(Open Source) (Mission)

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May 25, 2007
version 1.2

I.   The Need

As many have noted, the center of the Christian world is shifting away from Europe/North America to the developing regions of Asia, Africa and Latin America. The evangelical population of Africa, Latin America and Asia represent nearly 60% of all evangelicals worldwide.[1] This ascension is fueled by remarkable church growth in these regions.

Nowhere has the growth been more apparent in recent years than in China. The numbers are staggering. In 1949, there were approximately 1 million Christians in China. Today, conservative estimates place the number of Christians at approximately 50 million.[2] Some have even estimated this number as high as 100 million.[3] The contrast is stark when you compare this growth to most of Western Europe where church attendance has been below 2% for decades.

This means that the evangelical church worldwide today and in the foreseeable future will be no longer a primarily Western institution. Philip Jenkins reinforces this point in his book, The Next Christendom

"Christianity will enjoy a worldwide boom in the new century but the vast majority of believers will be neither white nor European, nor Euro-American." [4]

Yet, the vast majority of reformed based Christian materials are published in English and not accessible to most of these believers due to a language barrier. While church growth in these emerging regions is impressive, the lack of sound doctrine is a concern for many churches and Christian organizations operating in those regions. The lack of supplemental materials to train and encourage new converts in the basic doctrines of Christianity is a substantial problem. In our opinion, if unaddressed, this deficit in biblically rich, gospel centered materials will have a detrimental effect on the church worldwide.

The need for bible translations have long been accepted but it is also important to translate secondary, supporting materials to strengthen the doctrinal foundations of the church. In the reformed tradition, we have built upon knowledge and works of prior generations. However, in the case of this rapidly developing church in Africa, Asia and Latin America, this progression is impeded by the translation gap. If the current translation issue is left unsolved, the Christians in these regions will develop their own doctrinal constructs without the benefit of prior reformed works as a reference point.

II.   Limitations of Current Translation Models

Over the years, there has been substantial time and resources poured into enabling translation of books and articles into other languages. However, despite the fine efforts of many publishers, the problem remains largely unsolved due the enormous challenge of translating into numerous languages and the cost of undertaking a translation project.

The fundamental issue is that the existing model for translation and distribution of Christian content is both limited and expensive.   Publishers often have to decide whether to undertake translation projects based on economic/financial parameters.   In practical terms, this means that books that do not sell well in the popular US market are not likely candidates for translation.   Unfortunately, this also means that not many reformed based books make the cut. This is no critique of Christian publishing but rather a statement of the economic realities they have to operate under.

The other challenge with the current model is the cost of distribution. Today, distributing Christian materials to other non-English speaking countries means printing and distributing a physical, hard copy book in the hands of the reader. The cost for doing so relative to the number of Christians in these nations makes it non-scaleable and economically infeasible. Furthermore, the price point of the books that are translated, printed and distributed overseas would typically make it prohibitive for the average Christian in many of these nations.

We believe there is a better way to solve the translation and distribution problem and humbly submit our approach as a viable way to do so.

III.   Open Source Mission Overview

Open Source Mission is a non profit initiative to enable translation of contemporary reformed books and articles from English to various languages through the power of mass collaboration. We believe that accessibility to biblically sound content is of strategic importance to the growth and vitality of the non-Western church.

There is an opportunity to effectively bring translated Christian materials to the non-Western world by taking advantage of technology innovation and an "open source", participatory model of translation. Our vision is to create a new, revolutionary, framework for translation by combining the following components:

- Global social network of volunteer translators
- Proven "open source" methodology
- Web 2.0 collaboration platform

What we hope to see are several ongoing translation projects fueled by the passion and skills of volunteer translators, resulting in an online reference portal of translated books and articles in a multitude of languages.   Imagine, if you would, a wikipedia of translated reformed works in multiple languages.

The distinctive focus of our mission is simple.

Mass Collaboration - We want to enable translation through the use of volunteer mass collaboration. We believe that technology advancement has opened unique opportunities for collaboration. Such models for successful collaboration have been proven in the commercial world. If we can successfully apply methodologies similar to those used in an open source software development like Linux or Web 2.0 projects like Wikipedia, we may have an opportunity to solve the translation challenge before us.

Contemporary Reformed Writings - We want to focus on contemporary reformed works. Our focus is to translate contemporary books and articles. We do not wish to initially focus on historical writings (i.e. Puritans, Reformers). There are sufficient hurdles in bridging the translation and cultural gap without undertaking the challenge of a historical gap as well.

Leveraging Technology - We want to leverage technology to make these materials accessible. We believe that the trajectory of technology adoption in the developing nations means that the most effective and inexpensive way to get materials to our fellow Christians in these nations is to provide this material on the web, searchable and cross referenced. We can then secondarily, partner with local publishers to make hardcopy materials available as well.

IV.   Open Source Mission – How It Works

One way of thinking about the Open Source Mission initiative is to view it as a framework of services to facilitate translation. OSM brings together in this framework, several components essential to success. While the idea behind OSM is relatively simple to grasp, there are in fact, numerous execution points required to launching and advancing this initiative. Each of these is discussed below:

- **Creating a Copyright Library**– One of the first essential steps in launching the project is to create a "library" of copyright permissions. These permissions include titles of books, articles, or topical excerpts. OSM will work with publishers to secure rights for these titles at the time of launch and on an ongoing basis. The creation and enhancement of this library is one way that OSM brings value to individual translators. It alleviates the need for them to seek out permissions for translation directly from publishers.

- **Building Translator Network Registry** – Building a registry of volunteer translators is the most important and challenging part of executing the OSM model. This registry is an active contact database of translators for each language. As part of the initial OSM initiative, this registry will be constructed via a series of programs launched through multiple channels – traditional christian media, christian organizations, churches, blogging community and personal introductions.   This social network of translators will be nurtured on an ongoing basis through moderated discussion groups for each language.

- **Developing OSM Wiki Platform** –The wiki platform technology will serve two purposes. It will permit project team members to collaborate effectively. Rather than permitting complete "open access" to create and edit content., under the OSM Wiki, the general public may read the content but only project team members may create, delete or edit content. It will host the translated information for general accessibility making the content searchable, cross reference linkable. Other technical requirements will be defined and listed in a separate document.

- **Defining & Refining "Open Source" Methodology** - Open source successes are dependent, not only on technology and people but also on the process that accompanies content development. A project is defined by the requirements of the project and the project team members. Unlike wikipedia, the content may only be created, modified and deleted by project team members. Team members include a team leader who ideally would not actually translate but instead review translated content, organize project assignments and qualify the translators. Depending on the size of the team, there may be separate roles for translators and reviewers. Each project cycle consists of four stages before general availability– project initiation, content development, quality review and beta.

- **Ongoing Promotion of the OSM initiative** – This involves promoting the overall goals of the initiative that will lead to gaining mindshare and traction in the Christian community. It will have the ongoing benefit of creating broader acceptance for the initiative and increasing the pool of potential translators. The ongoing promotion also involves drawing the interest and attention of the target audience through search engine optimization and third party references.

- **Other Important Factors** – Other components vital to the success of projects include the identification of translation leaders in each language group who can provide peer leadership. OSM facilitates the initiation and completion of projects by working with project translation leaders on the type of projects, the development schedule and any kind of third party help that may be needed to sustain or complete the project. Another vital component is provision of ongoing encouragement, reward and recognition for team members. While team members are not paid, it is intended that they would be rewarded by other means.

V. Join the Open Source Mission Initiative

There are many good initiatives for the sake of the gospel and we would like you to consider Open Source Mission among them. Without diminishing other worthy causes, we would like to make the following points and invite you to consider lending support to our initiative.

- **This is a critical need**.
  The rate of church growth in Asia, Africa and Latin America is unprecedented.
  Yet, many of these churches operate without the benefit of biblically sound,
  Christian materials that are vital to healthy church life.

- **We have the opportunity and responsibility to bridge the translation gap.**
  If we wish to see materials accessible to our non English speaking brothers and
  sisters in Christ, it is incumbent on us, who have the materials and resources to
  make it happen.

- **We can revolutionize the model for content translation and delivery**.
  Instead of employing the existing methods that are costly and limiting, we can
  change the way Christian content is translated and distributed.

- **You can make an impact to the global church**.
  As an individual, if you've ever wondered how you could contribute to making an
  impact to the church worldwide, OSM offers you a way to participate.

- **We need your help**.
  OSM runs on passion and initiative of volunteers. We cannot do this alone, nor
  do we wish to. We believe that one of the great benefits of OSM is the
  opportunity to collaborate with other like minded Christians as God brings them
  to us.

We see the concept of OSM as a gift from God and we simply want to faithfully steward the opportunity presented to us. The following are the various ways you can help us – please prayerfully consider joining our effort.

Translation

We are looking for individuals who can translate and collaborate with other translators. If you're bi-lingual and can either translate or review translated works, please contact us at info@opensourcemission.com

Technology Assistance

We are also looking for skilled individuals who can assist in website development and implementing the wiki technology. Please contact us at info@opensourcemission.com

Promotion and Connection

We are looking for individuals to promote the OSM initiative. You can do so in numerous ways:
- Forward this paper to others who may be interested. Please do not change the content of this paper or any other Open Source Mission materials. You can also refer them to our website – www.opensourcemission.com.
- If you're a blogger, please consider blogging about OSM. If you'd like to know what to blog about, please feel free to contact us.
- If you're a pastor, please consider promoting this initiative in your church. If you'd like to know how to do so, please feel free to contact us.
- Another way to help promote this initiative is by facilitating personal email introductions to other individuals who may be interested in participating as translators. You may email me at andre@opensourcemission.com

Appendix A: References & Contact Info

1. Strategy, Trends, Statistics – Table 1, Lausanne World Pulse, January, 2006.
    http://www.lausanneworldpulse.com/trendsandstatistics/01-2006

2. OMF website. China Profile.
    http://www.omf.org/uk/about_asia/countries/china/china_profile

3. The Next Christendom, Philip Jenkins, p 81. Referencing the U.S. State
    Department, International Religious Freedom survey.

4. The Next Christendom, Philip Jenkins, p2.

To learn more about Open Source Mission, please visit www.opensourcemission.com

We would love to hear from you. If you're interested in being involved, in supporting the initiative or in simply providing constructive feedback, please email to
andre@opensourcemission.com