.[63] At the same time, the Protestant churches rejected the monastic orders, but did not develop a corollary missionary enterprise, and so there was "virtually no Protestant missionary ... between 1517 and 1792... For 275 years, until the time of William Carey, Protestantism failed to develop a missionary structure that was reproducible and sustainable. Protestants had no structure through which to send missionaries."[64] During that time, the Western church continued to fragment along denominational lines,[65] such that when Carey published his "Enquiry" and began what some consider to be the era of modern missions, it came into existence in a fragmented, institutional era of the Western church.[66] Nonetheless, God used the Western missionary paradigm to expand the reach of the gospel and Bible translation into thousands of people groups and languages. Gonzalez explains how because of this, for the first time in the history of the church, the church has become a truly global church.

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62 Gonzalez notes that Ignatius "underlined the importance of the bishop in the local church, and he is actually the first witness to the existence of a monarchical episcopacy. Nothing is to be done in the church without the bishop (*To the Magnesians* 7.1; *To the Tralleans* 2.2; *To Polycarp* 4.1.), and any who are not subject to him are not subject to God (*To the Ephesians* 5.3; *To the Tralleans* 2.2; *To Polycarp* 4.1.). Without his consent, it is not lawful to celebrate baptism or the eucharist (*To the Smyrnaeans* 8.1.), and Ignatius also advised that marital union take place with the bishop's consent (*To Polycarp* 5.2) (*A History of Christian Thought*, Vol. I, 2010, ch. 3, § "Ignatius of Antioch"). Kruger observes that "in the letters of Ignatius, the role of the bishop gets most of the attention. The relationship between the people and the bishop is like the relationship between the Church and Jesus (*To the Ephesians* 5.1)... Indeed, only those in fellowship with their bishop can be regarded as those in fellowship with Jesus (*To the Philippians* 3.2). (*Christianity at the Crossroads*, ch. 3, § "The emergence of a single ruling bishop").

63 Schaff notes the essential structural similarity between Roman Catholic and Protestant ecclesiology when he says, "The altar is the throne of the Catholic priest; the pulpit is the throne of the Protestant preacher and pastor" (Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 7, 490).

64 Mulholland, "From Luther to Carey: Pietism and the Modern Missionary Movement." Bosch notes that "...in spite of what [some] have identified as the fundamentally missionary thrust of the Reformers' theology, very little happened by way of a missionary outreach during the first two centuries after the Reformation." He suggests this was in large part because Protestants "saw their principal task as that of reforming the church of their time ... they had no immediate contact with non-Christian peoples ... the churches of the Reformation were involved in a battle for sheer survival ... in abandoning monasticism the Reformers had denied themselves a very important missionary agency ... Protestants were themselves torn apart by internal strife and dissipated their strength in reckless zeal and in endless dissensions and disputes; little energy was left for turning to those outside the Christian fold" (*Transforming Mission*, ch. 8, § "The Reformers and Mission").

65 Bosch suggests that the Protestant "preoccupation with right doctrine" was instrumental in the fragmentation of the church, as it "soon meant that every group which seceded from the main body had to validate its action by maintaining that it alone, and none of the others, adhered strictly to the "right preaching of the gospel." The Reformational descriptions of the church thus ended up accentuating differences rather than similarities. Christians were taught to look divisively at other Christians. Eventually Lutherans divided from Lutherans, Reformed separated from Reformed, each group justifying its action by appealing to the marks of the true church, especially correct preaching" (*Transforming Mission,* ch. 8, § "Lutheran Orthodoxy and Mission").

66 This is evident in Carey's description of an institutional organization ("a society" with rules, plans, employees, funding, etc.) and that each denomination should have their own, in light of the "divided state of Christendom": "Suppose a company of serious Christians, ministers and private persons, were to *form themselves into a society*, and make a number of rules respecting the regulation of the plan, and the persons who are to be employed as missionaries, the means of defraying the expense, &c. &c. ...I wish with all my heart, that every one who loves our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, would in some way or other engage in it. But *in the present divided state of Christendom*, it would be more likely for good to be done by each denomination engaging separately in the work..." (Carey, *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens*, 1792.).

> What happened was that **the "missionary movement" succeeded**. During the nineteenth century, Protestant missionaries from Europe and the United States set out to found churches in every nation of the globe. By the end of the century, that task was largely accomplished... It was no longer a Western religion; [it] had grown to be a world-wide fellowship.[67]

He then argues that 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.**"[68] More than 40 years ago, it was observed that "we do not stand at the end of mission... we stand at the definite end of a specific period or era of mission, and the clearer we see this and accept this with all our heart, the better." We are called to a new "pioneer task which will be more demanding and less romantic than the heroic deeds of the past missionary era."[69]

Understanding the historical development of the Western church is crucial for understanding the emerging paradigm of Bible translation done by the church as it can help us to think clearly about how and why the emerging paradigms in traditional domains of church planting, theological education, and Bible translation are so fundamentally different.

3. Missional Paradigm Shifts

In recent decades, three essential paradigm shifts in the domains of missiology and ecclesiology have occurred that, together, create the context for the emergence of a fourth: a reimagination of Bible translation as an essential aspect of theological formation, rather than essentially the production of a book.[70] We will consider this in the following sections, but we must first begin with a definition of a "paradigm shift." For that, we will turn to Kuhn's classic work, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. In it, he observes that new paradigms are never incremental or cumulative, but entail a fundamental reconstruction. This reconstruction, however, inevitably overlaps with the legacy paradigm, sometimes in significant ways.

> The transition from a paradigm in crisis to a new one from which a new tradition of normal science 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**, a reconstruction that changes some of the field's most elementary theoretical generalizations as well as many of its paradigm methods and applications. 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.[71]

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67 Gonzales, *Christian Thought Revisited*, ch. 9.

68 Ibid. He continues, "In short, the first great fact we must take into account as we look at theology and the life of the church in the twenty-first century is that a truly worldwide church exists—one in which North Atlantic churches are progressively reduced from a position of absolute leadership to one of partnership in the global mission" (Ibid.).

69 Kraemer, Hendrik. 1970. *Uit de nalatenschap van dr H. Kraemer*. Kampen: Kok. cited by Bosch in *Transforming Mission*, Introduction, § "A 'Pluriverse' of Missiology."

70 As implied above, and considered at length in "Rediscovering the Way of King Jesus," the bifurcation of missiology and ecclesiology is a development of the later church—the church and her mission are inseparable in the biblical model.

71 Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, ch. 8 "The Response to Crisis." In summarizing Kuhn's theory of paradigm change, Bosch notes Kuhn's observation that "the old paradigm and the new are incommensurable; the perspectives of their respective champions are so different that one might even say that they are responding to different realities. Proponents of the old paradigm often just cannot understand the arguments of the proponents of the new. Metaphorically speaking, the one is playing chess and the other checkers on the same board (Hiebert, Paul. "Epistemological Foundations for Science and Theology," *Theological Students Fellowship Bulletin* (March 1985), 9). ... Protagonists of the old paradigm, in particular, tend to

Bosch correctly notes that Kuhn's analysis of paradigms and how they change is relevant to theological domains, but with important caveats.

> The idea of paradigm changes is of relevance for the study of theology generally and, within the context of this book, for the study and understanding of mission in particular. **This is not to suggest that we should uncritically apply Kuhn's ideas to the area of theology.** To begin with, there are in this respect important differences between theology and the natural sciences. In the natural sciences, for instance, the new paradigm usually replaces the old, definitely and irreversibly. ... **In theology ... "old" paradigms can live on.**[72]

Thus, we will consider the new paradigms described here in terms of reconstructions of certain ecclesiological and missiological domains from "new fundamentals" (namely, a return to Scripture in pursuit of biblical patterns, apart from received tradition). We will, however, recognize that the emergence of new paradigms in these domains does not consequently nullify or render previous paradigms as categorically deficient—the paradigms co-exist with some significant area of overlap between them.

Movements – As leaders in the global church return to Scripture, apart from received traditions, to learn the patterns of church and mission of the 1st century church, three paradigms of world missions have started to shift. First, as mentioned above in "Understanding the Movemental Church," the multiplication of disciples is resulting in movements that expand the reach of the church. These include variations of Church-Planting Movements and Disciple-Making Movements that focus on learning Scripture so as to understand and obey everything Jesus has commanded (Mt 28:19–20). Whereas the established paradigm of church planting tended to be time-consuming and expensive, movements require little overhead and can expand rapidly at low cost.[73]

Theological Formation – As the church has continued to multiply into new people groups and places, the seminary paradigm of theological education has not been able to meet the needs for trained leaders. In order to meet this need, leaders have returned to Scripture and discovered a fundamentally different paradigm. As mentioned above, theological formation refers to this biblical model of establishing new gatherings of God's

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immunize themselves against the arguments of the new. They resist its challenges with deep emotional reactions, since those challenges threaten to destroy their very perception and experience of reality, indeed their entire world (Hiebert, "The Missiological Implications of an Epistemological Shift," *Theological Students Fellowship Bulletin* (May-June 1985), 12)" (Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, ch. 5, § "The Paradigm Theory of Thomas Kuhn").

72 Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, ch. 5, § "Paradigm Shifts in Theology." Bosch elaborates on how the co-existence of different theological paradigms need not fragment the unity of the church. "Instead of viewing my own interpretation as absolutely correct and all others by definition as wrong, I recognize that different theological interpretations, including my own, reflect different contexts, perspectives, and biases. This is not to say, however, that I regard all theological positions as equally valid or that it does not matter what people believe; rather, I shall do my utmost to share my understanding of the faith with others while granting them the right to do the same. I realize that my theological approach is a "map," and that a map is never the actual "territory" (cf. Hiebert, Paul. "The Missiological Implications of an Epistemological Shift," *Theological Students Fellowship Bulletin* (May-June 1985), 15; Martin, James P. Toward a Post-Critical Paradigm, *New Testament Studies* vol 33, 373). Although I believe that my map is the best, I accept that there are other types of maps and also that, at least in theory, one of those may be better than mine since I can only know in part (cf. 1Co 13:12). ... So, the Christian church should function as an "international hermeneutical community" (Hiebert, Paul. "The Missiological Implications of an Epistemological Shift," *Theological Students Fellowship Bulletin* (May-June 1985), 16) in which Christians (and theologians) from different contexts challenge one another's cultural, social, and ideological biases. (Ibid.)

73 "The traditional way of making disciples and planting churches costs a lot of money that must be generated from outside. In many cases, discipling a person to Christ requires a large sum of money. For example, David Barrett and Todd Johnson estimate the total expense per baptism in the United States to be $1.55 million (Barrett, David B., and Todd M. Johnson. 2001. *World Christian Trends, AD 30– AD 2200*. Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library. 520–29). In our case, all DMM expenses combined typically total far less than $100 for each individual baptized, and most of those resources are provided locally" (Kebreab "Observations over Fifteen Years of Disciple Making Movements", in *Motus Dei*, ch. 2, § "DMMs Require Trusting God to Supply the Resources Locally").

family in the foundational principles of the faith and equipping leaders to care for and serve the church such that it builds itself up to maturity in unity.[74]

Church-Based Bible Translation – As the church has continued to expand into more languages, the demand for more Bible translations has greatly increased. This has given rise to a paradigm of Bible translation called "Church-Based Bible Translation" (or, "Bible Translation by the Church").[75] These three missional paradigms are depicted as the circles in the diagram below:

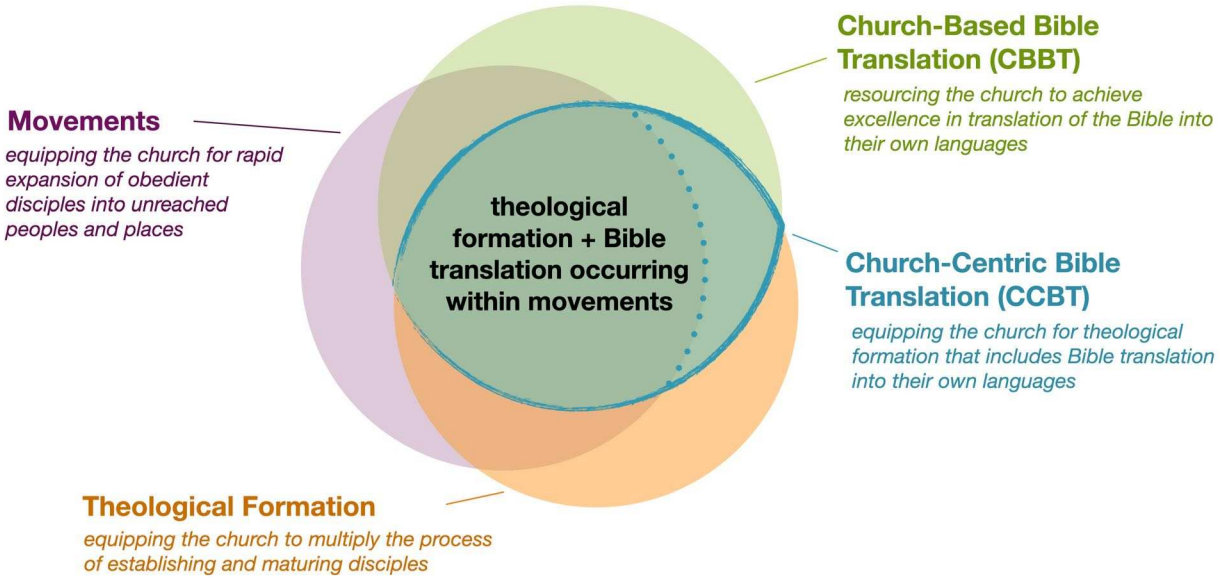

Diagram 8: Emerging Missional Paradigms[76]

As we considered in the first section of this paper, there are two distinct scenarios where the church may attempt to meet their own Bible translation need: one where they have the requisite theological formation and knowledge of Scripture to be able to produce a trustworthy Bible translation in their own language in a short amount of time, and the second where the church is relatively young and has little (or no) understanding of Scripture and theological grounding. It is in this latter scenario where a different model for Bible translation is warranted, one that does not unnecessarily prioritize accelerated production of Bible translation, but instead focuses on the establishing and formation of a mature lingual church with the capacity for Bible translation. This is what is meant by the term "Church-Centric Bible Translation."

Church-Centric Bible Translation (CCBT) is itself a paradigm shift, in that it steps back from the assumption that Bible translation is necessarily a book-publishing process and takes a different approach. It conceives of Bible translation as a capacity-building process, rooted in the biblical model of church and mission, that establishes and equips the church through engagement with Scripture. The emphasis is on rooting and grounding the lingual church in the first principles of the faith, and equipping her to build herself up to maturity and unity in Christ with the biblical knowledge and translation experience sufficient to both translate the Bible and confirm its trustworthiness with reliability and confidence. In the diagram above,

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74 The term "theological formation" has sometimes been expanded to "Church-Centric Theological Formation" in order to emphasize the ecclesial focus of the process.

75 There are many other terms used synonymously with "Church-Based," including "Church-Driven," "Church-Owned," "Church-Governed," "Church-Led," "Church and Community-Based," etc.

76 Early versions of this diagram used different terminology and should be considered somewhat analogous to the first maps made by explorers encountering what to them is a new world: reasonable representations based on the limits of their current understanding at the time, now updated in light of increased understanding of the territory.

Church-Centric Bible Translation is the overlap of theological formation and "Church-Based Bible Translation." When this occurs within movemental networks of disciples, the phenomenon is generally called "Movement-Led Bible Translation" (the overlap of all three circles in the diagram above).[77]

In order to better understand these different nuances of Bible translation by the church, we will consider how Bible translation occurs in four different modes.

4. Four Modes of Bible Translation

In the last several decades, the world of Bible translation has experienced significant changes. In the early 20th century, the Bible was only rarely translated into languages other than major languages of Wider Communication. As the need for Bible translation in minority languages of the world was perceived, pioneering organizations like SIL and Wycliffe (and many others after them) were founded to meet that need. In the diagram below, this is the "**Pioneering**" paradigm of Bible translation. The lingual church often did not even exist yet in most of the languages of the world when this paradigm came into existence. Bible agency staff undertook Bible translation and Scripture Engagement in the languages on behalf of the lingual church (and often before it existed).[78] In this paradigm of "**Bible translation for the church,**" the trustworthiness of the completed translations was affirmed by a translation consultant external to the target language.[79] God has used this model of translation over the years to expand and establish the church in many people groups and languages.

As the church continued to expand into more unreached people groups, Bible translation adapted and a new model was developed that included the lingual church (the element of the global church that speaks a given language) as an "Impact Partner" in the process. In this model of "**Bible translation with the church**" (sometimes implemented as the "**Common Framework**" approach) the pace of translation was increased and the impact of Bible translation in the community was usually experienced sooner.[80] In both of these models, the authority and overall responsibility for the translation of the Bible into a given language was retained outside the lingual church. These two models of the Established ("Outside-in") Paradigm of Bible translation are represented in the diagram below:[81]

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77 Thus, Movement-Led Bible Translation is not fundamentally different from Church-Centric Bible Translation, other than that it occurs within disciple-making movements.

78 As I note in "From Unreached to Established": "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" (Jore, "From Unreached to Established," § "2. Bible-Centric Bible Translation").

79 As I note in "Trustworthy and Trusted": "The dominant paradigm of affirming the trustworthiness of Bible translations in recent history depends on the external assessment of the trustworthiness of Bible translations by translation consultants from member organizations of the Forum of Bible Agencies International. In a paper written in 1968, Eugene Nida of the American Bible Society described translation consultants as the ones who test the acceptability of Bible translations before they are published. This model was adopted by the United Bible Societies and, since then, has become the de facto model for assessing and affirming Bible translations before the lingual church trusts them" (Jore, "Trustworthy and Trusted," § "3. Getting to Trusted").

80 cf. Every Tribe Every Nation. "Roadmap to Eradicate Bible Poverty," 2017, ch. 7.

81 Note that there is no clear distinction between Bible translation "for the church" and "with the church." This is because every translation project in the "outside-in" paradigm was intended "for" the church and involved the church to some extent. The differences are most evident in the most extreme examples on either end of the spectrum.

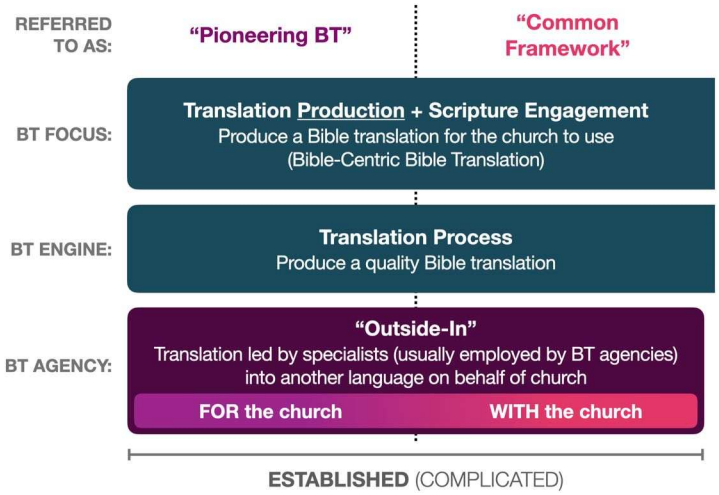

Diagram 9: The "Outside-In" Paradigm of Bible Translation

Around the turn of the millennium, a new paradigm of "**Bible translation by the church**" began to emerge.[82] Leaders in lingual churches began to translate the Bible into their own languages in order to meet their own needs for Scripture engagement and discipleship. Most of the early Bible translation work in this "**Church-Based Bible Translation**" (CBBT) paradigm was done by church leaders who had already received theological education from seminaries and had significant experience in studying and teaching the Bible. The essential paradigm shift here is one of agency—leaders within the lingual church produce their own Bible translation in order to meet their own felt need, instead of waiting for outsiders to do it for them. When leaders who already have considerable theological capacity and biblical understanding produce a translation in their own language (usually at the fastest pace possible), it can be referred to as "**Church-Produced Bible Translation**" (CPBT).[83] In this regard, while the shift of agency to the lingual church is of paradigmatic significance, the essential focus on producing a quality product as rapidly as possible generally remains.

When new churches come into existence, as in the second example from Chad in the first section above, the church has very little in the way of theological formation and understanding of Scripture. As leaders serve and equip this young church it is, necessarily, a multilingual process involving translation and explication of Scripture as part of the discipleship process. In these contexts, a fundamentally different approach to Bible translation is called for, one that does not attempt to accelerate production of a translation, but instead focuses on increasing the church's theological capacity and understanding of Scripture through a translation-informed dialog oriented around discipleship—learning to obey everything Jesus has commanded.

In this paradigm of "**Church-Centric Bible Translation**" (CCBT), the lingual church is still in the driver's seat, but the engine that drives the Bible translation process is not accelerated production of a translated book. Instead, the process is driven by the theological formation needs of the church. The translation agenda

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82 In reality, the paradigm of Bible translation by the church into their own language has been the dominant model of Bible translation throughout history (e.g., Wycliffe (Old English), Luther (German), etc.) I refer here to the contemporary rediscovery of the Church-Based Bible Translation paradigm. The earliest translation of which I am aware in this era is the Bhojpuri translation in the late 1990s. "The real breakthrough with significant numbers occurred in 1998 when we released the first edition of the Bhojpuri New Testament. After this the movement began to grow exponentially" (John, *Bhojpuri Breakthrough*, ch. 2).

83 The nuances of terminology in this domain is regrettable, in that it increases the complexity of the lexicon, but it is helpful in that it differentiates important nuances. If all the terms regarding the church and Bible translation are assumed to mean "Bible translation by the church" it makes it difficult to understand and communicate regarding the important nuances of different models. Ultimately, by retaining a differentiated lexicon, we will be able to better understand the different factors that comprise the many different expressions of Bible translation by the church.

reflects the passages of Scripture selected for their theologically formative value, rather than their ease of translation. Production of translation of whole books of the Bible is secondary to the translation of the selected passages used in making (and multiplying) disciples. The overall agenda for the equipping, strengthening, and expanding of the lingual church becomes the driver for the Bible translation work. This is an expression of what we considered above, where engagement with Scripture is the impetus for the eventual production and publishing of whole translations of the Bible.

In CCBT, the essential focus is increasing the capacity of the lingual church for understanding of Scripture and the development of translation experience such that they can, in time, produce a trustworthy translation of the Bible in their own language. Thus, the term "church-centric" is intentional in that the equipping and formation of the church is central to this paradigm. A desirable consequence of this approach is not merely a Bible translation in the language of the church, but a deeply rooted and theologically grounded, vibrant church already using the translation in their growth to maturity and unity in Christ. The diagram below illustrates these four different modes of Bible translation.[84]

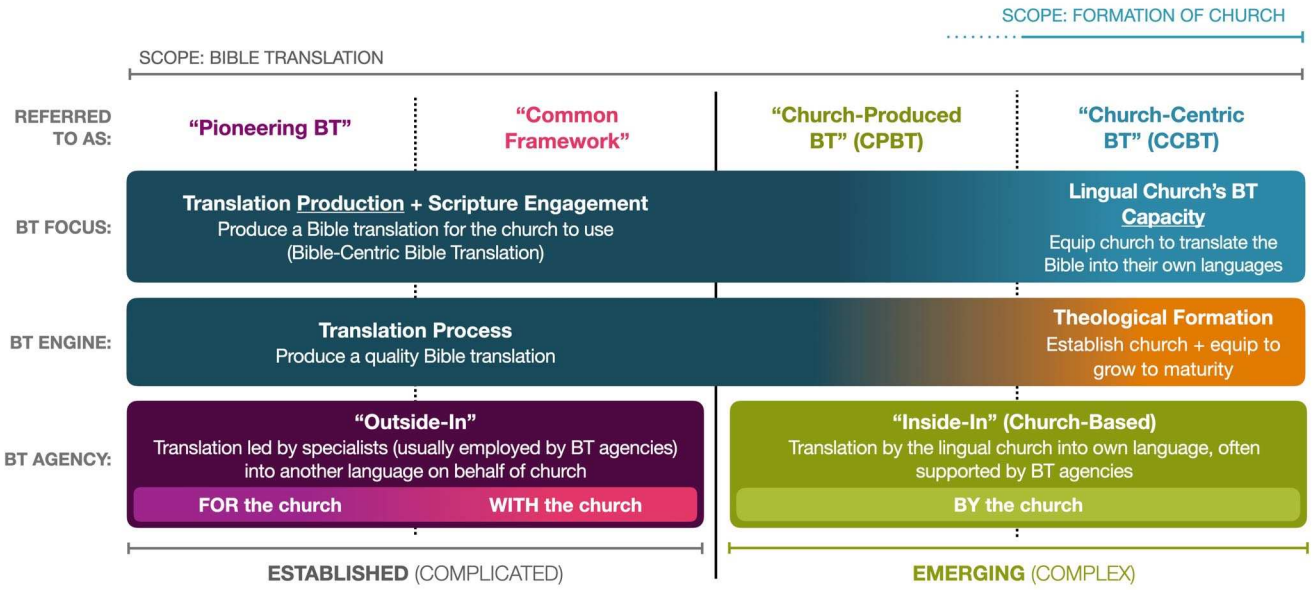

Diagram 10: Four Modes of Bible Translation[85]

As the diagram above depicts, the "Church-Based" mode of Bible translation is led by the church that speaks the language and thus contrasts with modes of Bible translation that are led by cultural and linguistic outsiders. The contrast is one of agency—who is ultimately responsible for the work itself. The "Church-Centric" mode of Bible translation is led by the lingual church and contrasts with modes of Bible translation that have a "Bible-centric" orientation. The contrast is one of method and focus. In the "Bible-centric" model (which implements the Produce → Publish → Engage process), the priority is rapid production of a quality Bible translation. In the "Church-centric" model (which implements the Engage → Produce → Publish process), the priority is the formation of the lingual church with theological capacity and translation experience such that they can produce a trustworthy Bible translation, as well as other theological resources, and maintain all of them over time.

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84 Note that there is not a clear line between CPBT and CCBT. The differences are most visible in the extreme endpoints, as the example in the first section of this paper indicates.

85 I am indebted to several colleagues at unfoldingWord who were instrumental in shaping original sketches of this diagram into the more useful and complete form in which it is presented here.

5. Implications of Church-Centric Bible Translation

As we observe the rapid growth of the phenomenon that is "Bible translation by the church", and specifically the expression that we refer to here as "Church-Centric Bible Translation," certain patterns emerge. Several of these patterns are considered here, across three general categories pertaining to Bible translation: strategic factors, translation dynamics, and the resourcing of the emerging paradigm of Bible translation.

5.1 Strategic Implications

In this section, we consider three strategic implications of the emerging model of Church-Centric Bible Translation pertaining to abundance, complexity, and biblical theology in culture.

5.1.1 Abundance

What if we are shifting from an era of scarcity of aggregate Bible translation capacity to one of unprecedented abundance?

Never before in the history of the world has the workforce for Bible translation been so immense, and growing. Reports from leaders of church networks in various regions of the world paint a picture of immense —and increasing—Bible translation capacity of the global church. Some examples:

- In many hundreds of languages without Scripture, leaders are already engaged in Bible translation as part of discipleship, where they verbally translate Scriptures on the fly from a regional language to the vernacular for the benefit of those who would not otherwise understand it.
- Some church networks report Bible translation teams with as many as 25 (or more) full time translators working together to translate into their own language.
- The scale of some of these networks makes it possible to engage hundreds, and sometimes even thousands of believers in a massively distributed Bible translation "use + checking" process, where a new translation in a minority language is used in the church together with known trustworthy translations in common languages, with a view to increasing understanding while also checking and improving the translation.
- The pace of some of the fastest Church-Based Bible translation projects in the best-equipped and most theologically capable churches are reported to be as little as 2–3 years from start to the publishing of the entire Bible.
- The time to first revision of some church-produced Bible translations (OT and NT) is measured in months, as the church implements an iterative publishing model.

In the aggregate, the phenomenon of Bible translation by the church is increasingly becoming a massively parallel and compounding process—the more lingual churches that begin meeting their own Bible translation need, the more that the word gets out and additional lingual churches begin to do the same. As described in "Duplication of Effort?" this phenomenon results in the rest of the global church encountering the true scope of the Bible translation need, as defined by the church. Whereas traditional Bible translation tended to work from a scarcity-constrained assumption of "only one translation per language"(and, preferably, in the most prestigious and comprehensible dialect of the language), the church often sees it differently. The Bible translation strategy of the church in each region tends to result in the creation of many Bible translations in many language variants, as in the diagram below:

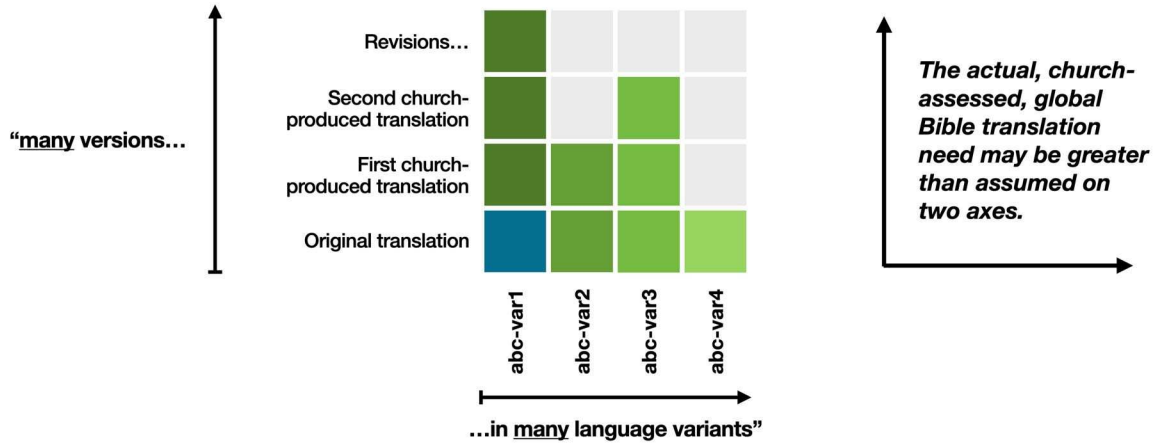

Diagram 11: Many Bible Translations in Many Language Variants

Multiplication of Bible translations seems likely to become the norm, rather than the exception, in the near future.[86] We will only consider two here. First, revising someone else's work is generally more time-consuming than starting over, and the result is often not exactly what the church needs. Frequently, the church desires to do a fresh work of theology in culture, using more natural forms of the language and better theological terminology, while also providing increased clarity—all reflected in a different translation philosophy that can only be effectively implemented in a new Bible translation. As one church leader notes:

> I am sure that in your experience, you will agree that **correcting another work is far more cumbersome than working from a clean sheet** … There were far too many mistakes [in the original work we corrected], and at the end, it was not completely the style we wanted, as we could not change the entire flow.[87]

Second, even when the lingual church is willing to revise an existing translation in their own language, they usually do not have the legal freedom to do so. The copyrights to the Bible translations in languages all over the world are generally not owned by the lingual churches, and the translations themselves are usually restricted by an "all rights reserved" license. The copyright and right to revise the existing translation is usually owned by a mission organization or publisher. Even when the copyright owner is willing to permit a church-led revision, the legal overhead involved in granting formal permission for a revision of the existing translation can slow the process down considerably. But all too often, even the willingness is not there, as in one recent scenario:

> … [One lingual church] some years ago wanted to update the translation, but **the mission agency who did it would not let them modify [it] at all**, saying that "making any changes to the text would dishonor all the years of sacrifice that the missionaries had made to translate that." So, [the church] is wanting to … do their own translation now.[88]

This does not reflect the mindset of every copyright holder. But it does illustrate the legal reality that even if the church desires to revise an existing translation, unless they are granted permission by the copyright

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86 See Jore, "Duplication of Effort?" § "What if the Church Assumes Differently?" The two examples here have been recounted by people closely connected with the leaders in these languages.

87 Name withheld, email, November 2022. This example as well as the following are from different sources, first cited in "Duplication of Effort?" § "From 'One Bible Translation' to 'Multiple Versions'."

88 Name withheld, email, October 2022.

holder to revise the translation, revision is not permitted. In such cases, they must start over and create a new translation.[89]

How might we rethink traditional systems of managing legal access to Bible translations and crucial resources (content and technology) in light of the abundance of Bible translation potential in the global church?

5.1.2 Complexity

What if the global Bible translation phenomenon is shifting (or has shifted) from one that is complicated and causal to one that is complex and dispositional?

For many decades, Bible translation organizations and Bible societies have led the global advance in Bible translation. The production of Bible translations in this era was a complicated, lengthy undertaking, but the process as a whole was under the direct control of these organizations. This included gaining access to resources, determining the pace and steps in the process, as well as the granting and receiving of permission to publish a translation.

With the rise of Bible-translating networks of churches and the corresponding shift from scarcity to abundance, Bible translation as a whole is shifting from a complicated and causal (i.e., controllable) phenomenon to one that is complex and dispositional. In a complex network of autonomous entities involved in Bible translation, direct control of all production pipelines is no longer possible. But it presents the opportunity to shape and predispose the complex network of entities toward desirable outcomes.

The Cynefin framework is helpful for understanding the differences between systems and the kind of actions called for in each.[90] It posits four types of systems, and suggests the importance of understanding in which system one finds oneself:

- **Clear (or Simple):** Systems are causal and easy to understand. *Example: the lock on car door is a simple system composed of a lever that provides a clear connection between cause and effect.*
- **Complicated:** Systems are causal, but deeply interconnected in ways that require considerable expertise to understand. *Example: the design and manufacturing of a high performance race car engine, requiring precision engineering and careful coordination of the production process.*
- **Complex:** Systems are dispositional (not causal) and interconnected in the realm of emergence, where the whole is greater than the sum of the component parts and not ultimately understandable in a deconstructionist, predictable way. *Example: traffic can be predicted and shaped in the sense of general patterns and factors that affect it (e.g., fog, traffic lights, etc.), but the precise actions of any given vehicle is not predictable.*
- **Chaotic:** A volatile system calling for immediate, intuitive action without full understanding. *Example: suddenly encountering a multi-car pile-up on a highway in the fog, with danger to life and the need to act immediately.*

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89 In "Letting Go," I refer to this as the "dependent model" of missions, in that copyright restrictions create a power imbalance at the legal level which forces the lingual church into a subservient role (cf. "Letting Go," § "3.3. The Dependent Model (Oversight by 'Gatekeepers')").

90 Snowden, Goh, and Blignaut, *Cynefin - Weaving Sense-Making into the Fabric of Our World*. See also Snowden, David J., and Mary E. Boone. "A Leader's Framework for Decision Making."

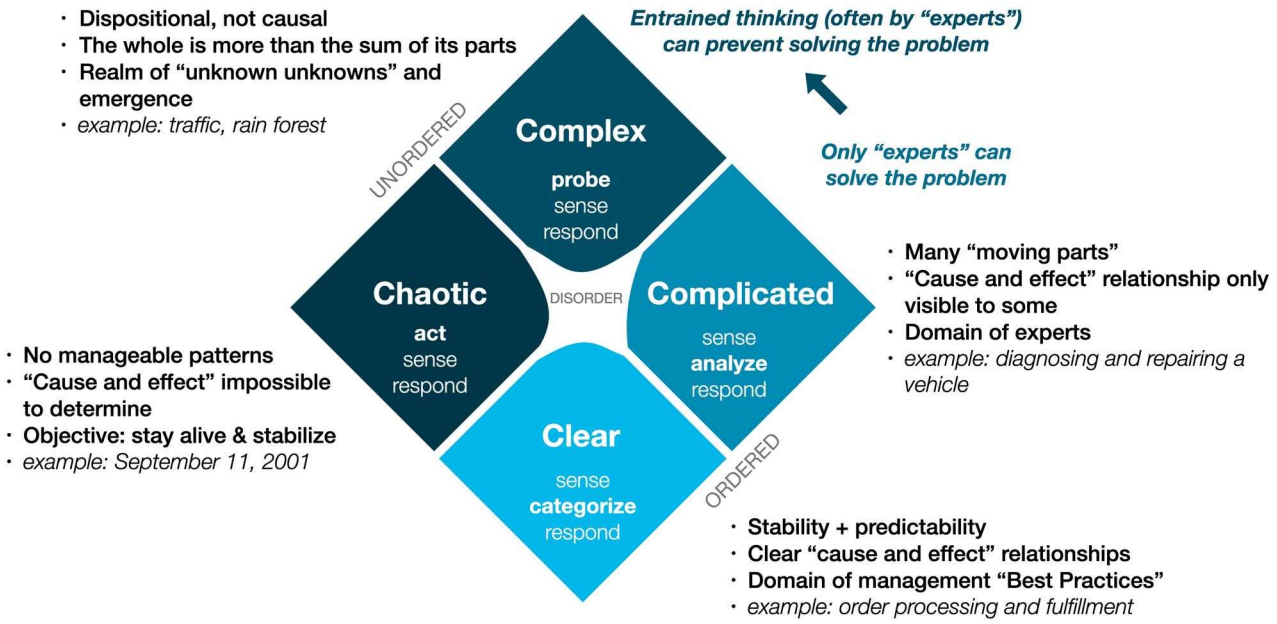

Diagram 12: The Cynefin Framework

The transition of a system from clear (simple) to complicated is one of *degree*. In both contexts, the systems are ordered and causal, meaning they can be deconstructed into their component parts, understood, and controlled. But because of their immensely greater number of component elements, experts are required to understand and control a complicated system. The transition of a system from complicated to complex is one of *kind*, in that a complex system is a completely different, unordered phenomenon even though it may appear on the surface to be similar to a complicated system

In a domain that is complicated, experts are extremely important because they are the only ones who can fully understand (and design, operate, repair, improve, etc.) the system. When a domain that was complicated transitions to one that is complex, experts can still be helpful, but only if they recognize the shift in the system and adjust their actions accordingly. The brilliant engineer that designed the high performance, complicated engine may have much to contribute in the design and optimization of the patterns of traffic of the cars powered by those engines, or nothing at all. It depends on, among other things, the extent to which they continue learning so as to adapt in ways appropriate to the new system. Dorst argues that the nature of challenges in general have shifted toward complexity such that only organizations who adapt accordingly will be able to solve them:

> The passing of the structures and systems of the industrial age and the rise of a networked society have resulted in **open, complex, dynamic, and networked challenges** that can only be successfully met by organizations that are ready to become open, complex, and networked themselves.[91]

Organizations designed to reduce complicated problems into their component elements such that each could be addressed and reassembled into a solution will find it difficult to achieve the desired outcome when the nature of the challenges to solve have changed so fundamentally. Dorst explains:

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[91] Dorst, *Frame Innovation*, ch. 1 § "Case 2: The dematerialization postindustrial economy." An *open* problem is one where the system border is not clear, or where it is permeable. A *complex* problem is one that consists of many elements, with numerous connections between them. A *dynamic* problem situation changes over time, with the addition of new elements and the shifting of connections (e.g., through the shifting of priorities). The *networked* nature of today's problem situations means that they potentially influence each other constantly (Ibid.).

> These open, complex, dynamic, and networked problems just do not gel well with the assumptions behind our conventional problem-solving methods, because **most of our conventional strategies were conceived to work in a reasonably isolated, static, and hierarchically ordered "miniworld."** When problems appeared, we could isolate them in a separate problem arena, decompose the problem into relative simple subproblems and analyze these, create subsolutions, and then build those subsolutions together into an overall solution that satisfied all concerned. If this strategy of divide-and-solve failed, we could use the alternative strategy of exercising authority to "simplify" the problem area by overruling some parties, and force a solution that satisfied the most powerful player.[92]

Observation of the emerging paradigm of Bible translation by the church suggests that "open, complex, dynamic, and networked" is a fitting description. If so, it follows that organizations that intend to address the challenge of Bible translation will need to adjust accordingly. One example of an adjustment that is underway in some contexts pertains to the function of Bible translation experts—those with more education and experience in aspects of translation and understanding of the original languages of the Bible. Such experts are more needed than ever before in the emerging paradigm of Bible translation, but *how* they are needed has changed. The highly iterative nature of most expressions of Bible translation by the church suggests that the traditional function of checking a Bible translation on behalf of the leaders of a lingual church is no longer the best investment of their skill and experience. Even if doing so were superbly effective, the aggregate capacity of all such experts can only reach but the smallest fraction of Bible translation needs. In the complex world of Church-Based Bible Translation, such experts can maximize their impact by training and strengthening those leaders in the church who are able to multiply effective training in Bible translation throughout their networks.

How might we adapt our processes, teams, and activities in order to predispose excellent outcomes across the entire complex network that is the Bible-translating global church?

5.1.3 Biblical Theology in Culture

What if the primary factor predisposing success in the emerging model of Bible translation is the faithful, contextual formation of biblical theology in culture?

In the established model of Bible translation, applied linguistics was the primary factor predisposing success in production of a textual Bible translation. The established model was an "outside-in" process that depended on linguistic and cultural outsiders learning the receptor language to a degree of fluency that enabled them to translate the Bible into it. Applied linguistics provided the tools for learning a language (often in a monolingual context), deconstructing it into a grammar, developing an orthography, translating the text, etc.

When a lingual church translates the Bible into their own language, those involved are native speakers of the language, so the essential process of translation need not begin with linguistic deconstruction and analysis. Instead, it becomes one of forming the church as a hermeneutical community that thinks deeply, clearly, and "translationally" about the Scriptures, developing and using their own theological categories and cognitive structures that are both biblically faithful and contextually relevant. This is the domain of biblical theology in culture, of which an important aspect is the consideration of theological concepts and patterns in the biblical text and the determination of appropriate linguistic structures that accurately convey the meaning of the text in the language of the church. Importantly, this suggests the need for a shift in how we think of the concept of "teaching."

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92 Ibid., ch. 1, § "Open, complex, dynamic, and networked."

> As a storyteller-facilitator, **one is still a teacher, but the teaching style shifts**. We shift from the lecture mode, which can often devolve to a mere download of cognitive information, to **a facilitator of discovery-learning mode**. If you are used to teaching by the lecture method, learning this style will be a challenge. We are constantly tempted to start lecturing or preaching, rather than asking questions that evoke discovery learning. We shift from being, as noted in a famous article, "The Sage on the Stage" to being "The Guide at the Side."[93]

As a lingual church engages in an oral hermeneutical process of understanding the Scriptures together, translation is an essential aspect of the process.[94] In many (if not most) scenarios globally, disciples learning to obey the Scriptures together do so in a multilingual context—translations in other languages are verbally discussed and translated on-the-fly for those who do not fully understand them. When the church works from Bible translations in various media (e.g., audio and also text) to engage in a multilingual theological conversation about the meaning, translation, and application of the text, this is referred to as "multimodality." Floor and Harmelink explain that, for purposes of Bible translation, "this means that taking advantage of several modalities like both sound and sight, producing target texts in other communication genres and communication media than the source text, is a good and potentially rich process.[95] It is important to differentiate between multimodality (the process) and multimedia (the fixed format of the content).

> Multimodality is not the same as multimedia. Modes are not the same as media. **Media is the expression of modes** ... for instance a book with printed letters, making use of the mode of sight, or an audio recording making use of the mode of sound. Multimedia expressions include pieces of writings, publications like books, digital products in both sight and sound modes including videos of performances, real-life performances, still images, moving pictures like movies and video recordings, again in digital or non-digital. But mode and media are closely related, and so are communication genres. **The three building blocks of multimodal translation are modes, genres, and media** ... but all three are closely interrelated and cannot be understood apart from each other.[96]

Biblical theology generally refers to the study of the Bible's message as it unfolds through the historical context of its original authors, audiences, and settings.[97] It seeks to exegete the communicative intent of the original author of each text to the original recipients in light of their respective contexts.[98] It seeks to uncover

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93 Steffen, et al., *The Return of Oral Hermeneutics*, ch. 2 § "A Different Style of Teaching."

94 This is true even for those lingual churches working from an already existent Bible translation in their language. Problems arise when the church forgets that they are working from mere translations of the original texts and engage in a largely monolingual discussion around a single translation as though it were the inspired original.

95 Floor and Harmelink, "Multimodality in Bible Translation," § "3. Defining multimodal translation," p. 10. They continue: "In practical terms, developing an oral-aural text or even an audiovisual one from a written source is permissible and desirable, as is developing a written-print target text from an oral-aural text. The idea of doing Bible translation from a written source, developing an oral-aural draft in the target, and then going one step further in transcribing the oral-aural draft in a written genre and eventually publishing it in print media, involves translation which is multimodal. One can even add an additional step: the oral-aural draft in one language variant can even be translated into other oral-aural drafts in related or unrelated variants, each one in turn to be transcribed into writing and print."

96 Ibid., § "1. Defining multimodality and multimedia," p. 5. The authors cite Kaindl, K., 2019, "A theoretical framework for a multimodal conception of translation," Chapter 2 in *Translation and Multimodality: Beyond Words*, London: Routledge.

97 Definitions of "biblical theology" vary: "We may define biblical theology as 'that branch of theological inquiry concerned with tracing themes through the diverse sections of the Bible (such as the wisdom writings or the epistles of Paul) and then with seeking the unifying themes that draw the Bible together.' I. Howard Marshall (2004:23) says the aim is 'to explore the New Testament writer's developing understanding of God and the world, more particularly the world of people and their relationship to one another.' In a broader sense Stephen Motyer (1997:158) defines it as 'that creative theological discipline whereby the church seeks to hear the integrated voice of the whole Bible addressing us today.' This has the advantage of bridging from the meaning of the theology to its significance for the church today, and both are the task of biblical theology." Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, ch. 15.

98 Osborne observes that there is "a two-way relationship between biblical theology and exegesis. The former provides the categories and overall scriptural unity behind one's interpretation of individual passages, while exegesis provides the data collated into a biblical theology. In other words, the two are interdependent. The exegete studies the author's meaning on the basis of literary considerations (grammar and thought development) and historical background (socioeconomic), then the

the situational aspects (e.g., historical, cultural, economic, geographic, etc.) that shaped the purpose and intent of the God-inspired communication from the author to the recipients. Then, it connects the theological themes, narratives, and patterns across the canon, as part of the theological formation of the student of Scripture.[99] An important hermeneutical factor in understanding the authorial intent and purpose of a given text is understanding where the communication occurs in the metanarrative (or "grand story") of God's redemptive history, as depicted in the story arc of the Scriptures from Genesis to Revelation.

> One of the most important reasons for being able to articulate the grand narrative of Scripture is **it becomes the foundation, the heart hermeneutic** (in contrast to a head hermeneutic) **for interpreting each individual part of Scripture**. Whenever a single verse, story, or section of Scripture is heard, read, or viewed, we intuitively interpret it through the framework of our understanding of the grand narrative of Scripture. This is significant because **no story or passage can be interpreted accurately or fully if taken out of context of the grand narrative of Scripture**. [Oral Hermeneutics] can help move us beyond the fragmented, incomplete interpretations so common today in the West.[100]

Thus, effective methodologies that equip the church to translate the Bible will employ techniques that increase understanding of the text (and its context), enable the lingual church to internalize it in a way that transforms character and behavior, then express it in a trustworthy and understandable way in their own language. Such multimodal, theologically formative processes result in translations that can be encoded in whatever (multi)media formats are desired by the church. The implications of Biblical Theology in Church-Centric Bible Translation will be considered further below (§ "Theological Formation and Bible Translation").

How might we provide resources and training that strengthen the ability of lingual church leaders to formulate faithful biblical theology in their own cultural and linguistic categories such that they are equipped to produce trustworthy Bible translations?

5.2 Translation Dynamics

In this section, we consider three implications pertaining to quality assurance in the emerging model of Bible translation.

5.2.1 Always Improving Translations

What if Bible translation by the church is less like an assembly line with a clear start and finish, and is more like a continuously rotating wheel progressing toward the desired destination.?

In the established model of Bible translation, the framework for quality assurance has generally been "sequential + binary"—the process has tended to follow a linear sequence, followed by a binary ("yes or no") quality control assessment by a translation consultant.[101] By contrast, the emerging model of Church-Based

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biblical theologian works with the results and compiles patterns of unity behind the individual statements" (Ibid., ch. 15, § "Relationship to Other Disciplines").

99 I agree with Kruger that "biblical theology and systematic theology should not be pitted against each other. Both play a critical role and should not be viewed as mutually exclusive. As Geerhardus Vos observed, 'Biblical Theology ... differs from Systematic Theology, not in being more Biblical, or adhering more closely to the truths of Scripture, but in that its principle of organizing the Biblical material is historical rather than logical'" (Kruger, *A Biblical-Theological Introduction to the New Testament*, § "Introduction").

100 Steffen, et al., *The Return of Oral Hermeneutics*, ch. 4, § "Oral Hermeneutics Relies Heavily on the Grand Narrative of Scripture."

101 Jones explains the traditional function of the translation consultant: "A metaphor that has powerfully shaped our understanding of translation consulting is drawn from the manufacturing world. We have conceived of our work as a kind of

Bible Translation tends to be iterative and cyclical. There may still be an evidently linear production process (particularly in the more outlying forms of "Church-Produced Bible Translation") but these are often part of an intentionally iterative process of ongoing improvement. Some church networks employ a structured, multi-phase publishing process with a built-in, church-wide review process that improves the entire translation over time. Others employ a more *ad hoc* process of improving the translation as editorial upgrades are needed. Regardless, the general pattern of the emerging model is cyclical, with the quality of the translation improving iteratively over time. This is not at all surprising, as Church-Based Bible Translation (i.e., translation by the church that speaks the language) has always been iterative.[102]

One of the aspects of the established ("outside-in") paradigm of Bible translation that made it easy to understand is that it assumes a linear process with a clear start and finish. This makes it much easier to quantify the number of Bible translations that have not started, are in progress, or are completed. The simplicity of this paradigm, however, may be *simplistic* to the extent that it does not account for the ongoing need for revisions of Bible translations over time. By contrast, in the Church-Based paradigm, where Bible translation work tends to be iterative and ongoing through multiple revisions, traditional metrics (i.e., Bible translations starts and completions) are more nuanced and difficult to quantify. At what point has a lingual church that has been interacting with Scripture and recording their on-the-fly translations in their own language for review actually started a Bible translation project? If a lingual church has completed a translation of the Bible in every verse of the Bible, should it be counted as a finished translation? What if they do not consider it "finished" and intend to revise it several times before relying on it as a trustworthy translation in their language?

In order to bridge between the metrics of the established paradigm of Bible translation (that assume a linear process) and the complex, iterative reality of Church-Based Bible Translation, a new approach to thinking of "finished" is needed. One proposed approach states that when all five of these factors are true, a translation should be considered the equivalent of "finished" in external metrics:[103]

1. **The translation produced by the lingual church ... is "text complete"** or "audio complete" or "video complete", by which is meant that there is at least something translated for every verse of the stated scope. *For example, if the scope is a New Testament, then every verse of the NT has been translated, without reference to the actual (and possibly unknown) trustworthiness of the translation.*
2. **The church is implementing an iterative process** that provides for ongoing improvement and revision of their Bible translation.

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" ("Signing Off, Giving Input"). Another recommended paper that describes the phenomenon of linear translation and iterative translation is "Ladders and Wheels" (King, 2015).

102 Luther published a total of five editions of his translation and it is said that he "never ceased to amend his translation. Besides correcting errors, he improved the uncouth and confused orthography, fixed the inflections, purged the vocabulary of obscure and ignoble words, and made the whole more symmetrical and melodious" (Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol 7, 347–8). Tyndale revised his translation in 1534 and observers have noted that it contained "scores, and indeed hundreds, of improvements, the products of greater finesse with English, of greater knowledge of Greek, and particularly of the impact of Tyndale's Hebrew studies" (Daniell, *William Tyndale*, 146). In 1885, the Authorized Version (AV 1611) was revised and became the Revised Version (RV). In 1901, the RV was revised into American English, becoming the American Standard Version (ASV). In 1952 the ASV was revised and became the Revised Standard Version. The 1971 revision of the ASV was used as the basis for the English Standard Version, published in 2001 and subsequently revised in 2007, 2011, and 2016.

103 ETEN Innovation Lab, "Innovation Lab Quality Assurance Recommendations" § "Recommendation 4: Meeting the All Access Goals in Church Based Bible Translation."

3. **The church is connected with other churches and leaders in a network** (or family of churches) that speaks at least one shared Strategic Language and can help provide support and ongoing training, as needed. This ideally includes other lingual churches involved in Bible translation, as well as people who are experienced in different aspects of the mission and translation work of the church. These could include application of translation principles, exegesis, theological formation, etc. The objective is to ensure that each lingual church is not isolated, but is rather connected in appropriate, constructive ways to others who are able to help them in the ongoing work of translation and revision toward ever increasing trustworthiness.
4. **The translation is in active use within the lingual church** for discipleship and kingdom impact, together with any other translations understandable by the community. This provides an additional element of review through theological reflection and interaction with their translation in comparison with the meaning in translations in other languages.
5. **The church is equipped with biblical and translation resources in languages they understand** (as per ETEN's Strategic Languages Initiative[104] and Bible translation technology that is effective for them and that results in kingdom impact.

Iterativity in Church-Based Bible Translation is immensely important, and the faster the "Engage → Produce → Publish" loop turns, the faster the lingual church can achieve a trustworthy Bible translation, as their theological capacity and translation experience increases with each loop.

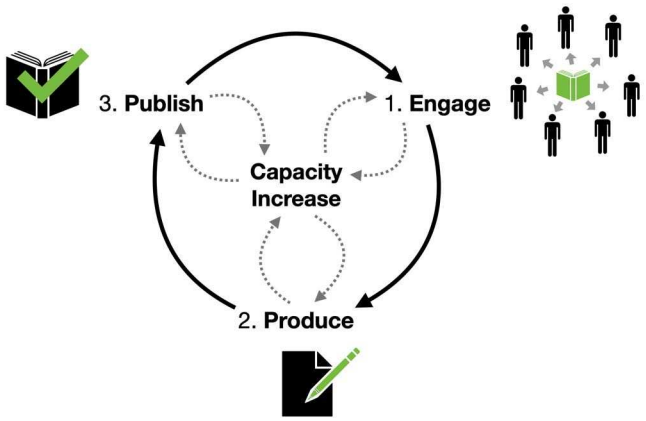

Diagram 13: The Essential Functions of an Iterative Bible Translation Process

The diagram above illustrates how this becomes a virtuous cycle that results in high quality Bible translations over time.[105]

How might we collaborate as the global church to provide the training, technology, and biblical resources needed to strengthen the ability of lingual churches everywhere to iteratively achieve Bible translations that they are able to confidently and reliably confirm are trustworthy?

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104 cf. Strategic Languages Initiative, **https://sli.openlanguages.io**.

105 I am indebted to my friend and colleague, Andy Kellogg (ETEN Innovation Lab) for the original diagram on which this one is based.

5.2.2 Theological Formation and Bible Translation Capacity

What if theological formation is the most crucial factor in equipping every lingual church to produce trustworthy Bible translations in their own languages and, thus, accelerate the overall impact of Bible translation?

Across the spectrum of different methodologies, there is a general pattern that can be observed in the arc of Bible translation by the church: an initial "production" phase typically results in an essentially faithful translation, and a later "precision" phase improves the trustworthiness of the translation.[106] It may be more helpful to think of these as, respectively, a "getting started" phase (during which a translation is encoded in a fixed media format) and a "continued checking" phase (during which the encoded translation is further checked and improved).[107] The diagram below illustrates this:

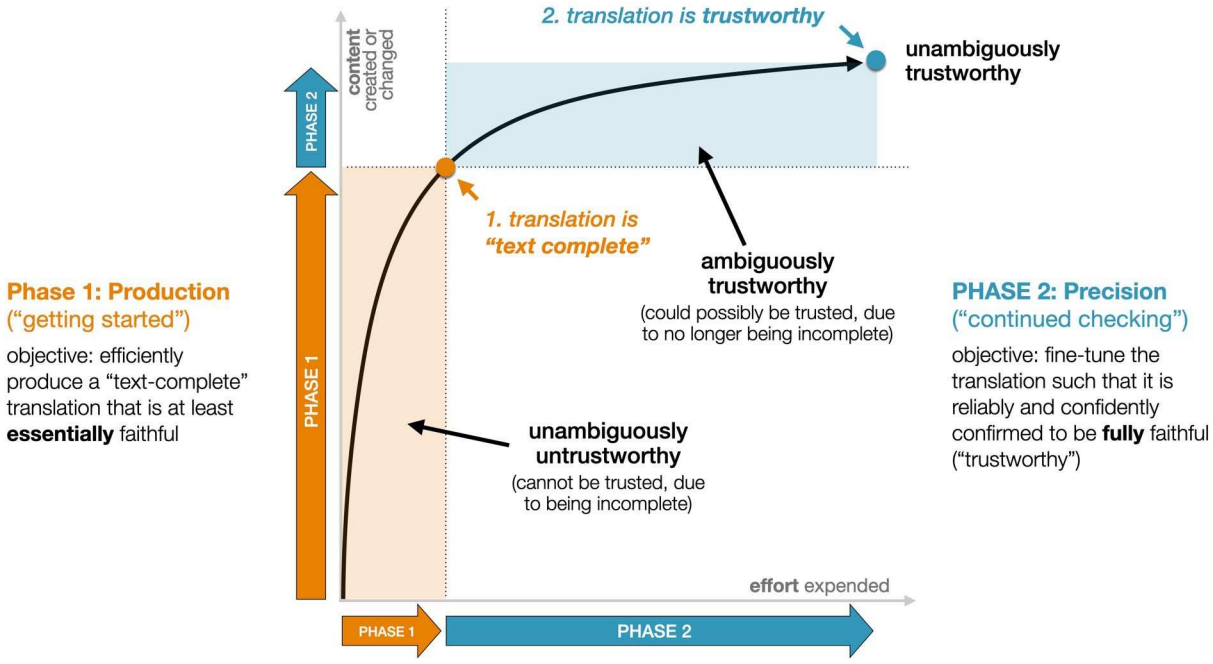

Diagram 14: Two Phases in Church-Based Bible Translation

To the extent that the lingual church is actively engaged in a theologically formative engagement around Scripture *before* attempting to translate it, this pattern changes. As the church's theological capacity, understanding of the texts to be translated, and translation experience increase, the speed with which a trustworthy translation can be achieved also increases. Much of the effort that would have been invested in the "continued checking" (or "precision") phase is invested in advance in a theologically formative process of

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106 I explore this and other considerations pertaining to quality in Bible translation in "Trustworthy and Trusted." This pattern is most readily observable toward the "church-produced" end of the spectrum (cf. § "4. Four Modes of Bible Translation" above). At the "church-centric" end of the spectrum, theological formation changes the pattern (see below).

107 The phrase "continued checking" is intended to indicated two things: First, every good translation methodology will include some aspect of checking in the initial "getting started" phase, whether a self-check, peer check, etc. Second, no matter how good the quality of the first draft is, there is always a secondary (and often ongoing) review process during which a "text complete" translation of a passage is revisited in light of expanded theological capacity, greater understanding of Scripture, and increased translation experience. This "focused checking" phase may not be clearly differentiated from the preceding phase, but it is the part of the translation process during which a lingual church confirms (and improves) the trustworthiness and overall quality of the translation in their language.

engaging with the Scriptures, discerning the meaning, and applying the teaching as faithful disciples of Jesus. This is illustrated in the diagram below:

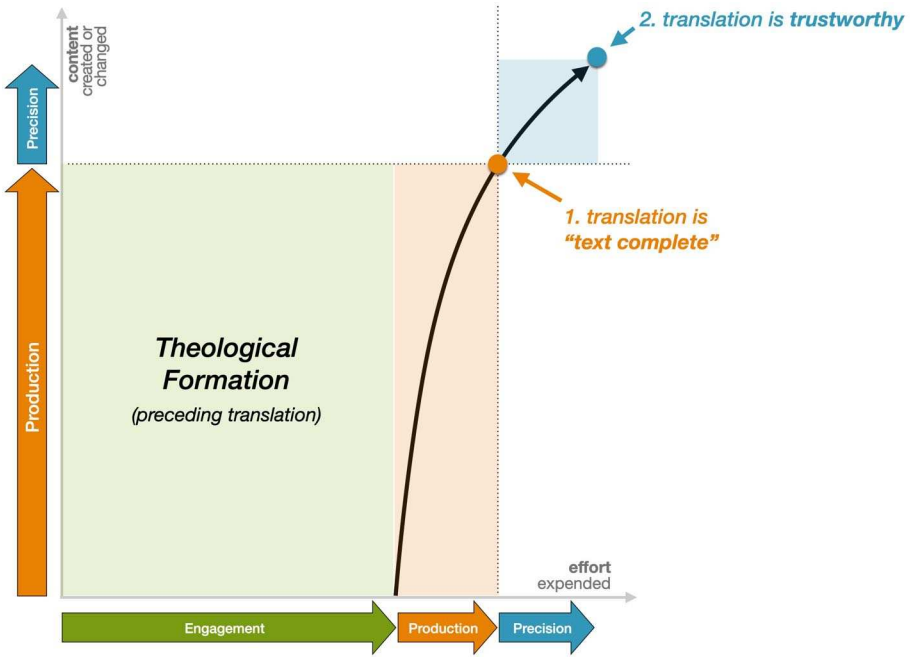

Diagram 15: How Capacity Accelerates Bible Translation

The theological and translation capacity of a lingual church is increased through interaction with Scripture, especially as it results in the development of a robust biblical theology and increasing understanding of the metanarrative of Scripture. For example, to the extent that disciple-making movements are engaged in inductive study of Scripture (e.g., Discovery Bible Study) with a view to understanding and obeying it, they increase in theological formation. This increased capacity results in acceleration in the production of a translation into their own language, without overrunning their ability to reliably and confidently confirm the trustworthiness of their own translation of the passage. The diagram below visualizes this as the interdependence of theological formation, together with the practical ministry of the church building itself up to maturity, and Bible translation as key aspects of the growth process.

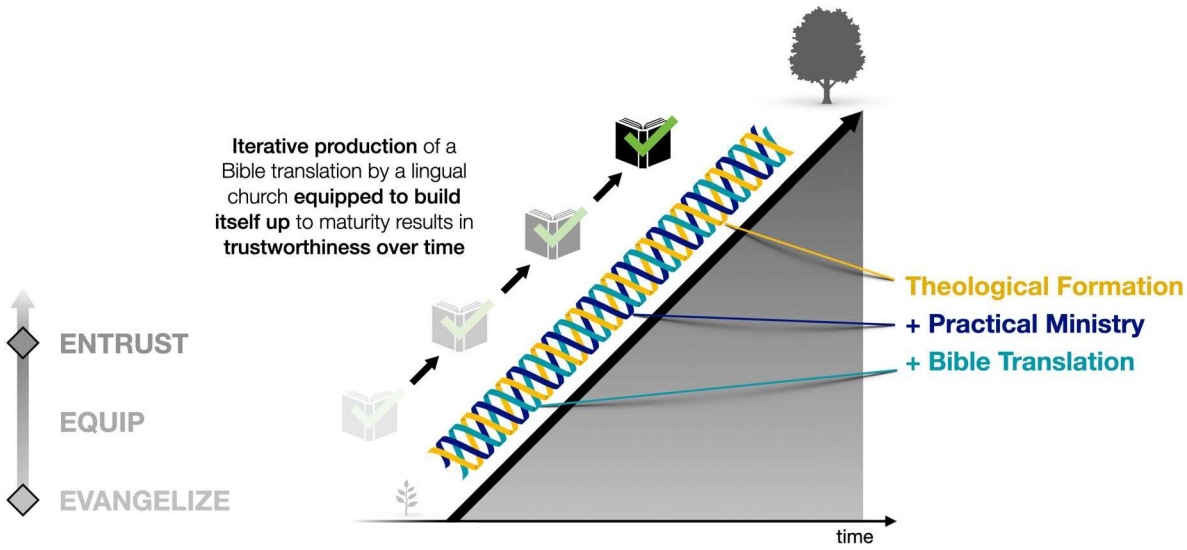

Diagram 16: The Interconnection of Theological Formation, Practical Ministry, and Bible Translation

This is what is meant by theological formation being the "engine" of Church-Centric (or Movement-Led) Bible Translation. The production of a Bible translation is not the main thing. The main thing is the equipping of the lingual church to develop the theological capacity and Bible translation experience sufficient to produce a trustworthy translation. The iterative "Engage → Produce → Publish" process is an important means to that end. As the diagram above illustrates, the trustworthiness of the Bible translation produced by the lingual church increases together with their theological formation.

The Importance of Living Under the Scriptures

But isn't this notion of weaving together theological formation and Bible Translation potentially a bad idea? Might not the direct integration of the two result in Bible translations that are infused with whatever theological misunderstandings the church may currently have? This is an important concern, and we will note here two points in consideration.

First, whether because of a lack of theological understanding or a motivation (whether conscious or subconscious) to preserve certain doctrinal traditions and assumptions by engraining them into a translation of the Bible, this is a problem that is not unique to modern expressions of Bible translation by the church. Anecdotes abound of reputable Bible translations in major languages that still retain bias (if not flagrant error) even after hundreds of years of Bible translation experience. This does not diminish the nature of the problem or the importance of addressing it. We are merely establishing up front that this is a concern inherent to Bible translation of every kind and at all times, no matter who is involved in the work.[108]

Second, the solution in every case—whether centuries old or newly occurring in the emerging paradigm of Bible translation by the church—is to clearly differentiate the process of translation from theology in culture. While necessarily interconnected, it is imperative that the flow of theological formation always begin with

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[108] The solution, however, is *not* to attempt to produce a "purely linguistic" or even mechanical approach to translation, as though this would avoid the problem of theological skew. It cannot, because every translation choice in Bible translation is, at some level, both linguistic and theological—the linguistic elements such as the lexical choice, inflection, the syntax in which it occurs, etc. all carry theological freight to a greater or lesser extent. As we shall see below, Bible translation is unavoidably a theological endeavor.

biblical theology: seeking to understand what the original author intended to communicate to the original audience in their original context.

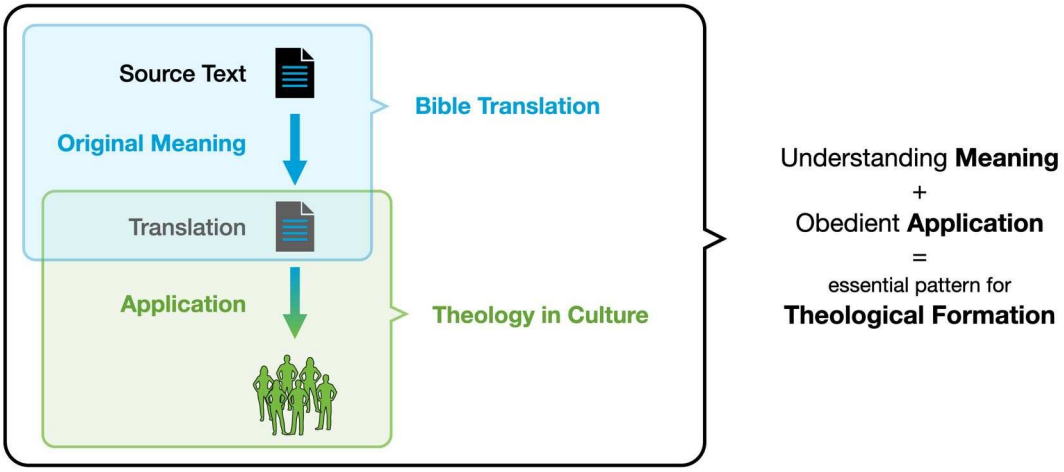

Diagram 17: The Interconnection of Bible Translation and Theology in Culture

As the lingual church understands the meaning of the text, translates it faithfully, and seeks to obey it, they do so to the fullest extent of their current theological capacity and translation experience—and *the process itself is conducive to their theological formation*. Crisp is correct when he notes that "any translation of the Bible is an act of theology, in which the presuppositions of the translator ... will inevitably influence the outcome."[109] The point is not that one must have perfect theology in order to translate with excellence (as if such were possible), but that the ongoing process of theological formation—which is strengthened by translation-oriented interaction with the Scriptures—continues to increase theological capacity and, accordingly, the ability to translate more effectively.[110]

In this regard, it is of crucial importance that the lingual church live "under" the Scriptures, and not position itself "over" them. It is when the flow reverses—theological assumptions and traditions are injected upward into the Bible translation—that the church loses the ability to even recognize their theological errors. The light that could have illuminated them will be darkened, until they return again to the original meaning of the text (apart from tradition or self-reference) and correct the flow of understanding from the original in order to correct their own translation.

As the process of learning the Scriptures and seeking to translate them faithfully into their own language continues, their increased understanding—together with their obedient application of the Scriptures—results in increased theological formation.

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109 Crisp, "Translation Consultancy," 4.

110 In light of this, Crisp is correct to note that "a new emphasis on building the capacity of these communities to produce high quality translations may lead to even better results than our current approach" (Ibid., 9).

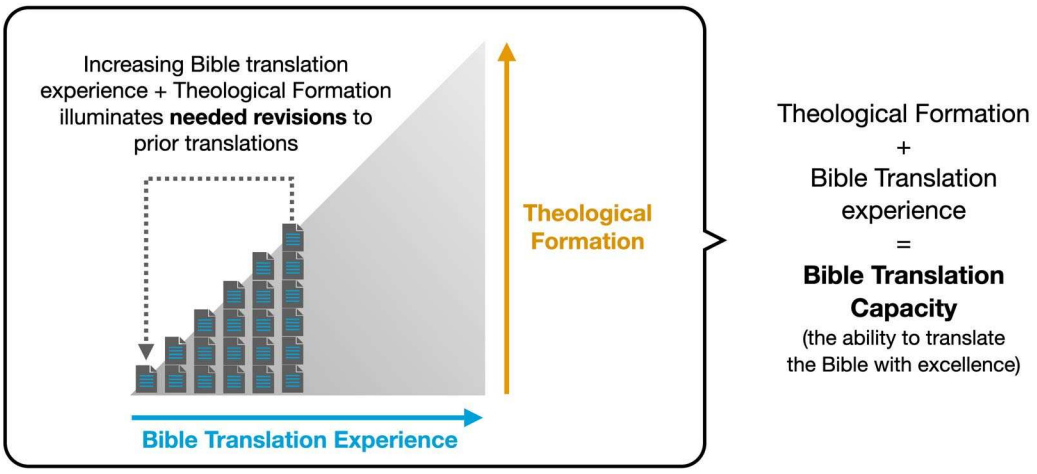

Diagram 18: Increasing Bible Translation Capacity

As the diagram above illustrates, the increasing theological formation of the lingual church results in the increase of their capacity for excellence in Bible translation. Practically, this will be evident in not only greater facility in the translation process itself, but the ability to recognize needed improvements and corrections to previous translations they have already done. This is the expected progression of Bible translation, which is why iterativity in Bible translation is such an important factor. It provides the means of continually improving the trustworthiness and overall quality of the Bible translation.

The Importance of "Establishing"

As we saw above (§ "2.1.2 Paul's Method"), one of the most important aspects of the work of leaders in God's family is equipping disciples for ministry so that they can build themselves up together to maturity (cf. Ep 4:11–16; Co 1:28). The work of equipping includes establishing (strengthening, rooting, grounding, etc.) disciples in the faith and encouraging disciples to persevere in it. The expected progression of those who are equipped in this way is that they would become fully mature, able to multiply the equipping ministry to others. But sometimes this progress is blocked, as in the case of the recipients of the epistle to the Hebrews:

> We have a great deal to say about this, and it is difficult to explain, since **you have become too lazy to understand**. Although by this time you ought to be teachers, **you need someone to teach you the basic principles of God's revelation again**. You need milk, not solid food. Now everyone who lives on milk is **inexperienced with the message about righteousness**, because he is an infant. But solid food is for the mature—for those **whose senses have been trained to distinguish between good and evil** (Hb 5:11–14).

In this passage, we see that there is an expected progression in spiritual maturity from "needing milk... someone to teach you" to being able to consume "solid food" as a teacher who is mature. It is "inexperience with the message about righteousness" that causes someone to need milk. The mature who can consume solid food are those "whose senses have been trained to distinguish between good and evil." The Greek term used here (*aistheterion*) has the sense of gaining "capacity for understanding" as well as the "ability to make moral decisions."[111] It depicts disciples who understand the Scriptures and who grow in experience and maturity as they continue to obey everything Jesus has taught (Mt 28:19–20).

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111 αἰσθητήριον: "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'" (Louw and Nida, *Lexicon*, 383); "the ability to make moral decisions" (Arndt, et al., *Lexicon*, 29).

In addition to worldliness (1Co 3:1–4) and laziness (Hb 5:11–14) that can disrupt this growth to maturity, Peter also warns of a third potential disruption: the active opposition of **false teachers** that causes the unstable (i.e., those who have not been "established" in the faith) to lose their way. In his second epistle, while decrying the destructive work of the false teachers, Peter references the concept of being "established" (*stērizō*) four times. First, he tells his hearers that they are "established in the truth you now have" (2Pe 1:12). In the second chapter, he states that the false teachers are sensual and they "seduce unstable people" (2Pe 2:14). The clear implication is that those who are not firmly established in the truth are at risk of being deceived (cf. those who are "blown around by every wind of teaching" Ep 4:14). Then, in chapter 3, Peter directly connects the need for being established in the faith with the ability to correctly interpret Scripture. He writes:

> Therefore, dear friends, while you wait for these things, make every effort to be found without spot or blemish in his sight, at peace. Also, regard the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our dear brother Paul has written to you according to the wisdom given to him. He speaks about these things in all his letters. There are some things hard to understand in them. **The untaught** (lit. "unschooled") **and unstable** (lit. "unestablished") **will twist** (ie., "misinterpret") **them to their own destruction, as they also do with the rest of the Scriptures.** Therefore, dear friends, since you know this in advance, be on your guard, so that you are not led away by the error of lawless people and **fall from your own stable position**. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity (2Pe 3:14–18).[112]

Peter warns the church that training and establishing disciples in the faith is essential for understanding all of Scripture—especially the things that are hard to understand (like some of what Paul has written). By remaining vigilant and continuing to grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord, stability can be maintained.[113]

The implications of these passages for Bible translation are significant. Peter tells us that being firmly established in the faith (which is the foundation of theological formation) is an important factor in interpreting Scripture faithfully (2Pe 3:14–18). Faithful interpretation of Scripture is a necessary prerequisite to its faithful translation. It follows, therefore, that the pace of Bible translation should be commensurate to the theological formation of the lingual church.[114] Along these same lines, the author to the Hebrews (5:11–14) reminds us that those who are young in this process are "inexperienced with the message about righteousness" (i.e., drinking only milk) and must first grow in maturity to be able to handle not merely the foundational principles of the faith, but also everything else (i.e., to consume "solid food"). How do they develop this maturity? By increasing their "capacity for understanding" through training and experience in distinguishing "between good and evil." This is a central aspect of the process and objective of theological formation, and beautifully depicts the essence of Church-Centric Bible Translation.

How might we adjust our Bible translation expectations and priorities toward strengthening the theological formation of every lingual church as both means to and end of their producing trustworthy Bible translations?

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112 This passage is frequently misunderstood to be referring to false teachers intentionally distorting the Scriptures. In the preceding chapter, Peter strongly chastises the false teachers for seducing "unstable people" with their false teaching (2Pe 2:14). In 2Pe 3:16, the people doing the distorting are the "untaught" and "unstable" (same root word στηριζω in both verses) who are deceived and misled by the false teachers in the previous chapter.

113 It is important to recognize, however, that this does *not* imply enrollment in institutionalized theological education. Such institutions did not exist in Paul's day and yet he was able to fully establish and equip the churches in his sphere of influence to continue growing to full maturity such that he could testify, "...I no longer have any work to do in these regions..." (Ro 15:22).

114 Grudem suggests that "Scripture affirms that it is able to be understood, *but not all at once*. Growth in understanding is a lifelong process. Clarity is a property of *Scripture*, not a property of its readers, who vary widely in their understanding" ("The Perspicuity of Scripture," § "2.3.1. Scripture affirms that it is able to be understood but not all at once").

5.2.3 Complex Networks Confirming Trustworthiness

What if the responsibility for confirmation of the trustworthiness of a lingual church-produced Bible translation resides with lingual church leaders in collaboration with a supportive network of equipping servants connected to them?

The church-based quality assurance process in the "continued checking" phase should not be misunderstood as an isolated group of leaders working independently and without input from others. The most robust and effective quality assurance processes in Church-Based Bible Translation exist when leaders in the lingual church work in coordination with other leaders (e.g., equipping servants with Bible translation experience) through shared Languages of Wider Communication as a network.[115]

An important factor that enables a rapidly expanding network of churches to remain strong, grounded in the gospel, and able to grow to maturity in Christ is the concurrent development of a unified team of servant leaders within the church network who equip, establish, and shepherd the church. These leaders function as a plurality at the local level (shepherding elders) and at the translocal level (equipping servants). As lingual churches continue to meet their own Bible translation needs, the most natural locus for the affirmation of the trustworthiness of Bible translations that affect the lingual church is the relational constellation of leaders who have the God-given responsible for the theological formation and care of the church in that region.

An important function of these leaders in the network of churches is ensuring that disciples understand the "whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:26–28) and maintain theological fidelity in light of the gospel of Jesus the King (the *kerygma*) and the apostolic teaching that emanates from it (the *didache*). The translocal network of leaders who equip and serve the churches is a ready-made framework for developing, maintaining, and expanding Bible translation training and expertise throughout a network of churches. By equipping the leaders of church networks, Bible translation becomes part of the intrinsic skill and ongoing practice of the churches—not merely for the initial production of a translation, but the ongoing use and revision of the translation over time (as well as the creation of biblical and theological resources from the translation).

How might we connect networks of equipping servants to lingual churches who are translating the Bible into their own languages, such that their capacity for understanding and translating Scripture increases in ways that enable them to confidently and reliably confirm the trustworthiness of Bible translations in their own languages?

5.3 Resourcing

In this section, we consider three implications pertaining to provision of biblical and translation resources, development of Bible technology, and financial investment in the emerging model of Bible translation.

5.3.1 Biblical and Translation Resources in all Strategic Languages

What if the most catalytic factor contributing to the translation of the Bible in every language is the unrestricted availability of and global access to biblical and translation-strengthening resources in the most strategic languages that equip the church to understand and translate Scripture faithfully?

In the established paradigm of Bible translation, statements like the following describe the wealth of available resources:

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115 The Quality Assurance branch of the ETEN Innovation Lab suggests an approach by which church networks can implement a networked, multilingual process of church-based quality assurance. See "Innovation Lab Quality Assurance Recommendations," § "Recommendation 3: Iterative Quality Assurance by the Church and Community."

> ...today's Bible translators are empowered as never before. They have access to high-quality training and tools, enabling them to interact with the source text and a multitude of translation helps. Advances in the domains of theology, literary analysis, and linguistics have positively affected the work. Bible translators from all continents can, not only do their job, but contribute significantly to our understanding of Scripture in the world today.[116]

This is a true statement when two conditions are met: one is able to use English resources, and one has the legal freedom to do so. This may have been generally true for a paradigm of Bible translation where virtually all translation teams could use English resources and worked for organizations that could manage the legal restrictions on behalf of translators. But increasingly, we should expect that new Bible translators in Church-Based Bible Translation do not speak English and are not be part of formal organizations that manage copyright licenses on their behalf.

Thus, if excellence in Bible translation is to be unshackled such that anyone in the entire global church can be part of the work in effective ways, we must proactively overcome two obstacles.[117] First, the **language obstacle** must be overcome, because equipping the global church requires biblical and translation-related resources in strategic languages beyond just English. What is needed is a massively available, worldwide, sociolinguistically-informed living library of best-in-class resources for study and translation of the Scriptures —the "theological building blocks" of the church.

In addition, we must provide these resources under open licenses that reserve no restrictions on the access, retention, redistribution, repurposing, and use of these resources. This overcomes the **license obstacle** that would otherwise restrict the acceleration of these resources into every language where needed for use by every person who would benefit from them. The Bible Aquifer (**www.aquifer.bible**) is a global-scale, open-licensed project that aggregates, harmonizes, cleans, and interlinks the highest value biblical resources needed in the most strategic languages of the world to equip the global church for Bible translation.

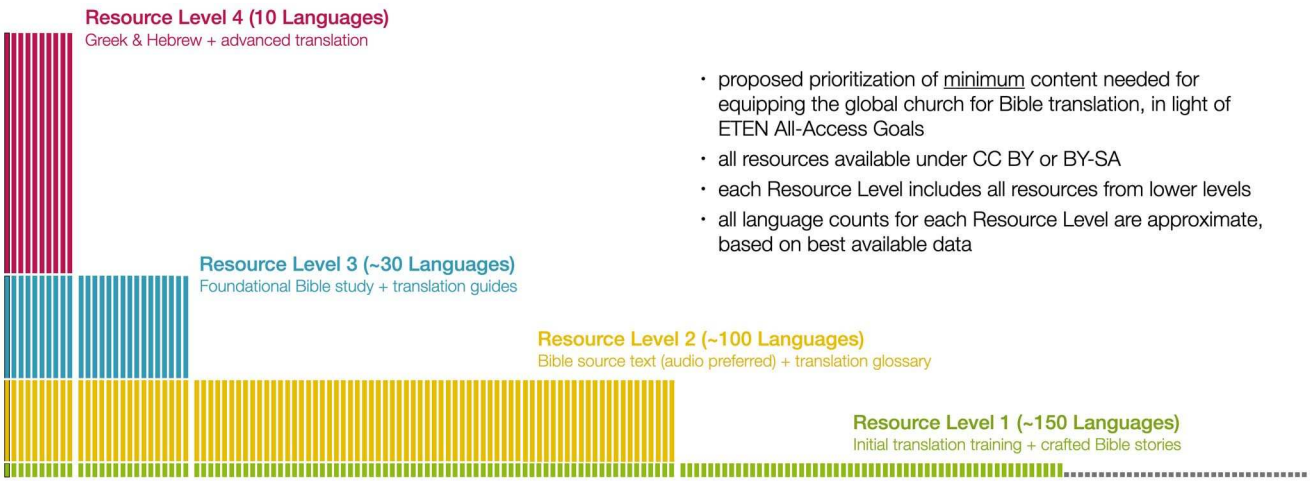

Diagram 19: Strategic Languages Initiative: A Global Translation Resource Ecosystem

The Strategic Languages Initiative (**openlanguages.io/sli**) identifies the most strategic languages of the world, based on the number of minority languages dependent on them (multilingualism) together with other

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116 Zogbo, Lynell. "Introduction: The Field Today." ch. 14 In *A History of Bible Translation*, 2nd ed. Storia e Letteratura, 2011. 350.

117 The obstacles and how to overcome them are explained in detail in "The Gateway Languages Strategy" (Jore). The rationale for open-licensed biblical resources as a critical factor in equipping the entire global church is explained in *The Christian Commons* (Jore) and "Letting Go" (Jore).

strategic factors, as depicted in the diagram above. Included in its design is the recognition that the scope of biblical content that lingual churches desire in their own languages is not limited to the Bible itself.[118]

The scope of the established paradigm of Bible translation is generally limited to the Bible. When the church in a given language decides to meet their own Bible translation needs, they often continue beyond Scripture to the most important resources needed for correct interpretation and study of the Bible. As illustrated in the diagram below, this often includes study notes, exegetical resources, and original language resources:

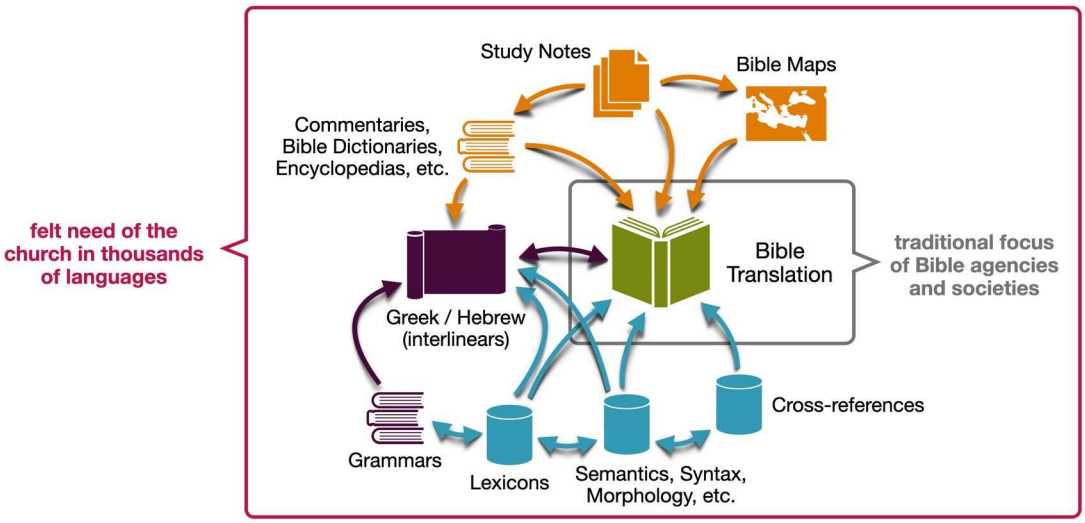

Diagram 20: The Bible and the Most Important Resources that Support It

The increased translation scope from Bibles to additional biblical resources is not surprising, in light of the shift described above from applied linguistics (intended for the production of a Bible translation) to biblical theology in culture. In time, this trajectory suggests the likelihood of many more Bible translations aligned to the Greek and Hebrew, available with foundational interpretive aids, and other resources that increase the church's ability to faithfully interpret and apply Scripture.

How might we increase the accessibility of best-in-class biblical resources in the most strategic languages together with effective technologies needed in order to equip the entire global church to understand Scripture and translate it with excellence into every language variant, as desired.

5.3.2 Technology in Service to the Church

What if the most effective use of advanced Bible technology is to increase the global church's capacity for understanding Scripture and ability to reliably and confidently confirm the trustworthiness of Bible translations in their own languages?

When a lingual church is blessed with mature leaders, robust understanding of Scripture, and experience in application of translation principles, the use of advanced technology to rapidly produce (or complete) a Bible translation in their language can be beneficial. When errors in the translation are produced, the lingual church will have the ability to identify and correct them.

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118 This is an initial attempt to implement "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" (Jore, "From Unreached to Established," § "Assumptions and Misalignments of the Bible-centric Paradigm," 10).

When a lingual church is in earlier stages of theological formation, has not yet been adequately equipped to build itself up to maturity in Christ, and has not yet internalized a robust biblical theology informed by the grand narrative of Scripture, the situation is quite different. Use of advanced technology to generate a Bible translation for (or with) the church, reverts to the essential dynamics of the established paradigm—but this time with technologists in the outsider role instead of linguist-translators. Recall that in this paradigm, the assumption is that what the church needs most is a Bible translation in their language as quickly as possible, so that it can be published, and they can then engage with it.

But until the lingual church has developed the theological capacity and translation experience to reliably and confidently check their own Bible translations, the well-intended acceleration of production is likely to accelerate beyond the lingual church's capacity to recognize and correct errors in the translation. When this happens and the church does not realize there are errors in their translation, they may use the translation and only later discover the errors—after they have taught them, learned them, and even memorized them (as in the example mentioned above). They may inadvertently be trusting a translation that is not yet trustworthy. This is depicted in the lower right quadrant of the diagram below that contrasts the objective trustworthiness of a Bible translation with the subjective trust that the lingual church may have in it:[119]

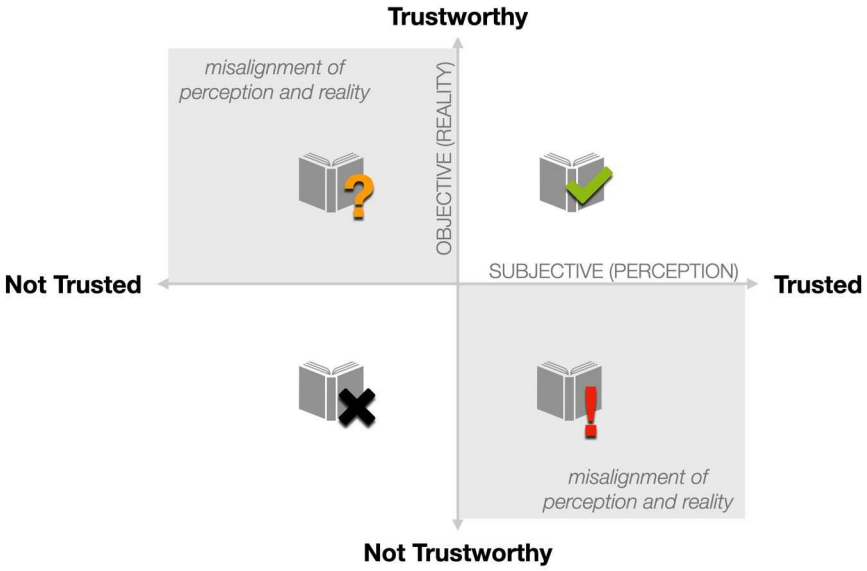

Diagram 21: Contrasting the Trustworthiness of a Translation with the Trust Placed in It

If the church *does* suspect there are errors that need correction, or desires to more fully check the translation for any reason, they need to spend more time in the "continued checking" phase than might otherwise be needed. The diagram below illustrates how the time that has been saved by using advanced technology in the drafting stage may increase the time needed in the later checking stages:

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119 This concept, together with the original version of this diagram, is described in "Trustworthy and Trusted" (Jore).

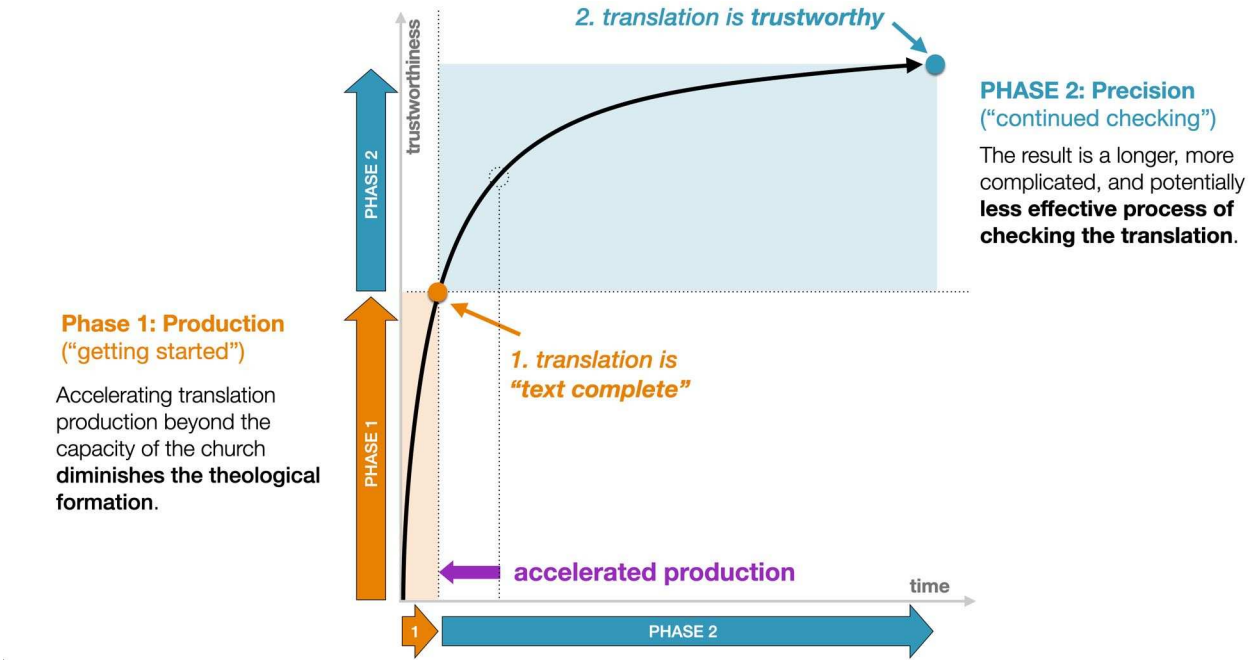

Diagram 22: Accelerating Production and the Impact on Checking

Accelerating translation production beyond the capacity of the church diminishes the opportunity for theological formation in the "getting started" phase that would otherwise have enabled them to check the trustworthiness of the translation. Where they could have built up their "capacity for understanding" and become established in the faith through the process, they might now be expected to check the trustworthiness of a translation produced for them and for which they do not yet have the capacity to confidently and reliably check. The result is a longer, more complicated, and potentially less effective process of checking the translation, without the benefit of the theological capacity and translation experience that would have been developed in the production phase.

Thus, while there sometimes is benefit in using advanced technologies for accelerating Bible translation production to help some lingual churches, there will *always* be benefit in harnessing advanced technologies **to equip the church to better understand Scripture and check their own Bible translations more effectively**.

How might we maximize the use of advanced technologies for the strengthening and equipping of lingual churches for understanding and checking their Bible translations?

5.3.3 Investing in Bible Translation Training

What if the best way to accelerate Bible translation production across the entire global church is to invest in Bible translation training?

Historically, most Bible translation funding has been intended for the production of Bible translations. Recently, significant funding has been made available for capacity and resource development objectives intended to strengthen Church-Based Bible Translation. This is a strategically advisable investment, and is likely to become increasingly important in the days ahead, as the future of Bible translation becomes even more complex.

When Bible translation funding is tied to production metrics, this can help Bible translation organizations improve their efficiency and consistency of their reporting. But Bible translation is expanding to networks not directly connected with (let alone in the employ of) existing Bible translation organizations. This makes reporting on production more difficult, especially when the number of methodologies in use across the entire complex network for the global church is in constant flux. Furthermore, many of these networks implement an iterative translation process of selections of Scripture as needed for discipleship that make counting completed books and chapters more complex (as considered above).

An even greater challenge for the traditional "funding of production" is that the church's Bible translation goals in a given region are rarely aligned with outside objectives and it is almost always much greater in scope. We saw this above (in "§ 5.1.1 Abundance"), where the church in a region often considers each variant to need its own translation, and they may want multiple revisions (or new translations) in each variant.

Historically, Bible translation funding has generally tended to prioritize production of a first translation into a given language. This has helped to achieve the initial translation objectives, but the sustainability of Bible translation over time has often been outside the scope of investment. While most would agree that Bible translations are expected to need revision, it is understandable that funders might be more interested in investing in translation into "Scriptureless" languages that are still waiting for their first version, rather than investing in revisions of existing translations. Consequently, funding has tended to flow toward the production and publishing of first versions, resulting in a general scarcity of revisions to translations—even when revisions are desperately needed.

As Bible translation continues to multiply throughout more networks and languages, we may find it beneficial to learn some of the patterns of movements that are intent on avoiding behaviors that hinder movemental dynamics. One pattern is to use funding as venture capital in support of sustainability. For example, some networks involved in Movement-Led Bible Translation are providing for the ongoing sustainability of the work by starting profitable businesses, the proceeds of which are used to pay the salaries of those working on the Bible translations in their languages. Investment into the startup of profitable businesses supports the sustainability of Bible translation without creating ongoing dependence on outside funding.

One of the standard patterns in disciple-making movements is to avoid using outside funding to pay the salary of field workers (e.g., disciple-makers). While this might seem surprising (or even uncaring) on the surface, it is a principle derived from considerable experience in how the well-intended use of money can inadvertently halt the advancement of the kingdom. But there is one use of funding that not only does not create dependence or hinder multiplication, it actually strengthens it:

> ... we must consider how money can be used wisely to support a movement. **In a word, training. Invest in training. Training leaders at every level** in the Word of God puts the Gospel first in their hearts and lives.[120]

By investing in the training of trainers, together with the provision of accessible biblical resources and appropriate technology, the overall capacity of a network increases without creating dependency. This requires an up front investment that shows little return on investment in the near term. But as translation capacity in a church network increases, the need for funding decreases at the same time that production increases—and it increases without dependence on outside funding.

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120 Reach, *Movements that Move*, ch. 3, § "Don't Pay Leaders of Simple Churches!"

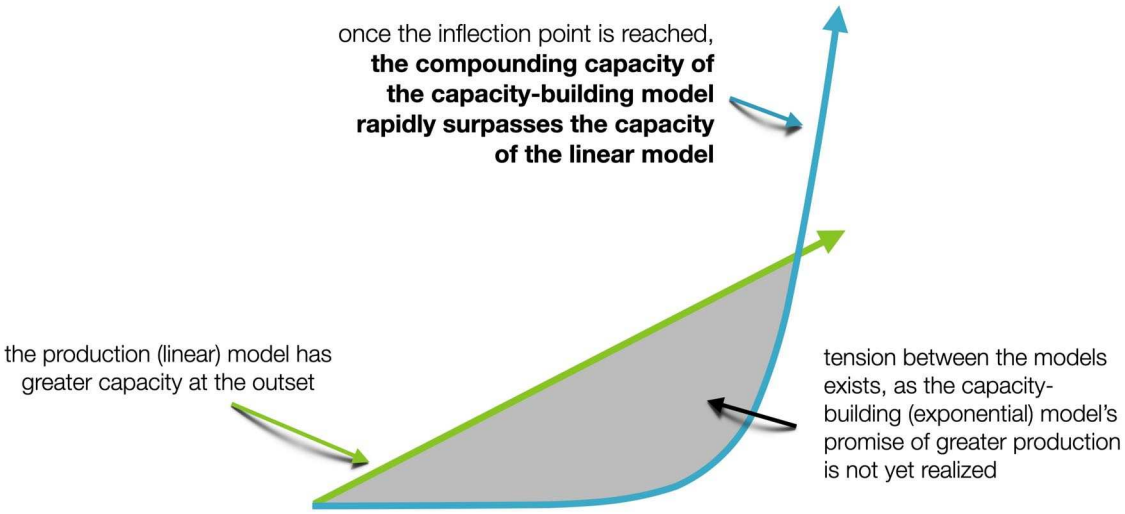

Diagram 23: Contrasting Production (Linear) and Capacity (Geometric)

The diagram above illustrates the difference between investment in production (linear progression) and investment in capacity, particularly of a multiplicative nature (geometric progression).

6. Serving the Bible-Translating Church

We have considered how the emerging paradigm of Bible translation by the church is different in many ways from the established paradigm of Bible translation for (or with) the church. More church networks in more contexts are employing different methodologies and technologies in more languages and dialects. How might we strengthen and help the increasing complexity of Bible translation across the entire global church?[121]

6.1 The Essential Challenge

The traditional assumptions underlying the established paradigm of Bible translation typically assume that the essential challenge of Bible translation pertains to the accelerated production of the end product (a translated Bible) with no loss of quality. This is reflected in manufacturing values that seek to make Bible translation "faster, cheaper, and better" (or, at least, not worse). When a paradigm changes, however, it is often associated with a rethinking process that uncovers a fundamental insight previously overlooked. For example, the fundamental insight of the Copernican (heliocentric) model of the solar system is that the center of the solar system is the sun, not the earth. The fundamental insight of germ theory is that the cause of sickness is not "bad blood" (that needs to be let out of the body), but microscopic organisms in the body. The fundamental insight that radically changed the shipping industry and made globalization possible was that the shipping industry's business was moving cargo, not sailing ships.[122]

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121 I am implementing the "kernel of a good strategy" framework described by Rumelt (*Good Strategy, Bad Strategy,* ch. 5, "The Kernel of a Good Strategy"). In this framework, a good strategy includes three things: A *diagnosis* that defines or explains the nature of the challenge, a *guiding policy* for dealing with the challenge and a set of *coherent actions* that are designed to carry out the guiding policy.

122 Levinson, *The Box*, ch. 3. He continues, noting that Malcom McLean's insight "led him to a concept of containerization quite different from anything that had come before. McLean understood that reducing the cost of shipping goods required not just a metal box but an entire new way of handling freight. Every part of the system—ports, ships, cranes, storage facilities, trucks, trains, and the operations of the shippers themselves—would have to change. In that understanding, he was years ahead of almost everyone else in the transportation industry" (Ibid.).

Along these lines, might there be a fundamental insight of Church-Based Bible Translation that unlocks our ability to understand and participate to the fullest extent in the advance of Bible translation into every language? Perhaps the fundamental insight of Church-Based Bible Translation is that it is not about producing Bible translations, but **equipping God's people for ministry to build themselves up to full maturity, with Bible translation as both means and end of that objective**.

We can see that the essential nature of the challenge facing the Bible-translating church is one of capacity. We might define the essential challenge along these lines: **the global church needs to understand the Bible and how to translate it effectively as part of the life and ministry of God's family in every people group and language.**

6.2 Guiding Principles

In order to address this challenge, we need to identify the highest-leverage factors that, together, form the parameters within which the objective of increasing the church's capacity can be achieved. In light of what we have addressed in this paper, these principles may be along these lines:

- **Share Equally:** Provide the best-in-class, highest value biblical resources without restrictions under open licenses, in the most effective formats, in all the strategic languages needed by the entire global church for studying and understanding Scripture. In this way, the entire global church can collaborate openly using any technology to faithfully interpret and translate the Bible into every language where the church desires a Bible translation.
- **Clarify the Fundamentals:** Communicate the foundational translation principles and techniques that equip lingual churches to produce trustworthy Bible translations in every language, in the way that works best for them. In this way, lingual churches will be able to utilize resources in different media formats to increase their understanding of every passage of Scripture through translation-oriented dialog as a "hermeneutical community." In accordance with their capacity and experience, they will be able to produce trustworthy translations in any media format, as often as desired.
- **Accelerate Capacity:** Prioritize the training of the church's trainers in ways that enable multiplication of Bible translation resources, methodologies, and technologies to build up the aggregate theological capacity and Bible translation experience of church networks. As the church continues to engage with Scripture in a translation-oriented dialog together, iteratively producing and publishing Bible translations in their own languages, the acceleration of Bible translation production will scale up commensurate to (and without exceeding) the theological capacity and translation experience of each lingual church. In this way, each lingual church will be able to reliably and confidently confirm the trustworthiness of Bible translations in their language, as part of an interdependent network of leaders.

6.3 Action Plan

Given the complexity of a phenomenon like Church-Based Bible Translation, a natural tendency is to attempt to meet a complex challenge with a complex solution. The authors of *Simple Rules* suggest a better approach:

> Meeting complexity with complexity can create more confusion than it resolves. … Applying complicated solutions to complex problems is an understandable approach, but flawed. The parts of a complex system can interact with one another in many different ways, which quickly overwhelms our ability to envision all possible outcomes. … **simple rules tame complexity better than complicated solutions**.[123]

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123 Sull and Eisenhardt, *Simple Rules*. § "Introduction: Simple Rules for a Complex World"

So what are "simple rules"? They are basic strategies "that save time and effort by focusing our attention and simplifying the way we process information."[124] By shaping behavior in ways that lead to desirable outcomes in complex circumstances, simple rules "allow people to act without having to stop and rethink every decision."[125] Simple rules (or principles, guidelines, etc.) work because they do three things very well:

> First, **they confer the flexibility** to pursue new opportunities while **maintaining some consistency**. Second, **they can produce better decisions.** When information is limited and time is short, simple rules make it fast and easy for people, organizations, and governments to make sound choices. They can even outperform complicated decision-making approaches in some situations. Finally, **simple rules allow the members of a community to synchronize their activities** with one another on the fly. As a result, communities can do things that would be impossible for their individual members to achieve on their own.[126]

This framework may be helpful as we consider the biblical depiction of a church expanding to every people group and language, while simultaneously becoming more rooted in the Scriptures and building itself up to maturity. What are the most foundational functions that, when the church implements them at scale, will result in a global church that becomes established in every people, with trustworthy Bible translations in every language variant where one is needed? Perhaps something like the following:

1. **Equip to become obedient disciples:** This is the essence of the biblical model of church and mission, where disciples are equipped (by establishing them in the gospel and apostolic teaching and encouraging them to persevere through hardship) such that they are able to build themselves up in unity to maturity in Christ while simultaneously multiplying disciples and expanding the church into every people group and language.
2. **Equip to understand the Bible:** In order for God's family to be able to grow to full maturity, they need freedom to access and use biblical resources and technologies that facilitate their ability to understand Scripture as an integral aspect of the ministry of the church to one another.
3. **Equip to translate the Bible:** In order for the entire global church to be able to understand Scripture, they must be equipped to know how to apply the foundational principles of Bible translation as a hermeneutical community engaged in an ongoing translation-oriented dialog around the meaning of Scripture, how to communicate it faithfully in their languages, and how to obey it as disciples of King Jesus.

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124 Ibid. § "Introduction: The Power of Simple Rules."

125 Ibid. The authors relate a memorable example of simple rules in action. "After publishing a string of best-selling books, including *The Botany of Desire* and *The Omnivore's Dilemma*, University of California professor and author Michael Pollan distilled his nutritional insights into three simple rules: "Eat food. Not too much. Mostly plants." By "food" Pollan means real food—vegetables, fruits, nuts, whole grains, and meat and fish—rather than what he calls "edible food-like substances" found in the processed-food aisles of the grocery store. This rules out anything your great-grandmother wouldn't recognize as food, any product with ingredients a thirdgrader cannot pronounce, or any meal that arrives through the window of your car" (Ibid., ch. 1).

126 Ibid.

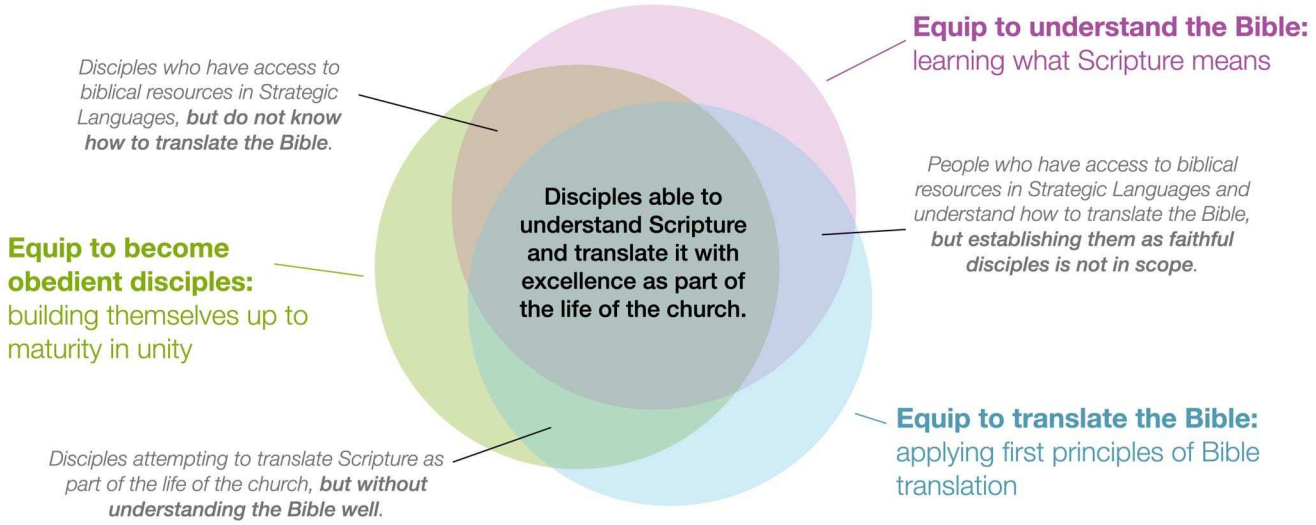

Diagram 24: Equipping the Family of God for the Mission of God

As illustrated in the diagram above, when the global church is equipped for all these functions, the church will, in time, be established in every people group, with the Bible in every language.

7. Conclusion

In the first section of this paper, we considered two different scenarios that represent the theological formation endpoints where "Bible translation by the church" is occurring. On the one extreme (represented by the scenario in Indonesia), the lingual church already has significant theological capacity and biblical understanding throughout a rich network of trained leaders and mature disciples of Jesus. We noted that, in such scenarios—and with the introduction of an effective translation methodology, appropriate computer technologies, and adequate biblical resources in a language that they understand—the lingual church is likely to be able to rapidly produce a trustworthy Bible translation in their language.

But in the second extreme (represented by the scenario in Chad), the lingual church is very young, and their few leaders have almost no understanding of Scripture and only minimal theological capacity. In such scenarios, the well-intended efforts of outsiders to "accelerate Bible translation" is rooted in the belief that publishing a translation is an essential prerequisite to the lingual church's ability to engage in Scripture. This reflects the assumptions of a paradigm of Bible translation that existed when speakers of languages without translated Scripture were more generally monolingual and the church was much less expansive and missionally oriented than it is today. Furthermore, we noted that it is unwise to accelerate Bible translation production beyond the theological and translation capacity of the lingual church for whom it is intended, because when it happens, the only people who have the necessary linguistic ability to confirm the translation's trustworthiness do not yet have the Bible translation capacity to do so reliably.

Instead, we have considered a fundamentally different paradigm of "Bible translation by the church." In this paradigm, multilingual engagement in the Scriptures in a theologically formative and translation-informed process increases the lingual church's capacity for understanding Scripture and their ability to translate it faithfully into their own languages. In this way, and by providing for their increasing translation ability through multiple iterations of their translation, the acceleration of their Bible translation production does not surpass their capacity to reliably and confidently affirm its trustworthiness. We refer to this paradigm as "Church-Centric Bible Translation."

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