

By Faith he Still Speaks

Rick Aschmann, July 2009

- "As the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts.
- As the rain and the snow come down from heaven,
and do not return to it without watering the earth
and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater,
- so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty,
but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it. Isaiah 55:9-11

A few weeks ago I got a call here in Quito from a young man named Gustavo Calixto. He said he worked for an organization called Grabaciones Buenas Nuevas. I said I wasn't familiar with that organization. He said, "In English it's called Gospel Recordings." I said, "Oh, of course, that organization has been around a long time." In fact, I remembered that they had done some recordings for my parents in the Totonac Indian language of Mexico many years ago, but I didn't say so. He said, "My wife and I have just come from Mexico, and I was wondering if I could meet with you to explain what we have to offer." I said that would be fine, and we made an appointment for him to come visit.

When he arrived, I said, "So you're from Mexico? So am I. I was born and raised there."

He said, "Yes, actually, I had heard about another missionary with the same last name, and I wondered if you were related. His name is Pedro Aschmann."

"Yes, of course," I said, "that's my father."
(His name is really Herman, but in Mexico they always called him Pedro.)

He said, "Well, you see, we redid those old vinyl recordings of his on CD's, and we made a trip out to the Totonac area, to the town of Coyutla, to distribute them, and everyone was asking us where Mr. Aschmann was now, since many of them knew him."

Later on, in thinking back, I realized that those recordings must have been made around the time I was born, over fifty years ago, or even well before that. I believe they have a gospel message from my father on them, and some Totonac hymns sung by my mother, who had a lovely singing voice.

"He's deceased," I said, "but that's wonderful that you did that. I remember visiting Coyutla with my father. One of the three New Testament translations he did, in three different Totonac languages, was in Coyutla Totonac."



Herman Aschmann

We talked for a while about their program, and how they would like to do similar recordings for the Quichuas. I was actually rather impressed with it all, and said that we would very much like to work with them.



Herman & Bessie, Tetelcingo, 1942
My parents in Mexico in their first year of marriage

Then he said, “I’d like to tell you a story. When we went to Coyutla to do the distribution, we were directed to the president of the Alliance of Pastors for the area. We went to see him, and explained that we wanted to distribute CD’s free of charge throughout the area, to people who speak the Totonac language, along with some other literature.

“After we had explained the whole program to him, he responded, ‘I don’t really think that’s a good idea. I don’t see any value in distributing things in the Indian language.’ He was not an Indian, and didn’t understand Totonac, only Spanish. We tried to explain further, and show him

why we thought it was important, but got nowhere. And then he said, ‘And don’t try doing it through any of the other pastors, because if I don’t give the go-ahead, none of them will cooperate with you.’

“Well, this was very discouraging, but we didn’t totally give up hope. I left a CD with the pastor anyway. Three days later, the pastor’s wife came back from a trip. They have a store right on the main square there in Coyutla, and as usual, they have a loud-speaker attached to their sound system, and like to share whatever they are playing with the whole town.”

(Strange as it may seem to North Americans, who like our privacy and the control of our environment, this is the normal custom throughout Mexico and other parts of Latin America, and everyone generally appreciates it.)

“When she came into the store, she saw this CD lying there. She didn’t know what it was, but she thought she would play it to see what it was. She realized that it was in Totonac, which she didn’t understand, but she thought she would leave it playing, as usual over the loud-speakers for the benefit of the whole town. She went into the back room to do some things, and didn’t pay any more attention.

“After a while she began to hear someone crying, outside in the street. As she listened, the crying got louder, so after a while she went outside to see what was the matter. She found there an old Totonac man, crying bitterly.

“She said, ‘Why are you crying like this?’

“He replied, ‘That man says that I am a sinner, but that if I repent, God will forgive me. I really want to do that.’

“Well, the lady told her husband what had happened. The pastor got on the phone and called me, and said, ‘I was wrong. Please come back. You can distribute all the CD’s you want, and we will give you all the cooperation you need.’”



Dad with some of the Totonac people, in the town of Coyutla, possibly even on that same square. I used this same photo in our April 2008 newsletter about my dad, never dreaming how it would be used again in this context.

Later on, as they were well underway in the distribution, another old Totonac man came to them, with one of the old vinyl records of the original recordings. He said, “I don’t have anything to play this on anymore. Do you have this on a CD?” “We certainly do,” they replied gladly.

What can I add to that? Sometimes in the day-in-and-day-out grind of working in indigenous languages, it can get pretty discouraging, especially when we are constantly running into people like that pastor who don’t understand at all the value of working in people’s heart languages.

As Hebrews 11 explains so well, God uses the faithfulness of God’s people in ways we never

expect. And how many different people had to be faithful for this old Totonac man to hear the gospel and respond? We see the faithfulness of my parents, to spend years of their lives learning the difficult Totonac language, in mountains where the only access was on foot or by horseback. The faithfulness of Gospel Recordings in making those original recordings. And the faithfulness of their office staff in maintaining the recording in their files all of these years, and then to decide it was time to pull it back out and see if it could be used again. And the faithfulness of people like Gustavo, who spend their lives distributing the life’s work of others, so that it can be said of my father, as it was said of Abel:

And by faith he still speaks, even though he is dead.

Hebrews 11:4

And it is people like these who are referred to for our encouragement in Hebrews 12:

¹ Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. ² Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. ³ Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

Hebrews 12:1-3