



Wa women at the launch of the Wa Bible

PHOTO CREDIT: ©UBS China Partnership

BIBLE TRANSLATION AT THE HEART OF MISSION

**Then how is it that each of us hears them
in our native language?**

— Acts 2:8 (NIV)

September 30th marked the feast day of St. Jerome, the patron saint of translators, who translated the Bible into Latin from the original languages of Hebrew, Greek and Aramaic between A.D. 383 and 404. His translation became known as the Vulgate Bible, and it was the official Bible of the Roman Catholic Church for centuries.

However, over the centuries the road for Bible translators has often been paved with danger and even death. In 1524, William Tyndale, who is known as the Father of the English Bible, left England to translate the Vulgate Bible into English. In 1536, he was strangled and burnt at the stake in Belgium. His dying words were, "Lord, open the King of England's eyes." In 1539, his prayer was answered because Henry VIII required every parish church

in England to make a copy of the English Bible available to parishioners.

In the 1560s, Casiodoro de Reina began translating the Bible from the original Hebrew and Greek texts into Spanish while he was living in exile in western Europe and England. In 1562, the authorities of the Spanish Inquisition symbolically burned him at the stake in Seville. Despite this, the Reina Valera translation is now the most widely used translation in the Spanish speaking world.

Today, although modern Bible translators may not face being burned at the stake, they do face many challenges, including a lack of resources and infrastructure, a lack of funding, isolation, and unstable political situations. And there are still many languages in the world that do not have any Scripture. Of the 7,000

plus languages in the world, only 733 have received the full Bible. The New Testament has been translated into 1,622 languages, and a further 1,255 languages have received portions.

BURKINA FASO

This year, Bible Society New Zealand is supporting seven Bible translation projects in Thailand, Papua New Guinea, the South Pacific, Burkina Faso, and a confidential project that we cannot name. All these projects face challenges. I would like to share with you an update from Pascal Hien, the team leader of the Birifor Old Testament project in Burkina Faso, a language spoken by 250,000 people, which I received recently.

"After January 2nd, 2023, we had an internet shutdown throughout the Southwest and Bobo area that lasted most of January. At the end of January, we were invited to Ouaga for our annual Bible Society meeting, and we stayed on for a verification session with our consultant, Dr. Samy Tioye. We returned to Gaoua on February 5th, and were back in the office on the 6th, but there was still no connection. It was on February 9th that

the outage was detected, and the internet restored. As for the security situation, it is really trying. Officially, there are about 60,000 displaced people in the Southwest. The Bible Society has agreed to support us for the next two years. We are very grateful to the Lord for this extended time, because all this has weighed heavily on me towards the end of last year."

Through its Bible Translation Roadmap initiative, the United Bible Societies (UBS) is assisting translation teams like the Birifor Old Testament team. It aims to complete 1,200 translations by 2038. It provides funding, training workshops, specialised translation software, technical assistance, and translation consultancy support.

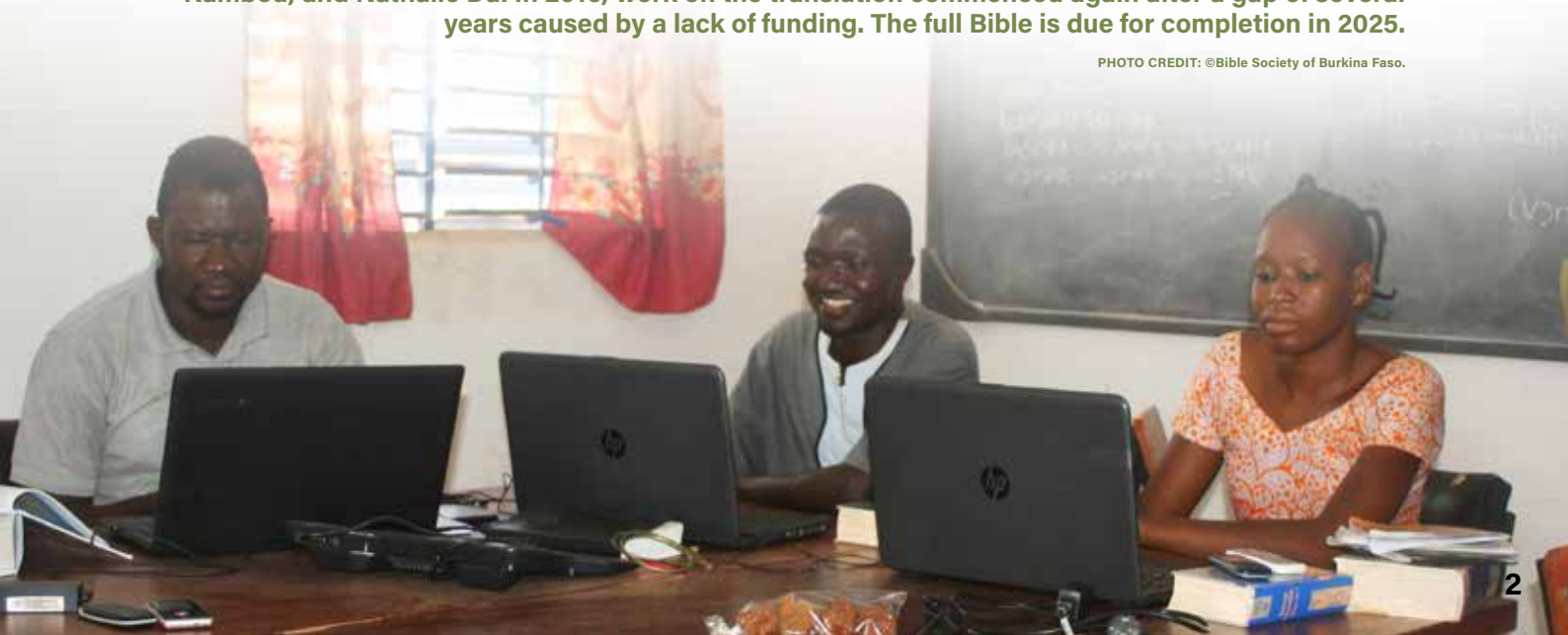
Recently, UBS reaffirmed that Bible translation is at the heart of its mission. And that Bible translation does not exist in isolation. When a community receives the Bible in its heart language for the first time, this is only the first step in a journey of Bible engagement and Bible literacy which leads to personal and community transformation.

Scan to watch a video from Paul Thiessen, a Burkina Faso Bible translator.



The Birifor Old Testament translation team in Burkina Faso. From left to right: Pascal Hien, Dimitri Kambou, and Nathalie Da. In 2016, work on the translation commenced again after a gap of several years caused by a lack of funding. The full Bible is due for completion in 2025.

PHOTO CREDIT: ©Bible Society of Burkina Faso.



CHINA

The Wa people live in China's Yunnan Province, along the border with Myanmar. They number around 352,000, and twenty per cent of them are Christian. In 1938, they received the New Testament when it was translated by missionaries. But it would be another 78 years before they received the full Bible in 2016.

In 2002, Rev. Bao Guangqiang joined the Old Testament translation team. Previously, Bao had worked in a factory, but an industrial accident left him unable to work. After much prompting and prayer from his family and friends, Bao accepted Christ into his life, and he was healed. He began studying at Yunnan Theological Seminary.

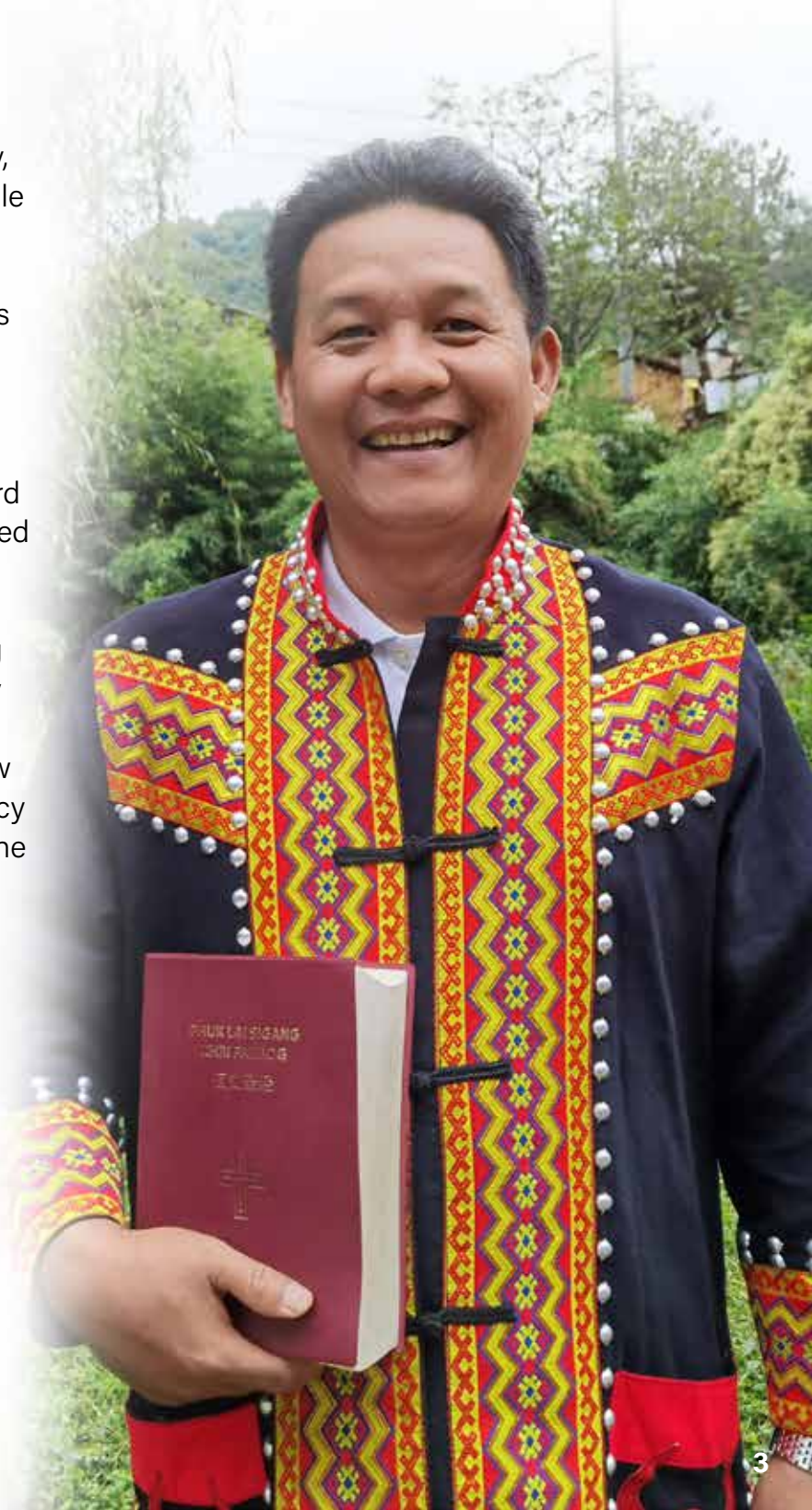
"For over twenty years, I have devoted my time and effort into making the Word of God available to Wa believers. I helped translate the Bible into Wa, and now I teach Bible-based literacy classes. I would like to thank UBS for distributing free Wa Bibles to us. Now almost every family in the village has a Wa Bible. Moreover, most of the villagers can now read the Wa Bible because of the literacy classes being run by the Church with the support of UBS!"

One family which has benefited from having the Wa Bible is that of Bao Bao'ai's. Born into a Christian family, Bao's faith suffered during the Cultural Revolution when Christianity was banned. But when the Wa Bible arrived in his village, it became a catalyst for transformation not only for Bao and his family but for the entire village.

After they received the Wa Bible, Wa Christians began forming Bible reading

Rev. Bao Guangqiang, a Wa pastor, Bible translator and literacy class teacher holding a copy of the Wa Bible, which was published in 2016 with the support of UBS. In October 2020, the Yunnan Christian Council/TSPM organised a three-day training workshop for ethnic minority church workers and leaders in Kunming, including how to conduct Scripture literacy classes for their respective churches. Many of the participants were Bible translators eager to teach their fellow believers how to read God's Word in their own language.

PHOTO CREDIT: ©UBS CHINA PARTNERSHIP





Wa women in a Bible-based literacy class.

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groups. Bao was one of the first to attend. He brought his son along who was trapped in the grip of addiction. With the support of the group, Bao's son repented of his sins, experiencing a profound life transformation.

"The Bible has transformed my entire family and turned our lives around. It

is more valuable to me than gold," says Bao. The transformation in Bao's family drew others to the life-changing power of God's Word and now this humble village is experiencing a revival. The local church is putting more emphasis on preaching, reading, and studying the Bible, as well as encouraging the congregation to share their faith with others.



Two Marquesan women with the New Testament.

PHOTO CREDIT: ©JOSEPH HONG

THE SOUTH PACIFIC

The Marquesas Islands lie around 1,500 kilometres north of Tahiti. In the 18th century, when Europeans first visited the islands, the population is estimated to have been 80,000 people. But due to European diseases and the practice of “blackbirding” or Europeans kidnapping Pacific Islanders for use as slaves on plantations, the population rapidly declined. By the early 20th century, there were only 2,000 Marquesans left. They were thought to be a dying race.

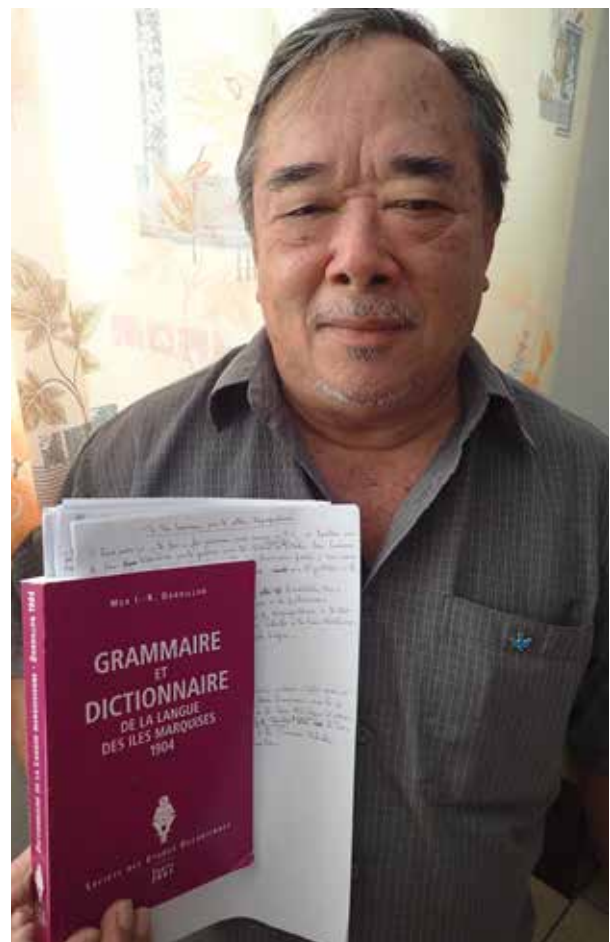
In the 19th century, Ildefonse-René Dordillon, a French clergyman, wrote a book entitled, “Grammar and Dictionary of the Language of the Marquesas Islands.” “The Marquesan is a language that will be no more. But while this people is going to be extinct, ethnographers and linguists will even more appreciate the documents of a language that is no longer spoken,” he wrote.

Fortunately, his prediction did not come true. Today, there are around 10,000 Marquesan speakers and his grammar book is used as a reference book by Bible translators. One of those translators is Jacques. A former teacher, Jacques is very active in his Christian faith and in the life of his church.

But over the years Jacques has seen the declining use of the Marquesan language among young people, and he wants to help revive it. He believes that a new Bible translation will help to preserve his language for future generations.

“My mother tongue is the distinct Marquesan language. When I read the Bible in French, it is difficult to understand due to my limited knowledge of the French language. When my grandchildren read the Bible in French and find they cannot fully understand it, they will be able to turn to the Marquesan Bible. This Marquesan Bible will serve as a basis for the language and help young people to master it,” says Jacques.

In 1995, the Marquesans received the New Testament with Psalms, followed by a revision in 2015. In 1990, work began on the Old Testament and this is now nearing completion.



Jacques with a recent edition of Dordillon’s “Grammar and Dictionary of the Language of the Marquesas Islands.”

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Bible translators such as Pascal, Rev. Bao and Jacques are standing on the shoulders of giants including William Tyndale and Casiodoro de Reina. But in our modern times they are facing their own challenges, including a lack of funding, resources, equipment, and infrastructure.

Yet it all becomes worthwhile because there is nothing like the excitement that occurs when a community receives the Bible in its heart language for the first time. And having the Bible brings many changes in its wake, including personal and community transformation, revival, increased literacy, and the revival of endangered languages. No other book has that impact!

When you support the Bible Translation Roadmap, which has the aim of completing 1,200 translations by 2038,

you are not only helping Bible translators you are helping communities to receive the Word of God.

You can find a list of the projects we are supporting this year in the enclosed appeal letter. Will you consider making a gift and help bring the Bible to people in their heart language? Your gift will make a difference. Thank you and God bless you!

Yours sincerely,



Neels Janse van Rensburg
CEO

P.S. Thank you for your generosity and faithfulness to Bible mission.

The Marquesan Old Testament Bible translators standing under a breadfruit tree, with Jacques, pictured right.

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