

SPREADING THE BIBLE AROUND THE WORLD

by Rev. Donald L. Rose

Christian denominations may differ on matters of ritual and doctrine, but there are vital things on which they heartily agree. One of them is the importance of the spread of the Bible among the peoples of this planet. It is a sacred responsibility.

We support and applaud the Bible societies of the world. Their mission is to print Bibles and also somehow to get them to people around the world. A huge factor in this world of thousands of millions people is that we are divided into different languages.

The top two languages are Chinese and English. Chinese has a billion native speakers (subdivided into five dialects). English has 350 million. When the King James Bible was published (back in Shakespeare's day) English was mother tongue to only five to seven million people and was outstripped by French, German, Spanish and Italian. Today it has almost as many speakers as those four put together. (This is from *The Miracle of Language* by Richard Lederer.) But there is reason to believe that those who use English as a preferred second language outnumber those to whom it is the native language! This is a vital consideration in Bible distribution priorities. Consider India. It has fifteen official languages and hundreds of local languages and dialects. Necessarily major newspapers are printed in English.

There are eight other languages that are native tongue to more than a hundred million people. In descending numerical order they are Hindustani, Russian, Spanish, Japanese, German, Indonesian, Portuguese, French. (This is from *Native Tongues* by Charles Berlitz.)

The entire Bible is now translated into some 280 languages, and portions of the Scriptures have been printed in hundreds more.

25 million Bibles have now been printed in China. This is reported in the June/July issue of the American Bible Society *Record*. This issue features George Gallup who reports that 93 percent of Americans own a Bible, while about 40 percent read the Scriptures at least once a week. He laments a current lack of Scriptural knowledge and says that it is the duty of the Christian churches to fill today's vacuum.

My own denomination has reason to support Bible distribution. When Emanuel Swedenborg published his religious books he directed that any financial proceeds should go to the cause of spreading the Bible. The money went to a precursor of the British and Foreign Bible Society which was founded in 1804.

Swedenborg wrote of the historic importance of the Bible in the world, the invention of printing being "provided by the Lord for the sake of the Word." The first printed book, of course, was the Gutenberg Bible in 1456.

In his book *Divine Providence* Swedenborg said that the commerce of Europeans who sailed to distant lands was under the providence of God partly because it brought the reading of the Scriptures to far-flung corners of the globe. It was of God's providence that portions of the Bible are incorporated in the Koran. He said that on the spiritual level the human race benefited by the reverent reading of the Old Testament in its original language by Hebrew speaking people.

He said that Bible reading on earth brings about the presence of angels and radiates a kind of light into human minds among people of all nations.

"Crusade of Light" is this year's motto for the work of the American Bible Society. More power to this and similar crusades.

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