

JAARS **SPEEDING THE WORD TRANSCRIPT**

Speaker

Len Newell

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Interviewer

Arthur Lightbody

Primary Topic(s)

Bible translation work in the Philippines

Other Topics

Rice terrace farming

Location Discussed

Philippines; Canada

People Group (if named)

Ifugao, Batad

Announcer:

Welcome to *Speeding the Word*, coming to you from the JAARS Center in Waxhaw, North Carolina, where JAARS speeds Bible translation for all people. And now our host Arthur Lightbody.

Lightbody:

We are talking with Len Newell, a Wycliffe translator. A Canadian who has served in the Philippines for several years, we are talking with him today by telephone in Chilliwack, British Columbia. Welcome to *Speeding the Word*, Len. I first met you in the Philippines. When did you and your wife Doreen go to the Philippines?

Newell:

If I give you a great answer to that, then everyone will know how old I am. It was in 1953. I've been in Wycliffe a long time.

Lightbody:

My aunt Alice went to the Philippines the same year, so I am aware of that first group of Wycliffe translators that traveled to the Philippines in 1953. God has done so many things, Len, and we want to hear some of the things that happened to you during those years. What people group did you go to live with in the Philippines?

Newell:

Our first experience was with the Ifugao people. The folks we worked with lived in a village called Batad.

Lightbody:

How large an area was that, and how many people speak the language?

Newell:

There are something like 60,000 people who speak the extended language. We are now calling it Ayangan, because it reaches beyond the borders of Batad—in fact, a good part of Ifugao is of the language called Ayangan.

Lightbody:

Tell us about their crop and about the rice terraces. Maybe our listeners don't know about those.

Newell:

The Ifugao are rice terrace farmers. They spend a lot of their time in rice terrace building. They take very rugged mountain country, and they cut down the mountainside and build it up with stone walls and make terraces. Now sometimes those terraces are very narrow because the territory is very steep. Then they bring down water and irrigate those terraces and grow rice. But they aren't able to grow enough rice to feed themselves, so they have to grow sweet potatoes in upland fields. That is actually the staple crop of the Ifugao people, because is not that extensive throughout Ifugao.

Lightbody:

I know things are changing now, Len, and many types of vocations are held by the young people as they go off to school, but what was the language picture when you arrived? Could these people speak English or [other] national Philippine language? What was the language picture?

Newell:

When we first arrived there were very few people who could speak English, and of those that did, they would probably have been about 25 years or younger—those

who had attended the elementary school in the area. They spoke English very falteringly. They did not really know the language very well. A few more had been outside of Ifugao and worked in gold mines in other mountainous areas. They spoke a language which was the lingua franca of the northern part of the Island of Luzon in the Philippines, which was called Ilocano. Those two languages, apart from Ifugao, were spoken a little bit.

Lightbody:

Would you say that even today many of the people still understand their mother tongue, Ifugao, better than other languages?

Newell:

As a matter of fact, I would say all of them speak it better than any of the outside languages. For those that live within the borders of Ifugao, most of them know very little besides their own mother tongue.

Lightbody:

So this is the reason we need Bible translation there. Can you tell us about their spiritual condition? In those early years when you went there, what was the religion they practiced?

Newell:

They are still practicing their religion—I would say 50% of the people are still as they were, as we saw them. First of all, they were animists. They appeased through sacrifices a pantheon of several hundred spirits. They offered animal sacrifices to them. They were also ancestor worshippers—they didn't actually bury their dead. They put them in caves, wrapped [them] in blankets, and then on occasion they would bring those bones out, and they would set them up in a sitting position underneath their houses—their houses were up on stilts—and they would offer sacrifices to their ancestors. So both ancestor worship and spirit worship has been and still is in some cases a part of the Ifugao religion.

Lightbody:

I understand you were in the Philippines recently. We'd like to hear something about the church movement that has started. What was the purpose of your visit?

Newell:

I was there to participate in the silver anniversary of the Ayangan Ifugao Bible Church, which grew out of our translation of the New Testament Scriptures. About 400 people gathered. We had a great time at the 25th anniversary. They were rejoicing in the fact that God had blessed [them] during the last 25 years, and they were eagerly looking forward to the future and the continued growth of the Ifugao church.

Lightbody:

Can you tell us about some of the early awareness that you had that people were turning to Christ during those early years you were doing Scripture translation?

Newell:

For the first 18 years or so there was nothing [no response]. We did our work there and we began translating, but for those years we worked with the Ifugao people we saw no results. As a matter of fact, I was so discouraged at one point I was almost ready to quit, but the Lord continued to put the Ifugao work and the translation on our hearts, so we continued. The first person I'm aware of who gave his heart to the Lord in Batad Ifugao was a man named Bon-Og Francis Poligon. He was a native priest. He was working with me on the translation of the Scriptures, and one day he stopped translating, and he said, "You know, Bullay (my Ifugao name), since I've been working with you on the Scriptures I have sensed a change in my thinking

and in my life. Some of the things I'd been doing in the past I find I am not able to do any more. That's a little bit strange because according to our beliefs some of the things such as taking sugar cane that belongs to someone else out of their field is not particularly wrong as long as you are not caught doing it." He gave me two or three other examples.

Then he said, "Now I am having trouble doing that because of the fact that somehow something is telling me that it is not right."

I said, "Bon-Og, you know what is happening is that the Holy Spirit is working in your heart and you are under the conviction of the Holy Spirit." Within a matter of days Bon-Og gave his heart to the Lord. He was the first. There were others, many others. In fact, all of the language men who worked with me on the translation eventually came to know the Lord.

Lightbody:

Well, Len, we are going to talk more about that next week. I know there is a gentleman named Ilat, and I would like to hear his story. Thank you for being with us this week. We invite our listeners to tune in again next week to hear more about what God did among the people in Batad Ifugao. I want to point out that you can find Len's book, *Headhunters' Encounter with God* on Amazon.com. Thank you, Len.

I would like to give you, our listeners, a little report. We are quite excited here at JAARS. We've just received the donation of a Pilatus aircraft, a PC-6 Pilatus Porter, that is well suited for our work in Southeast Asia. The gift was received from Marshall Carter, the Chairman of the New York Stock Exchange and his wife Missy. The aircraft is valued at one million dollars.

President Jim Akovenko of JAARS said, "We are grateful for this timely gift from Mr. and Mrs. Carter. The aircraft is a perfect match for the very short runways that are common in our fields of operation. The turbo-prop PC-6 is well suited for medical evacuations, assisting local people in literacy and other forms of community development."

Marshall Carter is a long time seaplane pilot. He owned and used the aircraft for nine years. "The Pilatus Porter," he said, "is a wonderful aircraft and has brought a tremendous amount of joy to me and my family over the years. With its donation to JAARS for humanitarian purposes, the aircraft will now take on its most important mission ever. JAARS should be commended for its great work and for putting donations such as this to work for people in need."

We are grateful to the Carter family and many of our donors that make our work possible. Have a great day.

Announcer:

We hope you have enjoyed *Speeding the Word*. We'd love to hear from you. If you are interested in finding out more about JAARS, or Bible translation, give us a call at: 1-800-890-0628, or look us up on the Web at jaars.org.