

Vision 2025 Rapidly Accelerating the Pace of Bible Translation

An Interview with Bob Creson, Wycliffe Bible Translators



Bob Creson is president of Wycliffe Bible Translators USA. He was interviewed by Darrell Dorr, managing editor of Mission Frontiers, during a May 18 visit to the U.S. Center for World Mission.

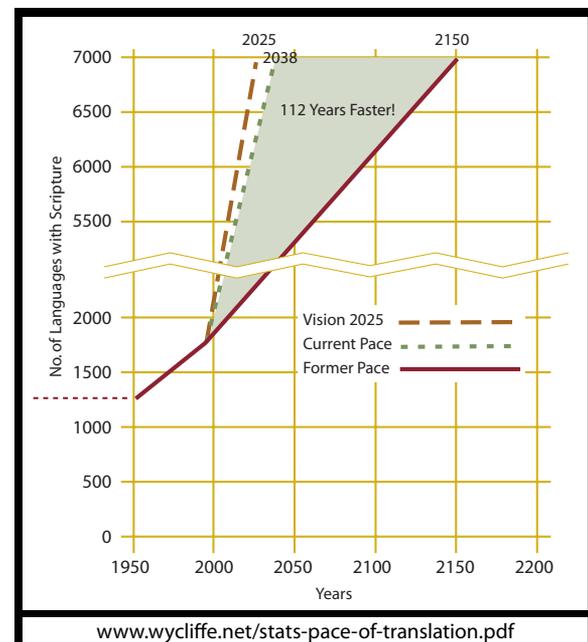
MF: Let's talk first about Vision 2025, Wycliffe's plan to see Bible translation begun by 2025 in every language community that needs it. How's this progressing? What are your metrics, and how do you monitor where you are?

Creson: We knew when we set this goal that we didn't have the systems in place or capacity to accomplish the vision, so we've been building our capacity to accomplish the vision and building the systems to help us measure progress. Our major partner, SIL International (formerly known as the Summer Institute of Linguistics), has developed a Language Program Database to gather information from our field entities and partner organizations. That information is transmitted to Dallas periodically, and once a year our International Administration compiles and evaluates it, looking for particular markers we've developed. Before we adopted Vision 2025 in 1999, the pace of Bible translation was on a trajectory of the year 2150 by which to begin Bible translation in each language still needing it, but we're now on a 2038 pace – a dramatic change.

MF: As you and other Wycliffe leaders have stepped back and looked at Vision 2025, have you

identified existing or likely bottlenecks? Where are the most vulnerable areas you need to shore up?

Creson: One major question is how we're going to be able to finance colleagues from local language communities and workers in Wycliffe Organizations in Latin America, Africa, Asia, and the Pacific. That's huge for us right now. We're putting a lot of effort in trying to figure that one out. That's



part of a larger business plan Wycliffe and SIL have developed. We've looked at the world and identified three basic types of language programs to fund. First, there's the classic program, the one-on-one approach, one team with one language. The second: larger number of languages will be tackled in a cluster approach, where a group of languages is brought together – sometimes they're related, and sometimes they're not. The third approach is where, at least at first, instead of a full

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New Testament we seek to provide what we call "limited scope" translation. So we've assigned a price tag to these three basic approaches, and total estimates range upwards of

several billion dollars worldwide.

MF: So in terms of bottlenecks, financing of national workers would be the first to note within this business plan.

Creson: Consultants will also be a bottleneck for us.

MF: Identifying them and training them?

Creson: Yes.

MF: Let's talk about your workforce of North American missionaries. Where are your new workers coming from, and what kinds of issues are they dealing with? What, if anything, are you doing differently in missionary recruitment?

Creson: One of the things we've rediscovered recently is that it's in the one-on-one recruitment, with the personal touch, where people really are motivated to mission. Many people in Wycliffe can identify a person that they talked to somewhere along the way as the primary person God used to motivate them to get in contact with Wycliffe. So we're spending time in re-engineering our personnel systems to re-emphasize one-on-one recruitment and processing of personnel, and we no longer have one team recruiting people and another team processing those recruits. The old system was creating a fair amount of confusion for them.

MF: You're talking about Wycliffe USA.

Creson: Yes, this is just USA. Two years ago we had the best year we've ever had in 12 years in terms of recruitment. It looks as if this year we're on target to equal that or maybe better it. Another issue we're re-evaluating is how we qualify people. Some of the things we're doing are very helpful,

and while we're not going to lower our standards, we've got to look at other things and ask if these are really inhibiting or preventing people from being part of Wycliffe.

MF: For example?

Creson: Well, college debt – we've had very restrictive guidelines for how much debt you can have, but we've been discovering that if we're too restrictive we eliminate a lot of people that could potentially join us. So we liberalized our standards for school debt, designing ways for a reasonable amount to be reduced through our normal support systems.

MF: So what are your ceilings for student debt at this point?

Creson: We allow a maximum of \$24,000 for singles and \$36,000 for couples. Another thing we've had to take a look at is our retirement policy, partially because these days we're approached by more and more mid- or late-career people

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who want to join Wycliffe. However, they might not have an adequate retirement program according to our previous standards. We're also seeking to increase our ethnic diversity by removing barriers that inhibit participation in Wycliffe by Latino, African-American, and Asian communities. We're not doing this because this is the politically correct thing to do, but because we believe God wants as many people from as many communities involved in what He's doing around the world as possible. We don't want to be a hindrance to that.

MF: So where *are* your new people now coming from?

Creson: Second-career people are a big emphasis for us now. We're trying to attract people who have the financial resources to be able to leave a job, be self-supporting and make a contribution in a new career in Wycliffe. One of the reasons we relocated our U.S. headquarters from southern California to Orlando was so we could tap into the retirees who move down to Florida from the cold states during the winters.

MF: Have your expectations been fulfilled on that front?

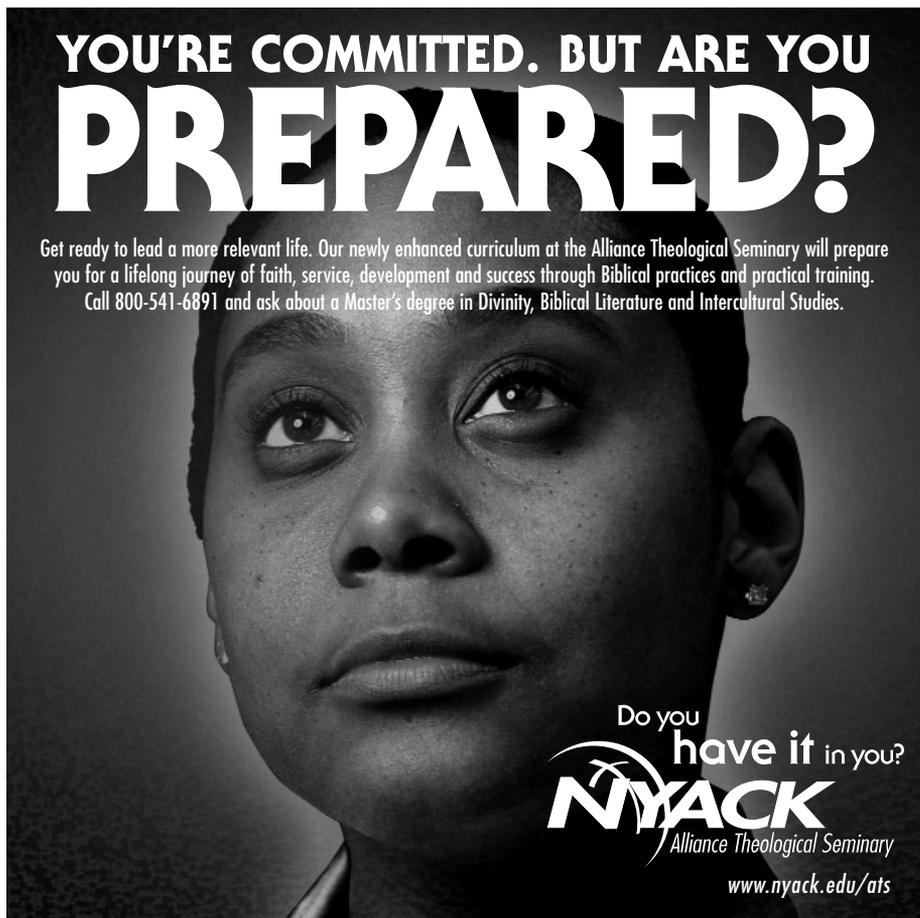
Creson: Yes, it's been huge, and we work closely with Wycliffe Associates to "mobilize" this group and maximize their contribution.

MF: If you were to identify 3-4 world regions where Wycliffe has either had special difficulties or for which you'd especially like to deploy new workers and energies, what would these be? Which cultural blocs or geographical regions would make it to the top of your list?

Creson: Three areas of the world encompass 80% of the remaining Bible translation needs. First, Central Africa – primarily Nigeria, Cameroon, Central African Republic – there are probably about 800 languages in this area. The second region is from northern India to southern China – probably another 800 languages there. Then

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there's the band of islands in Asia, from Sumatra clear across to Papua New Guinea – there are 1000 languages there.

MF: These regions are tops in terms of numerical need?

Creson: Yes, but they also present special challenges for access and long-term presence and educating children. We've had major strategy sessions to look at how we've traditionally lived and worked and to consider new options for the future. Now what does God want us to do? Can we work remotely, can we work and train offshore, can we find different ways of tackling Bible translation – workshop programs, temporary presence, coming and going? All this costs more money; Vision 2025 has a high price tag attached to it. But you know God is going to accomplish what He says He is going to accomplish if you're committed to Revelation 7:9 – a vision of every tongue, tribe, and people group worshipping before His throne. 🌐

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