

INTO ALL TECHNOLOGIES,
INTO ALL THE WORLD

Lane T. Dennis, PhD

Into All Technologies, Into All the World

Copyright © 2010 by Crossway

This address was originally given at the Faith Comes By Hearing “Digital Bible Summit,” March 25, 2010.

Published by Crossway

1300 Crescent Street

Wheaton, Illinois 60187

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publisher, except as provided for by USA copyright law.

INTO ALL TECHNOLOGIES,

INTO ALL THE WORLD

The purpose of this booklet is to address the topic of “Crossway’s Commitment to the Free Use and Development of the ESV Bible into All Technologies.” Rather than focus primarily on the technological details related to this question, my main focus will be on Crossway’s passion to reach people with the Gospel and the Truth of God’s Word – which is the driving force behind our use of technology and behind everything that we do at Crossway. With this as our purpose, I would like to begin this booklet by making the unusual request to ask if you would join with me in the following prayer:

Our dear Father in heaven,

We bow before You as the sovereign Lord of the universe, the Maker of heaven and earth. We are very conscious that we have no claim to come into Your presence, except by the work of Your Son, our Savior Jesus Christ. Father, we thank You that You saw us in our hopeless condition and that You sent Your Son to die on the cross for our sins. So it is through faith in Christ, and through faith in His

work on our behalf, that we come boldly into Your presence as our heavenly Father.

Father, we thank You likewise for the gift of Your Holy Word that You have entrusted to us to translate and to publish and to distribute. Father, we recognize that this is a task that is far beyond our ability to do in our own strength and by our own cleverness. We recognize that we can only do this work with reverence and awe, and with fear and trembling. Thus we pray that You would be pleased to provide the wisdom and the resources to accomplish this according to Your purposes.

Father, we are bold even to pray that You would use this moment in history to this end – that we may look back on these days as a time when You demonstrated Your presence through the outpouring of Your Holy Spirit and through Your provision in a dramatic way – for the sake of the Gospel and Your Word, and for Your glory alone.

For we pray these things through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever more. Amen.

When I read my Bible in the morning, I often have a deep sense of awe and gratitude – that God has been so gracious as to give us His Word; that I can actually hold the Word of God in my hands; and that we live in a land where we can freely read the Bible.

Into All Technologies, Into All the World

I often wonder: “What if I didn’t have a Bible?” How terribly sad it would be, if – for some reason – there was no way I could get a Bible, or that I didn’t even know that the Bible existed.

The Bible is the very Word of God! These are the words of eternal life! What a devastating thing it would be not to have the Bible!

Yet this is reality for more than one billion people in the country of China alone. This is the reality for another billion in India, in the nations of Africa, and in other parts of the world. Is there anything we can do to reach these billions with the Word of God? The massive need for Bibles around the world is so great that we sometimes feel immobilized by the magnitude of the challenge.

But there is something that we can do. In fact, there are *many* things that we can do. The problem is not finding something we can do. The problem is *allocating the resources that already exist* to reach the world with God’s Word.

Let me start by affirming that there are many things that need to be done to reach these billions of people with the Bible.

There is an urgent need to translate the Bible into the 2,000-plus languages into which not even a small

portion has been translated. May the Lord raise up a new generation of translators, and the massive support needed, to bring the Bible into every language of the world during this generation!

There is also an urgent need to reach the billions of people for whom the Bible *already* has been translated in their own language, but who do not even *know* that the Bible exists. Or who have *no way* to get a Bible. Or who are so *desperately poor* that they could never dream of having a Bible.

And there is also an urgent need to reach the billions of people who do not know how to read – to provide for them the gift and treasure of hearing the Bible recorded in their own language, and so to hear and understand the words of eternal life.

This, then, is the context within which we are called to carry out the work that the Lord has entrusted to us. Billions of people in need of God's Word and the Gospel – an impossible task for any one of us to do. The only solution is to turn to our infinite Lord and Savior and to His holy Word – and, based on the principles that we find in Scripture, to order our lives and our work according to God's Word.

With this in mind, let me mention three principles from Scripture that have been especially helpful to

Crossway as we have sought to fulfill our calling to publish and distribute God's Word. These principles are:

1. God's Word Doesn't Belong to Us

The first principle is: *God's Word Doesn't Belong to Us*. It has been especially helpful to us at Crossway, as a not-for-profit ministry, to continually remind ourselves of this principle – that God's Word doesn't belong to us. (Many passages could be cited in support of this, such as 1 Peter 1:25.) The Bible is first and foremost God's Word, it belongs to Him alone, and we are only stewards of this inexhaustible treasure. As such, God has graciously and amazingly entrusted His Word to us, to be used for His purposes, and for His Kingdom, and for His glory alone.

2. Partnership in the Gospel

The second principle is that our ministry is a *Partnership in the Gospel*. The best way to see this is to go right to Scripture; as the apostle Paul wrote, for example:

“I thank my God in all my remembrance of you . . . because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now” (Phil. 1:3–5).

Two words are especially important here – one is “partnership” and the other is the “gospel.” What we see in the ministry of Paul is a massive understanding of what these two words mean. As used by Paul in Philippians, the word “partnership” (*koinonia*) has to do with a whole range of things – including spiritual fellowship; providing financial support; participating in the suffering of others; sharing in the power of the Holy Spirit. Where this kind of partnership exists, the result is remarkable advance of the gospel.

Likewise, Paul’s use of the word “gospel” also has significant implications. It begins with a personal relationship with the Son of God, Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. But the personal dimension of the Gospel must be seen within the cosmic framework of redemption – which God began in eternity past, which will come to fulfillment with the return of Christ at the end of the age, and which touches and transforms every dimension of human life.

Partnerships are essential, first and foremost because this is the biblical principle. But partnerships are essential, equally so, because it makes no sense for Crossway to create organizations and infrastructures in the far-flung corners of the world, where brothers and

sisters in Christ are already present, giving their lives for the sake of the Gospel and God’s Word.

3. *Teaching the Nations*

The third principle that I would underscore is from the great commission, from Jesus’ closing words at the end of Matthew’s Gospel:

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, . . . teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:19–20).

This third principle, *the principle of teaching the nations*, has been a special emphasis and a specific calling for Crossway in recent years. In fact, the whole purpose behind the creation of the *ESV Study Bible* was “to help people understand the Bible in a deeper way.” Thus, our highest commitment is to the publication and distribution of the Bible, God’s Word. But it is increasingly clear that there is a massive need to create and provide doctrinally sound Bible resource materials, so that people will be able to understand and apply the Bible – materials that can be provided free of cost, everywhere in the world, over the internet, via mobile devices, “into all technologies.”

Now, with these three principles in mind, let me come back my original question: that is, “How have these

three principles impacted Crossway's Commitment to the Free Use and Development of the ESV Bible into All Technologies"? Probably the best way to see this is just to make a brief bullet-point list of free ESV Bible use, as outlined below:

- The ESV was *the first Bible published simultaneously in digital and print editions* (in 2001). (At one point the ESV had garnered 60 percent of all online Bible citations.)
- It was *available free online to everyone, everywhere* immediately upon publication.
- It is *available free as a link to all doctrinally sound Christian organizations for non-commercial use*.
- It is *licensed free to other publishers* for use in commentaries and church curricula.
- It was *available free online on the iPhone* within a week of the original iPhone launch.
- It was *available free on the Kindle 2* shortly after its launch. (The ESV was the number one Kindle product for a number of weeks, beating out Stephen King's free book, *Ur*.)
- It is *available free as an iPhone App*.
- It was *available free as an iPad App* immediately when the iPad launched on April 3, 2010. (When the iPad launched, we received an e-mail from Apple saying: "Congrats on being the very first partner of ours to send content in using the iTunes Producer tool!")

Into All Technologies, Into All the World

In addition to these bullet points, our partnership, for example, with Faith Comes By Hearing is especially exciting, including: (1) the free distribution of millions of ESV evangelistic New Testaments; (2) free sharing of the ESV Bible text and audio on any church or Christian ministry website; (3) free availability of the ESV Bible via “cloud technology,” everywhere in the world on every major form of mobile technology; (4) free essential Bible teaching resources for churches and individuals everywhere. And this is just the beginning.

All of this is to say, *when any significant new technology becomes available, we want to be there with the ESV Bible – free from day one.*

We live in a unique moment of history. We live at the beginning of a global communications revolution that will change the world forever, beyond anything we can begin to imagine. For people who are committed to the Gospel and the Truth of God’s Word, this communications revolution provides an unprecedented moment in the history of the world. The amazing thing is that the massive technological infrastructure to accomplish this already exists! Our calling is simply to make the con-

tent accessible to everyone, everywhere, at all times, by means of “all technologies.”

Let me conclude with two examples, one from China and the other from India.

The urgency and opportunity of this moment in history was powerfully brought home to me when we¹ visited the church in China about two years ago. It was astonishing to see first-hand what is happening in China today. Many have called it the greatest revival in the history of the church. In the 1970s, Mao Tse-tung’s wife pronounced the church “dead and buried.” Today there are probably about 70 million believers in Mainland China, and some would put the number much higher.

The purpose of our visit was to meet with the leaders of the China Christian Council, the Three Self Church, and the State Authority of Religious Affairs (SARA), regarding support for Bible distribution in China. One key part of this was to initiate relationships with church and government officials, with the hope that someday it may be possible for the ESV Bible to be published in China, in a Chinese-English bilingual Bible, using the ESV and the CUV (Chinese Union Version).

Remarkably, less than a year after our visit, the

¹“We” included Lane and Ebeth Dennis, as part of a delegation from the British and Foreign Bible Society, British Parliament, and the United Bible Societies.

Into All Technologies, Into All the World

ESV-CUV, Chinese-English Bible, was published in time for the Beijing Olympics, and given away free by the Chinese government in the Olympic Village. Remarkable indeed – as it would have been politically impossible for the U.S. government even to give out Bibles, if Chicago (or some other U.S. city) had won its bid for the Olympics in 2016. Now, just recently, we have heard from SARA that they are interested in moving forward with the approval of the *ESV Study Bible* for publication in China.

Given the pronouncement of Mao’s wife in the mid-1970s – that Christianity is “dead and buried” – who could have ever dreamed that the Chinese government would someday publish an “authorized version” of the Bible in China! The point is that God is sovereign in all things, and that He is able to accomplish far beyond anything that we can ask or think. This is true in China and in many other nations, but equally regarding “the free use and development of the Bible into all technologies.”

Lastly, the urgency of this moment in history was powerfully brought home to me when we² visited India two years ago. The purpose of this visit was to launch the publication of the ESV Bible as the English-language Bible translation officially supported by the Bible Society

²“We” included Dr. Lane and Mrs. Ebeth Dennis, as part of a delegation from the British and Foreign Bible Society, to the Bible Society of India.

of India, for the hundreds of millions of English-speaking people of India.

While we were in Bangalore, the Governor of the State of Maharashtra gave a deeply moving address for the ESV Bible “Release and Dedication” assembly – the urgency of which is especially fitting for the work that each of us are called to do. (As you may remember, Maharashtra is the province in India where terrorist attacks killed 170 people in the fall of 2008.)

The Governor of Maharashtra is a devout, openly Christian man – a man who has been the object of four assassination attempts because of his Christian witness. In fact, he carries an inoperable bullet in his body near his heart from one such assassination attempt. And though his life is constantly threatened, the Governor gave an impassioned speech for nearly an hour, taking Paul’s words from 1 Corinthians 9:16 as his central theme: “Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel.” Thus the Governor challenged all of us:

“What is the meaning of ‘preach the gospel’? The words ‘preach the gospel’ are not restrictive or limiting in scope and significance, but have far-reaching and multi-dimensional ramifications. . . . No word or sentence or doctrine or meaning enshrined in God’s words should be withheld; and all persons entrusted with the sacred duty of preaching the gospel should dedicatedly

Into All Technologies, Into All the World

and devotedly venture out to reach as many sinning, struggling, and suffering people as possible.”

The Governor then concluded with the following impassioned appeal:

“My beloved Christian brothers and sisters, my endearing believers in the Holy Spirit, we cannot remain . . . indecisive and mute spectators. . . . We cannot remain closeted in our prayers and our personal comforts and turn a blind eye. . . . At such a critical juncture . . . we must gather and command all our resources – material, intellectual, and spiritual – and employ them with zeal, determination, and vigor, for the glory of the Son of God, Jesus Christ, and the expansion of His Kingdom. For if we fail in our sacred duty and holy obligation to glorify Christ and exalt him, woe is unto us . . . !”

I cannot think of a more appropriate challenge for me personally and for the work of Crossway, or a more appropriate challenge for all of us. We have been given the Bible, entrusted with the very Word of God, the only hope there is for all eternity. As we look ahead to the new technological horizon, the problem is not finding something that we can do. The problem is *to judiciously determine the Lord's leading in allocating the resources that already exist* to reach the world with God's Word. There is no more important thing that we could do with our lives.

LANE T. DENNIS, PHD, is the President and Publisher of Crossway, a not-for-profit ministry of Good News Publishers. Dr. Dennis earned his BS degree in business from Northern Illinois University, an MDiv degree from McCormick Theological Seminary (IL), and a PhD in religion from Northwestern University (IL). Before joining Good News in 1974, Dr. Dennis served as a pastor in campus ministry at the University of Michigan (Sault Ste. Marie, MI) and as the Managing Director of *Verlag Grosse Freude* in Switzerland. He is the author and/or editor of three books including the Gold Medallion award-winning book *Letters of Francis A. Schaeffer*, and he is the former Chairman of the Evangelical Christian Publishers Association. Dr. Dennis currently serves as the Chairman of the ESV (English Standard Version) Bible Translation Oversight Committee and as the Executive Editor of the *ESV Study Bible*. Lane and his wife, Ebeth, live in Wheaton, Illinois, USA. Lane can be reached via e-mail at: ldennis@crossway.org.

EBETH DENNIS is the Crossway Senior Vice President for Publishing Ministry. Mrs. Dennis was raised in India and has worked in Christian publishing with her husband, Dr. Lane T. Dennis, for more than thirty years. Mrs. Dennis also serves on the Crossway Board of Directors and is an Associate Publisher of Crossway. Through the years, she has been a Bible study leader at College Church in Wheaton, Illinois, and has also taught neighborhood Bible studies in her home. Mrs. Dennis brings an international perspective to the Board with her love for ministry and desire to reach the world with God's Word. Ebeth and her husband, Lane, live in Wheaton, Illinois, USA, where they have raised eight married children and have twenty-five grandchildren.