

UBS STANDARDS

Bible Society heritage

All over the world and in most sectors of the Christian population there are certain characteristics for which Bible Society is known - things that are synonymous with the letters UBS. People use phrases like 'of course', 'as one would expect' and 'it goes without saying'.

The first of these characteristics is our commitment to get the Scriptures out to as many people as possible who want and can benefit from them. But for many people, the next characteristic, even before our commitment to 'no doctrinal note and comment' or our commitment to serve the whole church of Christ regardless of differences in tradition and teaching, would be our *commitment to quality in technical and scholarly matters related to the Scriptures*.

For many ministers, their first introduction to Bible Society is the Greek or Hebrew text they study in seminary. Their seminary teachers tell them that these are 'the best' texts, that they are reliable, professionally sound, academically respectable. And the image is built up that 'you can trust Bible Society', that we have a long history, that we know what we're doing. We're the experts, and we're not some hole-in-the-wall operation that will be here today and gone tomorrow.

To a lesser but still very significant degree, the same attitude has prevailed with regard to our editions of the Scriptures in languages other than the originals, whether it be the King James or Xhosa. Even when scholars or church authorities have disagreed with our emphases on common language and functional equivalence translations, they know that, within the objectives and parameters of the task we set out to accomplish, *we will do a quality job*.

Only the best is good enough

To a very large extent all this is the result of a commitment, dating back into the mists of Bible Society history, that *only the best is good enough for the Scriptures*, that they deserve our best work and the highest standards. Before we were born this was being worked out, painstakingly, in the translation and manuscript offices in London, New York and Germany. Infinite care (and in its day, incalculable expense) went into the preparation of Scripture texts, whether the recipients were in universities, in fashionable salons or in the African bush.

And in our more recent history it has been the commitment and absolute conviction of people like Dr. Gene Nida that have helped to maintain our reputation as the Bible translation 'professionals', while the work has grown and diversified almost beyond belief. This fundamental conviction that only the best is good enough for the Bible has led to a commitment to training both national translators and translation consultants, in biblical languages and scholarship, and in the newer science of linguistics. It has produced the need for adequate revision and checking procedures - a commitment to *take the time get it right*.

Today's demands

Most of what is outlined above pertains to Bible Society work that we now label 'Translation', whether it is the team of UBS professionals scattered around the world as Translation Consultants, or the specialisms that still exist, for historical reasons, in Germany, New York or England. But, of course, Bible Society work is much more than translation. (Indeed, in the early days of the movement it wasn't technical input in the translation process at all. That was a later

development.) We have traditionally used two other terms for the subsequent stages - production and distribution. But then there are the other practical necessities of any organization - finance, administration, personnel and, in today's world, computers and information services.

In our 'Coca-Cola Society', too, the demands made on Bible Society by the churches, and the evident needs of the population, are rather different from in the past. At one time it could be assumed that the development of a country meant that individuals could (eventually) be expected to be literate enough to cope with 'the big black book'. And it was assumed that everyone wanted that level of literacy and would want the added prestige of 'a Christian education'. Now that is certainly not true in the historically 'developed' nations of the world. And the influence of these nations, through their economic power and the diffusion of TV, radio, fashion, popular music, and all the trappings of the consumer society, has meant that these changed values are also evident in less affluent nations. All this before we even think about militantly anti-Christian nations.

So Bible Societies now produce selections, portions, children's scriptures, new reader materials, songs, audio scriptures, even videos, posters, bookmarks, calendars, jigsaw puzzles, colouring books. And they need to promote their work, using today's techniques, in order to reach publics effectively, and to have the prayer and financial backing to go on doing these things and more in the future.

Commitment to quality

As we plan our work for today and tomorrow, in the circumstances in which we find ourselves, we do so in the context of our Bible Society heritage.

We need to ask ourselves whether we are committed to the same standards of excellence in today's tasks that were evident in the work of our forebears.

We may say, 'But the needs are so great.' They have always been great.

'There is so little money.' There has never been enough.

*The long-term result of our answer to this question will be whether, in the future, people will still say, **'You can trust Bible Society.'***

Happily, there is much evidence that people *will* still be able to say that. Massive efforts have gone into providing human and technical resources that will help us to be effective in our work today. It takes a very long time in an organization as diverse as UBS, and where every member is a voluntary and autonomous entity, to introduce new initiatives that will benefit the whole. But it is happening. Take the field of computers as an example.

In the field of computers a lot of work went into researching (and re-researching in this fast-changing world) systems that would help the fraternity and each Society, appropriately, to manage its operations electronically. Many Society personnel have been or are being trained by regional specialists in the new budgeting and accounting systems. There are some places where it is still not feasible either to maintain the data or to have fully trained personnel for these functions, and in these circumstances a higher level of support can be given from the Regional Centres. But we are certainly on the way to having a global network that will help national Societies and regional and global functionaries to manage their work economically in tomorrow's world.

Computers in Publishing

Or take the even newer field of CAP (Computer Assisted Publishing), and with which the present writer is more familiar. Huge strides have been taken in a relatively short space of time, for an organization that is not a centrally run multinational.

CAP provides a system and a service for structuring any (primarily Scripture) text being developed for publication, in any language, in such a way that the computer can assist in checking the integrity of the text, and finally be the channel through to the finished publication ready for printing or other duplication. And the text only needs to be keyed once, for efficient selection and manipulation in a whole multitude of ways.

The emphasis has been on having *specialists who are themselves fully trained professionals and up-to-date in the developments in their fields*, who can first experiment and prototype what may be most appropriate in national contexts. Then, depending on the level of need in those national contexts, the strategy is to recommend appropriate hardware and software, ensure that adequately trained personnel are available, and then, as a regular on-going commitment, respond to problems, further needs, up-grades in hardware, software and training.

It needs to be stressed that, certainly in CAP in the Americas, this has not 'just happened' as new technologies became available, but it has been a very careful strategy.

The beginning was a *UBS conviction and commitment*.

Then came a *commitment to the professional necessities* of the new technology (which is the only way it can serve us economically).

In taking the technology from global and regional to national levels, certain criteria are used:

- * *Do the needs for local development of scriptures justify investment in any level of CAP hardware, software or personnel?*
- * *If this is first-time scripture being produced by a translation team, how adequate are the local possibilities of power supply?*
- * *What are the options for professional, technical support in the country and personal support in the Bible Society?*
- * *Is there a possibility of one Society also serving others in this field?*
- * *Is there enough need to justify some kind of Desk Top Publishing (DTP) operation?*
(The Ventura Publisher package for instance. Experts say that unless a person will use the software for 30% of his/her normal working hours it is not cost-effective to use the program. You will simply not reach the level of competence necessary to produce a good return on your initial investment in hardware, software and training. So Bible Societies have not been encouraged to invest in Ventura unless a realistic estimate of current work shows this level of use.)
- * *What quality of printer is needed for the work that will be done?*
- * *What other software packages for text and design will be needed for the work in hand or planned for the immediate future?*
- * *Are the right level of capable staff available and will time be allowed for adequate training?*

For the technology is no use without the right people. It would be a simple waste of precious resources.

It is on the basis of answers to these questions that UBS specialists recommend what is the best use of local or global funds for that Society. This method of working stems not only from a *commitment to seeing the most effective and cost-effective use of new technology in the Bible cause, but also from a commitment to quality and professional standards in the Bible cause.* The Bible deserves the best.

Quality in our expanding Bible Society world

So much for the most obvious new technologies. But what of all the other areas that, because of the changed circumstances in the wider world, we are now venturing into at various levels in our Bible Society world?

What are the expectations we ought to have, and what are the standards we ought to be working to, in the fields that most concern us in The Bible Distributor:

- * **fund-raising** and promotion of Bible needs around the world, including local fund-raising for local projects?
- * production of **Scripture materials**, often in colour, including graphic design, creation and editing of non-Bible text and 'bridge materials' for particular audiences, illustration, photography, preparation of final artwork, colour separation, colour printing, different styles of finishing and binding?
- * scripting, recording and production of **audio** cassettes either for sale or for promotion?
- * scripting, filming and production of **videos**?
- * newspapers and **magazines**, newsletters, flyers, posters? **direct mail** techniques?
- * material for **radio and TV**?
- * planning and development of **Human Needs Centred Scriptures** (HNCS) programmes - appropriate new scripture materials for current local needs?
- * **promotion** of all these materials to their publics?
- * levels of **customer service** and supply to these publics?

These are the projects that our trained, quality CAP, Translation and other efforts are going into. CAP, Translation, or any other aspect of Bible Society work, do not exist on their own, and the *market judgment on their work will be determined by all these other elements.*

Do we have criteria for evaluating the local situation, and established standards in these areas too?

Do we know what they are?

Are we committed to them locally, regionally, globally?

Do we equip our staff in the same way we equip our translation personnel and teams?

Are we demonstrating our commitment to quality: that the Bible deserves the best?

This a challenge facing all of us, at all levels in Bible Society management and governance. And it is a specific challenge to the editors and readers of this journal.

Can we look at some of these functions of our Bible Society ministry, in future issues, helping to establish concrete criteria for evaluating local situations, and quality standards for each discipline?

Can you write up and send examples of how you have tackled this challenge in your own local circumstances, and your own role?

Local needs, global standards?

This is a sensitive area and truly a very difficult one. National Bible Societies are autonomous entities and rightly resist too much interference from outside. But Bible Societies' membership in the UBS fellowship also implies a *commitment to the values and policies of that fellowship*. We know there are cases where the global fellowship has decided that national Societies no longer display their willing commitment to the policies of the fellowship, and they have been excluded. So there *are* norms that are required by membership of the fellowship.

These norms are put into practice all the time in the professional commitment of the translation specialists. If a translation is not 'up to UBS standards', it does not have UBS or a national Bible Society's name put on it. If the language group is so small that the Translations staff consider a translation project would not justify UBS investment, we put our money into something else. When a new translation is ready for publication, our translation personnel insist that we invest infinite care and attention in making sure that what finally appears in print is as accurate as is humanly (and now technologically) possible to the text approved as a 'UBS translation'. In many cases these *standards are not dictated by the local church or target audience, and in some cases not even by the national Societies*.

These are *global standards that are part of the nature of our fellowship*.

'Our reputation is at stake,' we say.

Going local

As we look forward to the continuing decentralization and localization of many tasks that have perhaps been 'UBS' or 'specialized', and certainly the continued shifting of responsibility for many functions from the regional to the national level, this issue of standards is crucial. Again the world of computers in publishing can give us helpful examples.

In the last few years, anyone who produced text displayed in some visual way, has fallen in love with Desk Top Publishing. It has been an intense and often whirlwind affair. But there is an enormous swell of professional opinion that now admits that they got some things wrong, and they are doing their best to pick up the pieces. Quite simply the sales potential of the field overrode professional wisdom. While many small-run newsletters may now be better produced than they once were, there have never been more 'atrocities' committed in the name of technological progress - in typography, graphic design, and print production. In some sense, a technological 'monster' has been let loose and it is doubtful that it will ever be recaptured. People have invested vast quantities of money, time and frustration to do what used to be attributed to human committees - produce a camel, when they were trying to design a horse. All this has come about because *powerful professional tools became available to untrained non-specialists*. And it has cost millions.

The opportunities presented by new and much cheaper possibilities in the fields of computer design, image scanning, typesetting, instantprint, video production and editing, are exciting. But they bring great dangers if used uneconomically and unprofessionally. They could cost UBS millions, and we could end up producing camels.

The response to these dangers is already available in the criteria and strategy we have been using to evaluate and develop the CAP function. (Here at least we did not let loose the 'monster' - at

least not knowingly! And obviously no one is trying to regulate all local purchase and use of software.)

Situation analysis

1. Local needs

- * Realistically, how much work in this area is going to be possible over, say, the next 5 years?
- * What kind of projects/publications, requiring what skills?
- * Is it going to be more cost-effective to do this work in-house?
(Costs of hardware, software, personnel, training)
Or to buy at least some of it in from outside?
(In which case personnel need to be available and trainable in the skills of buying these services)
- * Does the local context make it possible, to the standards we wish to achieve?
(Electricity supply, maintenance of equipment when it breaks down, some level of local professional and/or technical support or training)
- * Is the need great enough to separate the human and financial resources necessary to do the job to an adequate level?
- * What would be the likely consequence if we did NOT do this?
- * What are our concrete expectations if we DO do this?
- * Could someone else do this better than we can?
- * Should we be working cooperatively with another entity?

2. Local resources

- * Will the Bible Society be able to budget for the necessary training of existing personnel for whatever new functions are to be undertaken (whether buying in skills or actually doing the job)?
- * Do the personnel have the appropriate gifts and aptitudes to benefit from the training and reach the necessary skill levels?
- * Will they have the time to do it properly, especially if they have other responsibilities as well?
- * Is it going to be necessary and possible to recruit new staff?
- * Are they likely to come with training and experience or will the Society have to provide and pay for that?
(i.e. Do the skills exist in easy supply in the country?)
- * Is it going to be possible to retain these staff?
(i.e. Can the Society afford to pay the kind of salary and provide the kind of professional stimulus and opportunities to ensure that the BS gets an acceptable return on the investment of recruiting, training and orientation?)
- * Should we be seeking help from a sister Bible Society? Or could we offer help?

If the answers to these questions give us a 'green light' for significant development of particular functions or projects within a local Society, then we should be putting together realistic and comprehensive plans to equip Societies to handle whatever functions are most needed in their country. This is already happening in many ways, though more careful assessment and planned implementation are needed.

But if the answers give us reason to question the feasibility (in economics or in standards) of such developments in local situations right now, we need to be brave enough to say so. This is only like saying that it will not pay you to use Ventura Publisher unless you use it at least 30% of your working time. It is not an insult, it is a practicality. And only in this way will we be able to say of other areas than our translation work, that this is 'up to UBS standards', be glad to see our name on it, and know that our publics will continue to trust us into the future. These are enormous investments we are talking about, and we should not undertake them without the forethought that Jesus recommended in his example of the man building the tower, or the king planning a battle.

Thinking global

Globally, regionally and nationally we are responsible for the proper use of UBS funds. If our supporters see evidence to the contrary, those funds will be withdrawn. For this reason it may sometimes be the case that, *although all the new initiatives might be possible at the local level, they may not all be recommendable.*

Sometimes we will be dealing with issues of economy of scale, sometimes it will be the particular problems of the very expensive media. This is the way the business world has learnt to work. A British TV channel might prefer to produce its own programme on a subject, but it would not be cost-justifiable when a Stateside programme already exists that is 'more or less' doing the same job. Not exactly, but not so far off that it justifies reinventing the wheel. The same happens, all over the world, with any of the media or production industries.

Again this is a very sensitive issue, but it needs to be faced squarely. *No Bible Society should be spending any more than is absolutely necessary to meet the identified needs of its own publics.* The principle is common to all Societies, rich or poor. And each has the right, supported or supporting, within the fellowship, to question the other on this issue (and they do!), while respecting the autonomy of the individual Society.

In the context of the Americas Region, for example, it is inconceivable that we will see all national Societies producing original material for TV. But it is quite conceivable that it could be done globally or regionally and dubbed/subtitled as necessary. The same is true in video and in colour publishing. And with adequate planning it is possible to include the specific requests of individual nations. This is how TV companies and book packagers survive. It does not mean 'Take what is given to you and don't complain!' But it does require the establishing of proper planning procedures.

For this reason *UBS must continue to do some things at global, some at regional, some at national level.* We need to do the cost-benefit analysis for every individual case. There is no economic alternative.

Starting now

It has been said many times that local Bible Societies have developed enormously in the past decade. (That probably means we have been doing a few things right, at global, regional and local level!) It is time for many regional functions to be relocated in national Societies. Everyone is agreed on and committed to the principle. What we need to tackle right now are the **practicalities of all the necessary individual functions for all the individual Societies.** It is an enormous task.

We have been concerned for the stewardship of UBS funds at global and regional level. *We must be very careful to assess the use of UBS funds and maintenance of UBS standards as and when we transfer those functions to national level.*

There are no quick, easy solutions.

It is going to take a lot of time and a lot of resourcing to achieve the best balance of global, regional and national functions.

What we need is not a simple decision that, e.g., all colour selections and printed portions, from idea to printed copy, will henceforth be done locally and all regional provision withdrawn. **We need the assessment and resourcing of the national situation before we can be sure that economy and standards can be maintained.** In the meantime the Societies, if they want printed materials right now, must be able to get them from outside. The same is true of all the other functions we have mentioned.

It is a long process. We have begun. Global and regional circumstances have focused our concentration on, and commitment to, the process. But it cannot all be achieved tomorrow, and **global economies and standards need always to be held in balance with the priority of the local situation.**

We must assess and we must plan before we do, because the Bible deserves the best.

In that way, as we enter the 21st century, our publics will still trust Bible Society to get it right. Our reputation is at stake.

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