

End actual poverty first

By [David Henson](#)

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Perhaps you've noticed it. Maybe even on this site in the advertisements.

Makena can't read the Christmas story.

[End Bible Poverty.](#)

If you want to end Bible Poverty, since that's a thing now, with its own hashtag and everything, be my guest.

But maybe, before we do that, *maybe* we could think about, oh, I don't know, doing something about actual poverty first?

Before we fret over the 1 billion people who don't have a Bible in their own language (did anyone ask if they wanted one first?), maybe we can think about the 1.4 billion in extreme poverty every day. Maybe we can talk about the almost 3 million children who died from hunger or malnutrition in 2008. Or maybe we can put some innovation and good will toward preventing some of the 16,000 deaths that result from hunger *each day*. ([source](#))

I'm not against working to get people Bibles in their own languages, if that's what they want on their own accord. I love the Bible for who it reveals God to be. Its stories have shaped me more profoundly than anything else in the world (and I would guess people of other faiths might feel similarly to their own sacred texts or traditions). But it is precisely because I love the biblical stories so much that I have such a problem with this campaign.

At first, I didn't understand how anyone could possibly pair the word "Bible" and "poverty" in a world where actual poverty is so destructive, rampant, and oppressive. It is offensive to those in actual poverty. And it's offensive to the Bible itself, which is all about *actually feeding people real food and seeking actual economic and social justice right now*.

Then I recognized the [Wycliffe Bible Translators](#) campaign for what it was: veiled idolatry. The entire End Bible Poverty campaign treats the Bible like a talisman — an idol, really — in which translating Scripture into an indigenous language magically transforms a culture in some perceived primitive heart of darkness into a holy and humane one.

Take for instance their indefensible maligning of the [Andean Quechua](#). According to the campaign's Web site, the Quechua were barbaric. Men got drunk and beat their wives. Women weren't allowed in churches. Then they received the Bible in their own language, and discrimination ceased, and everything was all better, and women could go to church. Of course, what we don't hear about is the systemic oppression of the Quechua by the wealthy and powers that be, the genocide of their people, their forced sterilization, [and their virtual enslavement in the hacienda system](#). Nor do we hear about the indigenous movement, rooted in liberation theology and radical Catholic priests like [Leonidas Proaño](#), that confronts not just the lack of words on a page, but the lack of power, equality, and economic opportunity. It's a movement that emphasizes indigenous identity, self-determination, solidarity, and empowerment.

All we get from End Bible Poverty is the idea that these poor backward folk up in the mountains needed our help and needed some Bibles so they wouldn't be the brutal animals they had been previously. According to the site, it's essentially that they were lost, but thanks be to God— us and our Bibles, they have been found.

But even this industrial-savior complex isn't the most disturbing part of the End Bible Poverty campaign. Rather, it's the disturbing theology that seems to support it. The Web site explains,

“The day all people will have access to the Word of God is approaching. Innovation has rapidly accelerated the work, and we're on the verge of a historic achievement. With your partnership this will happen.”

So, in other words, it's not really about improving the lives of people around the world, as their emotional appeals would have you believe. Rather, it's about reaching all language groups or people groups with a Bible in their own languages. This itself is coded language, common among evangelical missionaries who believe the Bible must be translated in all languages in order to reach all “people groups” at which point the Second Coming will occur.

Or in one of their own recruitment [Web site's words](#):

A common verse used when teaching about missions is Matthew 28:18 and Matthew 24:14, which says, "And the Good News about the Kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, so that all nations will hear it; and then the end will come" (NLT). Essentially, missions ushers in the second coming of Christ!

In other words, once everyone has had access to the Gospel in their own language, then Christ can come back. ([Source](#))

So, Ending Bible Poverty isn't really about improving the lives of others after all. It's not about ending abuse or anything so noble.

Rather, it's about ushering in the end the world.

No wonder they emphasize an imagined poverty instead of actual poverty.

They think the way to end poverty and suffering in the world is simply to end the world.

But see, as a Christian, I can't think that way.

I want what Jesus prays for in the Gospels.

I want the kingdom to come on earth, not just in heaven.

*Originally posted at [Henson's blog](#)*