

Communication and Dialogue

I suspect this is not very well known but today is International Translation Day. This was set up by the International Federation of Translators to promote the work of the translation profession. The 30th of September was chosen because that is the feast day of St Jerome, considered the patron saint of translators. Jerome lived between about 342 and 420 and his great achievement was to translate the Bible from the original Hebrew and Greek into Latin. His version known as the Vulgate was the standard for centuries. Jerome's work thus made the Bible more accessible to the Western world.

However, it was not until the sixteenth-century that the Bible became available to ordinary people in their own language. Very few could read the Scriptures in the original language or even in Latin. The work of individuals and organisations such as the Bible Society to translate the Bible into all languages has thus been a very important part of Christian evangelism and mission. The inspiration for this work is at least in part the events of Pentecost recorded at the beginning of our reading from the Acts of the Apostles when those present heard the good news of the Gospel in their own language.

There are very many different languages in the world. Translation is very much an art. It is not always easy to translate directly from one language to another. There are often nuances in meaning to take into account, as well as cultural and social differences. The opportunity for misunderstanding is very great. In such situations that danger can be at best embarrassing, at worst catastrophic.

That is not least the case where conflicts are concerned. Military solutions to conflicts are rarely successful. Ultimately the different parties involved have to sit around a table and talk to one another. There has to be a real and meaningful dialogue if barriers are to be overcome and peace and reconciliation achieved. In this the work of translators and interpreters cannot be underestimated. Their role is essential for mutual understanding where different languages are involved.

Of course misunderstanding can occur when the different parties speak the same language but have different backgrounds, different perceptions, different prejudices. The role of the mediator, the reconciler, is thus not at all easy. A lot of hard work goes on behind the scenes. And yet people must continue to talk. Our hope and prayer is that the work and determination of those who facilitate that process may lead to success.

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