



News From Mark and Diane Vanderkooi

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We first got to know Y. two years ago as his father, who was one of Mark's old village papas, was dying of heart failure. His father's name was Baday Jaye, and whenever we went over to visit Baday in his last weeks, there was Y., holding him up in his arms so he could sleep. Baday had against all odds become a believer and was baptized only a few months previously, so it was our habit when we visited him to sing in Kwong, read Scripture, and quietly remind Baday, who knew that death was approaching, that he had nothing to fear, since one day, Christ would raise him from the dead. Even now, the memories of those visits are precious to us. Y., for his part, would listen silently, cradling his aged father in his arms.

Finally the night came when wailing and drumming from Baday's quarter of the village announced that the end had come. In the morning, his family came and asked for some wood to make a coffin – a luxury which only the most important personage is ever accorded in Kwongland. We were able to oblige with a brand new 20 foot plank – the least we could do for the man who for 17 years had been our advocate and counselor in every manner of civic conundrum that a white missionary living in an African village encounters as a matter of course. They also asked that Mark preach Baday's funeral service, the occasion of which revealed for the first time that Y. had not been entirely indifferent to the Christianity of his father during the final weeks of his life.

As Mark stood up to preach, the crowd of perhaps 500 or more people which had been shuffling and wailing in a slow circle around the coffin, spontaneously separated – the family members, who were pagan for the most part drifting to the left, and the church people drifting to the right. Just for a second, Y. drifted deliberately to the right, and then, in a fit of self consciousness, joined the family members on the left. Mark preached on the resurrection – that Baday whom we were now burying in the sandy soil of Chageen in a wooden box would one day come out from the grave, because he had thrown in his lot with the Firstborn from among the dead.

That evening, we prayed earnestly for Y., and in succeeding weeks, Mark expressed to him the hope that he would follow in his father's footsteps, something Y. said he was reflecting on a great deal. We continued to pray, and occasionally to encourage, but as the months turned into years, it seemed by all appearances that the good seed had fallen on not-so-good ground.

Then this past November, a year and a half after we buried Baday, we were at that stage in the translation of Luke where we needed to test the translation to make sure it *actually* said what we *thought* it said. To do this, we hire a couple of educated young men who know French and Kwong well. We have them translate from Kwong into French, and sit back to see what they come up with. As we considered candidates, Y. came to mind.

Y., and his buddy G. proved to be good testers. Over a week, they plowed through the first half of Luke with us and saw Jesus portrayed in a way which no-one else in Kwongland, excepting of course ourselves and our translators, ever had. This was not the Christianity of trite, nonsensical formulas, church attendance, and a dozen hoops to jump through. It was the stunning portrait of an extraordinary man who with a juxtaposition of magisterial tenderness and severity called forth by the very force of his character either unstinted allegiance or contempt, mockery or holy worship. He was in every respect, as we rendered the Messianic title "Son of Man" in Kwong, "ba bbok kina kòlòm" – the "ultimate, quintessential man of men."

There is more to the story, but suffice it to say that in the ensuing weeks Y. began to appear at Sunday services – the last fruit of his father's witness and, in some small measure, the first fruits of the Gospel of Luke in Kwong.



Baday Jaye at his baptism, Nov. 2007

The *Flip* Side

Anatomy of a Translation

It shouldn't come as a great surprise to many of you that the task of translating a very old document in a dead dialect of Greek into an African indigenous language isn't exactly a straightforward endeavor. We offer here, for the reading pleasure of the more cerebral among you, two examples from the Gospel of Luke – one where we were obliged to make a judicious “addition” to the text, and another where we decided to leave it alone.

“There is nothing hidden that will not be disclosed...” (Luke 8:17 - NIV).

Who hides? Who discloses? What is hidden and disclosed? There is no such thing as a passive construction in Kwong, so just leaving the answers to the first two of these questions ambiguous is not even an option. However, verse 10 (“*to you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God; but for others they are in parables*”^{RSV}) seems, in subject matter, to be the twin of our verse, and here, it is quite evidently *God* who is in the business of revealing to some and hiding from others, and furthermore, the object of this activity (stumbling thus on the *what*) is knowledge of the kingdom of God.

The beauty of making God the explicit subject of our passive in verse 17 (i.e. – *there is nothing God has hidden that God will not disclose...*”) is that the entire text suddenly pulls together in a way it doesn't in say, the NIV. Here is the flow of thought: It is no more sensible for God to hide knowledge of the kingdom than for a man to hide the lamp he has just lit (vs 16). God *does* make known the hidden things of the kingdom (vs 17), and if, as verse 10 seems to suggest, he hides the knowledge of the Kingdom from some, it is only because he reserves it for those who have paid attention to what little is already at their disposition (vs 18 – “*whoever has will be given more...*”). The application then is obvious: “*be careful how you listen*” because if you aren't, you will surely be numbered among those of whom it is said that God has hidden from them the knowledge of the kingdom.

And so, as is often the case, unraveling one translation issue – in this case an untranslatable passive – pays rich dividends in terms of understanding the teaching of the text as a whole, shedding further light on a perennial theological issue (divine sovereignty and human responsibility), and making good sense out of another enigmatic verse in the wider context (vs 10).

... and if I have cheated anybody out of anything,

I will pay back four times the amount (Luke 19:8 - NIV)

Did Zacchaeus cheat anybody, or didn't he? Apparently, Zacchaeus made the forgoing declaration in the presence of a lot of people, at least some of whom were thinking, if not exactly voicing, that he had bilked a lot of people out of a lot of money (as tax collectors in any era are wont to do). Traditionally, he is regarded as here confessing to his avarice and promising to make restitution. However, left as it is, and translated more or less literally into Kwong (which is possible in this particular case), this statement, far from being an admission of guilt in the Kwong context, *is an unequivocal protestation of innocence*. This is *exactly* what a person accused of thievery and brought in judgment before the chief would offer as unassailable proof that the charges were false. As one Kwong guy put it, after hearing such a declaration, the trial would be over.

So, did Zacchaeus cheat anybody? Not a single commentary even suggests the possibility he was an honest, but unfairly ostracized gentleman. Jesus' final statement that “the Son of man came to seek and save that which was lost” is the best evidence that he was (formally) a scoundrel, but it does not require it. In fact, the commentaries point out that this is an allusion to the negligent shepherds of Israel in Ezekiel 34, and has (together with the bit about being a son of Abraham) as much to do with Jesus' ministry vis-à-vis the outcasts of the Jewish establishment as anything else. In the end, we translated Zacchaeus' declaration more or less literally and let the chips fall where they may, since if we were to change Zacchaeus' words to make his guilt explicit, it was not at all clear what we would change them to. But frankly, there is something intriguing in the notion, however novel, of him being essentially honest. We could almost hope that every now and then a Kwong person reads this wonderful passage through wholly Kwong eyes.