
Towards the dedication¹

“Vers la dédicace” planning and discussions in DRC

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In the Democratic Republic of Congo, we have dedicated one New Testament and are in the process of working towards three more dedications over the coming few years. We are developing a concept which we call “*Vers la dédicace*” (Towards the dedication).

Each Bible translation project has a language committee. For the “Vers la dédicace” meetings, such a language committee includes the local chiefs and other influential people in the church and society at large.

The dedication of the New Testament should be a wonderful celebration, but it should also be much more than that. It is about a change of mind, heart and life, individually as well as corporately. So, together we reflect and explore questions like these:

- What would you like the place of this NT to be in the everyday life of the church?
- What is the place of mother-tongue use in today’s church and society?
- Which format should the NT be published in (oral or written or both)?
- What materials should be available in the mother tongue by the time of the dedication?
- Who can already read in the mother tongue? How can reading and writing in the mother tongue become a part of everyday life in church and society, and why should it?
- Do you want to continue publishing literature in the mother tongue after the end of such a project, and if so how?

As an outcome of such meetings we are hoping that the committee will not only come up with a plan for dedication, but beyond that for the use of the NT in churches and society, with a plan for use of the mother tongue in the society and church and with a plan of how to get there.

We are in the preparation phase of a research program using a research tool which has been developed for local use by a consultant in socio-linguistics living and working in DRC. Local Scripture Use and literacy workers as well as churches are involved in the actual data collection and later on in the evaluation of the data. The outcome will hopefully help us all to determine good strategies for each situation to enhance the use of the Scriptures in general and of

¹ This article is a revision of: Gottschlich, Bettina. 2009. “‘Vers la dédicace’ (Towards dedication)’ *Scripture in Use Today* 17:11-12.

mother-tongue Scriptures in particular, in order to see individuals and the churches built up in their faith.

As we have begun talking with committees:

- The value of oral presentation has become very apparent.
- Radio programs and cassettes with Scripture and music are a favourite way of using the mother tongue.
- Scripture songs using traditional and modern music styles are another favourite.
- Books, especially books with lots of pictures, are much desired (for example a picture dictionary, the 'Jesus the Messiah' book, local and traditional stories with pictures).
- The School Bible curriculum for children in primary schools is much appreciated as well as the Bible study booklet for women "The challenge of being a woman".
- People would like a special cloth for the dedication.
- They like the idea of competition in terms of sales of the NT before and after the dedication, with a special price for those who order their NT ahead of time.
- Church leaders like the idea of training their students in the Bible Schools, so they come out knowing how to read and write their language. They like seminars which show them how to read and write their language combined with skills for their ministry: Bible studies, key terms lists, training in preaching, the use of cassettes and other media. They like seminars on issues relevant to the church at that time (trauma, dealing with various issues resulting from culture, issues on finances, etc.).

One of the challenges has been that the local literacy workers and translators who have been working in these translation projects full-time are wondering what the "end of the project" means for them personally in terms of their future after the dedication. This needs discussing and processing well before the dedication.