

# Translating the Word

*In the 50 years since Cameron Townsend founded Wycliffe Bible Translators, portions of the Word of God have been translated into almost 2,000 languages. Today some 1,000 linguists are deciphering tribal dialects, living with the forgotten people of the world and translating the Bible so that the Great Commission can finally be fulfilled. Wycliffe has no easy task, either—the Bible has yet to be translated into more than 3,000 languages.*

**By Jamie Buckingham**

**T**he greatest adventure in life is to be involved giving the message of God's love and salvation to a group of people who have never heard it in a language they can understand," says Bernie May, U.S. director for Wycliffe Bible Translators.

That, says the U.S. director for what may be one of the world's largest missionary organizations, is how the hundreds of teams of Christian linguists view their task.

It is an adventure.

But the adventure is not limited to spiritual activity. Many times it involves physical risk and danger as well. Often it is accompanied by a miracle.

Or two.

Dave Watters and Gary Shepherd, rugged young Bible translators, stood staring at the majestic Himalaya mountains which rose before them and disappeared into the swirling clouds. For two days they had been waiting out the late October rain in the valley at the foot of the mountains in north Nepal. The high Himalayan mountain range needed to be crossed if they were to rendezvous with the single engine airplane which had dropped them off three weeks before. If they failed to find the pass which crossed

the mountains at 16,000 feet, they would have to retrace their steps and follow the river system for 12 days to the west. And their food supply was nearly exhausted.

Dave and Gary, members of Wycliffe Bible Translators in Nepal, had started from the capital city of Kathmandu. There, in the colorful marketplace, they had met rugged natives from the far side of the mountains who spoke a strange language—a language which had never been reduced to writing. That was all the challenge the young linguists needed. Their purpose for being in Nepal was to translate the Bible into languages which had never received the Word of God.

A Wycliffe plane, flown by a pilot from the Jungle Aviation and Radio Service (JAARS)—the flying arm of Wycliffe—had taken them to a high mountain airstrip at Dhorpatan. Carrying their belongings in heavy backpacks, they had hired two Tibetan porters to help them. Together, primitive maps in hand, they had trekked along the back of the Himalayas, paralleling the river opposite the border of Tibet. They had found three villages from one language group and were now trying to determine the geographical borders of this particular people. Once that was done David would return to Kathmandu, get his wife and children, and move into one of the villages to begin language study—

developing an alphabet and translating the Bible.

But all that was secondary as the two young men stood facing the high mountains. The rain had stopped that morning, but snow was falling at the high levels. The people in the villages had refused to sell food from their meager winter stores. They had also warned them that no one ever tried to cross the mountain at this time of year—especially if it was snowing. Even the Tibetan porters were afraid. Yet they had little choice but to push on as far as they could. They had to meet the plane on the other side of the mountains.

They followed a trail toward the pass. At the 9,000-foot level they paused, an hour before dark, and made camp in what appeared to be a sheepshed in a small fir grove right at the timberline, abandoned now that the high pastures were frozen to stubble. After a meal of rice and mutton—virtually the last of their food—they slept beside a fire of glowing coals.

The men rose at 6 a.m., fixed a little oatmeal in hot water, and after a time of prayer—claiming guidance and protection—started their climb toward the pass. Crossing the treeless grasslands they walked on spongy tundra, then rock, ice, and finally snow. The further they went, the fainter the trail became, until at 13,000 feet it faded completely in the

**A Baruya man in the Wonenara area of Papua New Guinea learns to write his language.**



deep snow. They pushed onward, upward, toward the saddle between the mountains.

Ahead they spotted a rock cairn, a pile of stones, which indicated the trail was about to cross the ridge. But when they reached the ridge their hearts sank. On the other side was a precipice, almost 400 feet down. The cliff was protected from the afternoon sun in such a way that its narrow ledges were piled deep with snow and ice. It was impossible to descend. Their only alternative was to retrace their steps into the valley. But by now the snow had started falling and the way back was blocked from view.

The two men looked at each other in despair. Then Gary recalled the Scripture passage he had read that morning from Psalm 37. *"The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord: and he delighteth in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the Lord upholdeth him with his hand...the law of his God is in his heart; none of his steps shall slide...."*

"Those look like footprints," Dave said, interrupting his thoughts. He was pointing at indentations in the snow leading over the edge of the ridge, onto a narrow ledge and out of sight.

"How did they get there?" Gary asked. "No human has been this way. Besides, even if he had, the snow would have covered his tracks."

"We asked God to lead us over this mountain. Now these footprints appear out of nowhere," Dave observed.

"They look as if they were made only minutes ago. What if God sent an angel to lead us over this pass?" Gary asked.

The two men smiled at each other. Both thought back to stories they had heard from other Wycliffe Bible Translators. Stories from all over the world spanning the last 50 years. Time after time, when these missionaries had run out of their own ability, God had stepped in. The two men realized that once they started down the precipice they could never scale back up. They had no choice but to follow what they called the "angel tracks."

Gary tied their 100 feet of nylon rope around Dave's waist and held it taut as Dave eased himself over the edge. As he moved downward, he cut steps for the others, then wedged himself into the rocks and pulled up the slack line. Gary followed. The Tibetan porters balked. Expert mountain climbers, they were not at all prepared to follow mysterious footprints into the howling snowstorm. But

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## **The Tibetan porters balked, not prepared to follow mysterious footprints into the howling snowstorm.**

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when they saw the two Americans were going on, they followed.

As they reached the foot of the precipice the afternoon clouds rolled in and swallowed them up in a fog. They could no longer see the pass ahead, but the footprints continued on—alongside the ridge, across a rockslide, and finally up the ascent that eventually brought them to the pass.

The danger of moving on was intensified by the clouds. The surrounding peaks and lower ridges were blotted out and all perspective was lost. White fog and snow blended so they could barely see the ground beneath their feet. It was getting late in the afternoon, but to spend the night in the open at 16,000 feet without food or fire would mean certain death.

They continued following the tracks, over the pass and out onto the very edge of a sheer precipice which dropped a thousand feet. Even without fog, to figure out how to circumnavigate such cliffs seemed impossible. But with uncanny skill, the strange footprints went before—along the ledge, across a slide, down a gorge. Even though it was snowing furiously, the footprints were still visible, as though the one making them was but a few feet ahead.

At 13,000 feet the men began coming out of the snow. The footprints led them to the edge of the snow field, right out onto a trail. There they stopped. Even though the trail ahead was muddy, there was no trace of the footprints. The men never saw them again.

Daylight was almost gone. Using their flashlights they inched down the slippery pathway until they reached the 10,000-foot level. There, beside a snow-fed creek in a deep gorge, exhausted by 12 strenuous hours, they built a fire and ate the last of their rice and mutton. After giving thanks to God for His miraculous delivery, the men slept soundly on the stony ground.

The next day they came to a small village on their way to the airstrip. A native invited them into his hut where he

killed two chickens—a feast. As they checked their word lists with him, the man said to Dave, "You ought to write books in our language."

It was all the confirmation Dave Watters needed. He knew God had literally directed his footsteps to that place so he could translate THE Book in the language of a people who had been waiting for it since the creation of the earth.

I first heard this story when I visited Nepal in 1975, compiling research for my book, *Into the Glory*, the story of the jungle pilots with the Jungle Aviation and Radio Service. Later I met Dave Watters who gave me more details. Yet as remarkable as it seems, such miracle stories are normal among these men and women of WBT.

Last year I spent two weeks in what must be without doubt the most remote spot on the face of the earth—a jungle camp in the province of Irian Jaya in eastern Indonesia. Once a year the Indonesian branch of WBT's sister organization, the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL), which carries out Wycliffe's overseas work, brings all their personnel together for a 10-day Bible conference held at the little base of Danau Bira, hacked out of the heart of the thickest jungle in the eastern hemisphere.

One hundred twenty men and women, along with all their children, were flown into the little jungle airstrip by JAARS pilots. I had been invited by the director in Nepal when I visited there eight years before. Dick and Edith have three children. But since there are no adequate junior high or high school facilities in Irian Jaya (Wycliffe has its own elementary school at the jungle base), the two older children must attend school at the Wycliffe base at Ukarumpa, Papua New Guinea—hundreds of miles and a difficult border crossing away. It is part of the normal sacrifices made by those who give their lives to translate the Bible into the languages of Bibleless tribes.

During the conference I listened to a number of "reports," which were actually testimonies of miracles experienced by these men and women who are literally on the cutting edge of God's forward penetration into the world.

A helicopter pilot told of getting lost over the jungle and having his compass needle swing off course and literally point him to his destination.

A young Bible translator from Tennessee, who is married to an Australian girl, told of how their financial support had dwindled down to less than \$100 a



month. Yet somehow God provided month by month, supplying all their needs, so they could keep on with their task of translation.

I even had a miraculous experience myself. One morning I was making my way along a jungle trail from the house where I was staying to the meeting hall for the morning Bible conference, when I heard loud screaming and wailing just ahead, coming from the direction of the path leading to the lake. Quickening my walk, I rounded a curve and saw an Indian woman, a member of the Bauzi tribe, running toward me. She had a dirty, red sarong around her waist, but was naked otherwise. Her head was back and she was uttering loud, mournful wails similar to that of an animal in great pain. Running behind her was a tall man, dressed only in a G-string, carrying a naked baby.

From all indications the baby was dead.

The pair was heading toward the little infirmary where an Australian medical doctor, who had flown in for the week-long Bible conference, was giving physical exams to members of the Wycliffe team.

I turned aside and watched as the doctor, a tough-talking woman in her sixties, came out and examined the baby on the porch. The child was not dead, but was in a semi-coma. Kneeling on the split bark porch, the doctor inserted a tube into the baby's nose in order to get liquid into his stomach, gave him a shot, and shook her head in frustration. It was all she could do.

A nurse, who was standing nearby,

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needs.**

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asked me, "Would you pray for the baby?"

The mother was sitting cross-legged on the porch, holding the infant in her lap. The man, who turned out to be the child's uncle, was kneeling close by.

The nurse asked the woman, in the Bauzi language, if I could pray for her baby. The mother looked up at me with sad, helpless eyes. Pleading.

"She begs you to pray," the nurse said softly.

Just as I started to lay my hands on the baby's head, the doctor, who was still standing on the porch, spoke up. "The baby has spinal meningitis," she said matter-of-factly. "It is highly contagious."

My hands froze, just inches from the baby's head. Did I dare run the risk? Then I thought of the miracle stories—and of the conclusions drawn by those men and women serving with Wycliffe all over the world. For those two weeks I had become one of them. What was theirs was mine also as long as I was there on the same mission they were on. That included physical protection. And miracles.

I laid my hands on the baby's feverish

head and prayed. Believing.

At the Bible conference that morning the entire missionary task force prayed for the baby. The next day the baby was still alive.

The day before I left to return to the States I stood on the dock beside the lake and watched as the mother got in her dugout canoe, holding her healed infant in her lap. The tall uncle dipped his paddle in the water and moved the canoe gracefully across the mirrored surface of the lake toward the Bauzi village on the other side. Several Wycliffe members were with me to wave goodbye to the little family—and to join in a prayer of thanksgiving to God who seemed awfully nearby there in the jungle.

Who are these remarkable people known as Wycliffe Bible Translators?

For one, they make up the world's largest missionary organization. More than 3,500 of them come from the United States with 1,500 others coming from 29 other nations. They are carrying on linguistic work in more than 40 nations. Over the last 50 years they have worked in 950 different languages, translating the Bible.

Wycliffe Bible Translators believes that to accomplish Christ's commission, the gospel must be given to every man in his own language. No group is too small or insignificant and no language is too hard. Wycliffe pioneers in the unnoticed, the unreached, the remote areas of the world.

No one in Wycliffe receives a salary. The work is a faith work dependent on the faithfulness of God's people. Each member must look to God to provide his support. Usually financial needs are met through the interest and participation of home churches and individual Christians.

Those are the facts, but the story of this group goes far beyond facts. Indeed, it cannot be told. It can only be felt.

When the decision was made to feature Wycliffe Bible Translators this month, I volunteered to tell the story. I knew the moment I spoke up in the editorial meeting that I had bitten off more than I could chew. A good writer should be objective. That's impossible for me when it comes to Wycliffe. Several years ago I committed my life to work with the organization as a volunteer consultant, traveling to the various jungle stations on occasion to help out, and working closely with the leadership in the U.S. Division. Bernie May is one of my closest personal friends. How could I be objective about people like these—people I honor and respect more than any other group in the world.



The Bauzi mother looked up with sad, helpless eyes and pleaded for someone to pray for her dying baby.



This morning, when I sat down to write the story, I didn't know where to start. Should I begin with that legendary giant, the late W. Cameron Townsend, who founded WBT fifty years ago? Historians rank him—along with William Carey and Hudson Taylor—as one of history's leading missionary statesmen and pioneers.

How can I be objective about a man like Uncle Cam in whose presence I always felt I should take off my shoes?

My natural tendency is to write about the man in Wycliffe I know best—Bernie May, who, perhaps more than anyone else in the organization, has taken up the mantle left by Cameron Townsend. Wycliffe is divided into a number of "divisions," each one representing one of the 30 nations who send missionaries through the organization. May is the director of the U.S. Division, by far the largest and most influential of all the other divisions. A natural leader with great wisdom, a sparkling sense of humor, profound managerial skills and an unshakable faith in God, he represents the very best of Wycliffe.

For years he was a jungle pilot in South America. He was the central figure in my book, *Into the Glory*. Later he became executive director of JAARS and now directs the U.S. Division. His personality, his writings, his grasp of world missions have made him a public figure.

Wycliffe Bible Translators is no longer the tiny group formed by Uncle Cam. It is now a huge, sprawling, world-wide corporation. It takes a man of May's stature and managerial ability to keep it moving forward. Yet, those of us close to the organization realize that Wycliffe is far more than Bernie May. Even Uncle Cam, by the time he died, could no longer be singled out as Mr. Wycliffe—for the organization and mission had outgrown even his visionary scope. Indeed, Bernie May, David Cummings, Ken Gregerson, or the executive vice-president of WBT/SIL, John Bendor-Samuel—all are but small members (albeit vital members) of a much larger body composed of thousands of equally dedicated men and women who are giving their lives for the cause of Christ.

Upon whom, then, should the story focus?

Maybe I should begin by writing about the more than 5,000 members of Wycliffe—all of whom are "faith" missionaries. I hear a lot of talk about "faith" these days—mostly from teachers who are driving fancy cars and wear-

## Historians rank Cameron Townsend as one of history's leading missionary statesmen and pioneers.

ing expensive clothes. I appreciate their message, but they—we—know nothing about faith when compared to these men and women who have given their lives to take the Word of God into the most inaccessible places on the surface of this planet.

Before sitting down to write this I read for the second time a story in the March issue of WBT's official publication, *In Other Words*. It was by my friend, Dottie Hoppe, who along with her husband Bob and three small children work in one of the most inaccessible places on earth—high in Colombian mountains. It is a 28-mile ride on mule back just to get to their village where they are working among the Malayo Indians. Each night they crawl into their mosquito nets and do spiritual warfare against the demonic pito bugs which swarm out of the jungle by the millions. The pito bug carries Chagas' disease, a South American sleeping sickness for which there is no cure. Last year Bob was bitten and the doctors told him he had less than two years to live. But the Hoppes are claiming life—rather than death—so they can continue their work of Bible translation.

Bob and Dottie, both Spirit-filled

translators, have lived and worked among the Malayo people since 1968. So far they have witnessed no converts to Christ. Yet they continue on.

Small wonder I grow a bit cynical when I hear rich American Christians talk about faith.

One of the places where faith is best exemplified is in Wycliffe's financial policy, which has become a model for most other "faith" mission groups. Working on a policy of "full information, no solicitation," each Wycliffe member—from the director to each secretary, from translators to jungle pilots and mechanics—is required to raise his own full financial support before being allowed to go on assignment. Each field has certain minimums needed, figures set by financial experts who have studied the amount of money necessary to live in say Brazil or Upper Volta. Each missionary must "trust God" to bring in this amount—from friends, family, a home church or churches they have visited across the years.

Since the work of the missionary—especially those serving with a group like Wycliffe—is hard for the average American to grasp, and since there are huge demands from many sources on both individual Christians and churches for their dollars, raising money to support someone in the jungles of the Philippines, or to support a computer operator working out of the home office in Huntington Beach, California, is extremely difficult. Yet the Wycliffe policy remains

William Cameron "Uncle Cam" Townsend receives "La Orden del Sol" (the Order of the Sun), the highest award in Peru to a civilian, from President Belaunde on October 28, 1981.







Wycliffe, the world's largest missionary organization, moved into its Huntington Beach, California, headquarters in 1974.

soft sell—no offering envelopes, no television appeals for money, just trust God.

Wycliffe members voted that 10 percent of all money sent to the members should be divided for “overhead” in the home and field offices. All money given without special designation goes to the Emergency Fund to help out missionaries who are on the field but are cut off or forgotten by home churches or donors. Things such as buildings, airplanes, or generators to provide lights in the jungle are considered to be “special projects.” Most of these have been provided by funds supplied by individuals or churches who hear about special needs and raise money to meet those needs.

I sat for more than two hours before the keyboard of my word processor, considering all this—and much more. Lord, how can anyone tell the story of 50 years of dedication and sacrifice by thousands of men and women?

Should I write about Chet Bitterman, who was martyred three years ago in Colombia after being held hostage by terrorists who demanded Wycliffe leave the country in exchange for his life?

What about Josephine Makil, a beautiful black woman? She and three of her children watched in horror as her husband, Gaspar, and their fourth child he was holding in his arms, were murdered in cold blood on a lonely Vietnam road.

What about my own nephew, Andy Buckingham, who gave up a secure position as a career army officer to take his wife and two infant children to tiny Easter Island where he will spend the rest

of his life translating the Bible. I have a picture of Andy and Rhonda on the wall of my study above my desk. There are other pictures taped alongside it: Bernie and Nancy May, Tom and Betsy Smoak, Dick and Edith Hugoniot, plus others. All are reminders that these, my friends, need my daily prayers.

These are tough people. Tough, independent and critical. Most of them hold college degrees, many of them have graduate degrees, all raise their own support but are not actually allowed by the organization to solicit funds. Although they choose to cooperate and submit to the organization, they remain independent and highly opinionated. This is not to say that most Wycliffe members are negative, but they are picky. Perhaps they can best be categorized as overly fastidious, exacting and fussy about nearly everything said and written. (I expect, for instance, to be criticized for this article, even though I am doing my best to represent the organization in an objective way.)

When translators are handling the Word of God they need to operate in this mode—paying close attention to all the jots and tittles. Unfortunately, some of them continue to operate in that mode even when they are not translating.

But that no longer bothers me, for I know it takes men and women like this to pioneer in spiritual conquests. These are the tough footsoldiers of the kingdom of God.

Dr. Frank Tannenbaum, a Jewish professor at Columbia University in New York and an expert in South American affairs, once commented on this. A close

friend of Cameron Townsend, Dr. Tannenbaum often spent his vacations in Peru, occasionally lecturing at the Wycliffe jungle base at Yarinacocha in the Amazon basin.

“There are many assistance programs that have started in South America,” Dr. Tannenbaum once told Bernie May, “but yours is the only one—including the government programs—that I can call successful.”

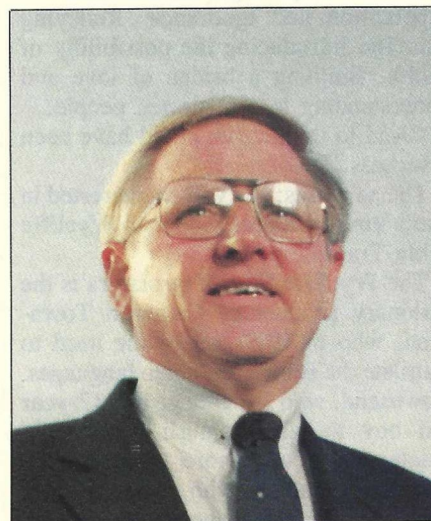
The reason for this, he assessed, was Wycliffe had their finest people working at the village level. He contrasted this to the Ministry of Education in Lima which moved their most competent people into the city, while Wycliffe had most of their Ph.D.'s working in the tribes.

Dr. Tannenbaum was right. In the world if a man starts out in the trenches, he hopes one day to be promoted to an air-conditioned office. But in Wycliffe the best people stay at the tribal level, even though it means a lifetime of hardship lived without basic creature comforts.

Such a life hardens people and makes them difficult to understand by those of us who live relatively soft lives surrounded by material comforts. These people are totally committed to servanthood as a way of life. Not motivated by the promise of promotions or pay raises, they sometimes have a hard time adjusting when they return to the States and find Christians do not take the commands of Christ nearly as seriously as they do.

It is typified in a recruiting ad. The ad shows a man with a six-day growth of beard, his shirt ripped and hanging open, a canteen on his belt, his pants rolled up above his knees, his shoes in his hands, wading across a swirling, muddy, jungle river.

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For years a jungle pilot, Bernie May now directs the U.S. Division of Wycliffe.





Wycliffe translators David and Joyce Briley arrive by helicopter to work with the Bauzi language people in Indonesia.

The caption reads: "Jim was voted 'Most Likely to Succeed.' Now look at him."

Underneath the recruiting copy continues: "It's too bad. Jim had it made. Personality, initiative, a college degree with honors. Success and the 'good life' were his for the asking.

"Now look at him. Backpacking across some jungle river. Giving his life to a preliterate people barely out of the Stone Age. Painstakingly creating a written alphabet from a previously unrecorded babble of sounds. Working night and day translating the pages of the New Testament. Exposing the senselessness of superstition and ignorance. Relieving pain and introducing the possibility of health. Building a bridge of love and understanding to a neglected people.

"And to think...Jim could have been a success."

The ad closes: "If you're interested in Jim's kind of success, contact Wycliffe Bible Translators...."

The Wycliffe Bible Translators is the visionary product of Cameron Townsend, who in 1917 sensed the need to translate the Bible into Indian languages. Townsend, who left college as a 17-year old boy to take Spanish Bibles into Guatemala, found more than 200,000 Cakchiquel Indians who could not even write their own language, much less read Spanish.

One day an Indian blurted out, "Why,

if your God is so smart, doesn't He speak our language?"

Townsend took the challenge and for the next 15 years lived with the primitive Cakchiquel in Central America, eating their food, mastering their difficult language and gradually reducing it to written form. He slowly developed a simplified method for teaching any phonetically written language. In 1931 the Cakchiquels received the entire New Testament in their own language.

Now, 50 years later, over 950 language groups have received alphabets and a written form of their mother tongue. Eight hundred translations are either in progress or finished. Membership of the organization exceeds 5,000 and work is being carried on in more than 40 nations around the earth. Last year, when Carl and Lauretta DuBois finished translating the New Testament into the language of the Manobo tribe in the Philippines, a Manobo pastor said, "This is our day, a day of extreme importance. Jesus has learned Manobo. We can come near to Him because we can understand each other."

Small wonder that when Townsend died two years ago Billy Graham spoke simply: "No man in this century has given a greater vision for being used of God to advance the cause of Christian missions than Cameron Townsend."

All Christians do not think as highly of WBT, however.

Townsend's naming of his organization after John Wycliffe who was condemned as a heretic in the 14th century for translating the Bible into the language of the people seems to have been prophetic. Not only have these followers of Wycliffe become the world's foremost linguists and translators, they are also—in the eyes of many—heretics.

Not too long ago a group of evangelicals, who evaluate the work of various missionary organizations, evaluated Wycliffe Bible Translators. They had a number of factors on which they graded each missionary group. On a scale of 1 to 26, Wycliffe rated 26. Last.

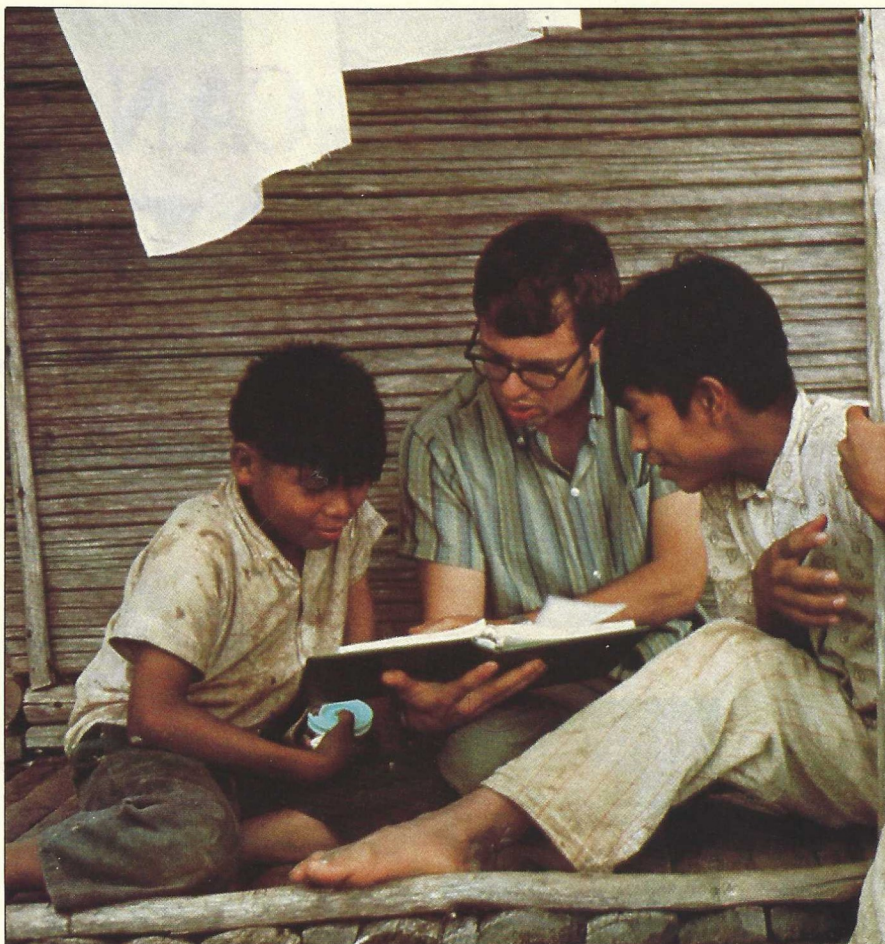
While Wycliffe has been criticized for being friendly with the Catholics and for not excluding Charismatics from its membership (just recently the Assemblies of God granted Wycliffe full endorsement to oversee their missionaries who are involved in Bible translation), the basic criticism of WBT is they are not an "evangelistic" organization.

The evaluation committee said "real" missionaries would be busy planting churches and winning souls. All WBT does, they reported, was translate the Bible.

That's true. Wycliffe is not an evangelistic organization. Its members are not pastors, evangelists or church planters. They are linguists, technicians, ordinary working people. There is not a single theologian or professional evangelist on the staff.

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Wycliffe translators do more than translate the Bible. Here, Bob Gunn in Panama teaches two Buglere boys to read their own language.

Yet, in a recent survey in a Latin American country I cannot name because of potential oppression, it was discovered that as a result of Bible translation work carried on by Wycliffe, there are now 116,806 new Christians in the 61 tribes where Wycliffe has completed translating the New Testament—and 1,243 new churches. Not bad for an organization that has been rated “Last” because it does not emphasize evangelism or church planting.

Among the Aguaruna Tribe in Peru—where all WBT did was translate the Bible—there are now 130 flourishing churches and over 10,000 new believers.

The story is the same around the world. WBT translates the Bible, then trusts the Holy Spirit to win the souls and plant the churches.

Not only is Wycliffe often criticized by evangelicals and fundamentalists, it is also under constant fire from humanistic anthropologists, Communists and left wing sympathizers in the media and in government offices.

A newspaper reporter in Mexico recently contacted a representative of WBT. “I wanted to meet you folks. Anyone as hated as you by some people

must have something going for them.”

The reporter went on to say there are centers around the world, manned primarily by worldly anthropologists, communists and sometimes liberal Christians, dedicated to destroying the work of Wycliffe. These are “Wycliffe watchers.” They subscribe to all Wycliffe publications, spy on all the workers, keep logs and journals and do everything they can to collect information they can then turn over to hostile government leaders in hopes Wycliffe will be forced out of those nations. They also use the press, releasing half-truths in the form of news releases to try to sway public opinion against WBT.

Wycliffe’s emphasis on academics continues to confound its critics, however. When Dr. Kenneth L. Pike, Wycliffe’s renowned linguist and theoretician, was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize, the nomination also carried recognition of the work of Wycliffe’s sister organization, the Summer Institute of Linguistics.

Pike began his work in 1935, when he went to Mexico to translate the Bible into the Mixtec Indian language. He received his Ph.D. in linguistics at the University of Michigan in 1942. He has been fur-

ther recognized for his work by honorary doctorates from the Sorbonne, the University of Chicago, Wheaton, Gordon, Houghton and Huntington Colleges. He is president emeritus of SIL.

Pike was one of five original students who attended Townsend’s “Camp Wycliffe” training school for prospective Bible translators at an abandoned farm in Sulphur Springs, Arkansas, in 1935. Insisting on the highest academic standards, Townsend said, “We will make the scientists sit up and take notice.”

Townsend, according to his contemporaries, seemed to live in a continual paradox. He attempted impossible projects, all the while believing in simple solutions. It was all based on faith.

When Townsend and his companion, L. L. Legters, reached the Mexican border in 1933 with what they called a “mandate from God” to translate the Bible into the languages of tribespeople, they were denied entrance. Throughout that night, waiting just outside the border station, Townsend and Legters prayed and hummed the chorus of a song over and over:

*Faith, mighty faith, the promise sees,  
And looks to God alone.*

*Laughs at impossibilities  
And shouts, “It shall be done.”*

As they prayed, Townsend remembered he was carrying a letter written by Dr. Moises Saenz, a prominent Mexican educator, inviting him to Mexico to “do for our Indians what you have done in Guatemala.” After reading the letter from the “father” of Mexico’s high school system, the border guard called Mexico City. Permission was granted for the two men to enter the country.

Faith, to Townsend, meant looking at God rather than the problems. It is this same faith which has been transferred to the new generation of Wycliffe leaders—and to the members themselves.

Townsend had a dream for five basic principles for his organization: We pioneer; we translate the Bible; we are willing to serve everyone: we do linguistics; and we trust God for the impossible.

The third point kept Townsend and WBT in hot water. By “serving” Townsend said they should serve the foreign (sometimes hostile) governments. It also meant serving foreign, hostile church leaders such as the Roman Catholics in South America, many of whom adamantly opposed their work. However, across the years the policy has consistently paid off. When leftist leaders in a South American nation were threatening to have Wycliffe expelled, it was the



Catholic archbishop who came to their rescue, recalling the times JAARS planes had brought aid and transported priests and nuns across the jungle.

Townsend's concept of service dates back to 1931 when he presented the first copy of the Cakchiquel New Testament to the then president of Guatemala, General Jorge Ubico. It seemed a futile gesture, but Townsend seemed to think it was important.

Sometime later an Indian leader was ushered into the powerful president's office. He had been commissioned by the town elders to ask the "Great Chief" to prohibit the Protestants from entering their town.

The president listened to the request made in broken Spanish. Then he stepped over to the bookshelves and took down the Cakchiquel New Testament. "This," he said, "is in your language. Read it."

After looking at it the Indian leader said, "This is wonderful. Where can I get a copy?"

"From the very people you want to drive out of your town," the president replied with a smile.

Later the Indian leader, who became a Christian, said, "I was evangelized by the president himself."

Serving your enemies makes them your friends, Townsend believed.

But it was the last of the five points, "accomplishing the impossible," which has moved Wycliffe beyond the point of being simply another linguistic organiza-

## Serving your enemies makes them your friends, Townsend believed.

tion into the place of true ministry. Yet, it all seems so common place.

In 1975, during the climax of the Vietnam crisis, John and Carolyn Miller, and their five-year-old daughter, LuAnne, were caught in crossfire between opposing forces, captured and imprisoned by the North Vietnamese.

The Millers had translated all but two of the books of the New Testament into the Bru language before being captured by the Communists. For the next 232 days they were held as prisoners. They remembered the fate of their fellow translator in Vietnam, Hank Blood, who had been captured by the Viet Cong in 1968 and died (or was killed, no one knew for sure at the time) in a communist prison. Now they, too, were prisoners. During this time they had no knowledge whether their other three children had been safely evacuated, were being held in some other prison camp or were dead.

(Fortunately, Marjorie, Gordon and Nathan had been safely evacuated to the

United States).


After the Millers were released, they had to start afresh on their translation of the New Testament. The original manuscripts had been confiscated by the Communists just a few days before their release. It took a number of years to re-do all that work, but it was finally finished.

Two years ago the Millers, now serving in Malaysia, received a package mailed in the United States. It was a small book—the printed copy of the Bru New Testament.

The customs sticker, listing the value of the contents of the package, was marked "N.V." It meant "no value."

To the world it was just a book—a compilation of letters of the alphabet formed into words on paper. But to the Bru people of Vietnam they were the Words of Life.

Fifty years ago when Cameron Townsend founded Wycliffe Bible Translators, the Bible had been translated into only 523 languages. Today that figure is topping 2,000 different languages. There are still 3,000 tongues to go, but Wycliffe is dedicated to keep on going into all the world, making alphabets where there are none—and translating the Bible into the languages of Bibleless people.

Can there be a higher calling? 

*Editor's note: Those interested in more information about Wycliffe Bible Translators may obtain it by writing Wycliffe Bible Translators, Huntington Beach, CA 92647.*

## At a Glance: WYCLIFFE BIBLE TRANSLATORS

- Was founded in 1934 by Cameron Townsend.
- Has a single mission: translate the Bible into all languages.
- Begins work on a new language every ten days.
- Estimates entire Bible available in 250 languages, only New Testament in 500, portions of Bible in 1,000.
- Estimates 2,500-3,000 languages remain to be translated.
- Is working on 750 languages in 40 countries.
- Needs 5,000 more workers to complete task: long-term (career), short-term (one or two years), or guest (six months or less).
- Can use a wide range of skills, including mechanics, teachers, office workers, pilots, printers, accountants, buyers, shippers, nurses, radio operators, artists, houseparents, builders, agriculturalists and physicians. Trains linguists.
- Does not have payroll. Each worker raises his own support from fellow Christians, churches and missionary societies.
- Has become three distinct groups:

1. Wycliffe Bible Translators recruits members and represents

the ministry to the church and public. Headquarters in Huntington Beach, California.

2. Summer Institute of Linguistics offers training in linguistics and translation. Cooperates with universities, schools and governments and is responsible for most field work, including the actual Bible translation. Headquarters in Dallas.

3. Jungle Aviation and Radio Service is composed of pilots, mechanics, radio technicians, computer specialists and construction workers. It provides the technological help needed by translators. Headquarters in Waxhaw, North Carolina.

- Has linguistic and translation work in progress in: Alaska, Australia, Benin, Bolivia, Brazil, Cameroon, Chad, Chile, Colombia, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guinea Bissau, Guatemala, Honduras, Indonesia, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Malaysia, Mexico, Mali, New Caledonia, New Mexico, Niger Republic, Nigeria, Papua New Guinea, Peru, Philippines, Quebec, Senegal, Solomon Islands, Sudan, Suriname, Thailand, Togo, Upper Volta, Vanuata, Zaire.



