

# JAARS **SPEEDING THE WORD TRANSCRIPT**

Speaker  
**Wes Collins**

Broadcast Date  
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Interviewer  
**Arthur Lightbody**

Primary Topic(s)  
**CILTA, a course that trains Spanish-speaking young people in linguistics and translation**

Other Topics  
**Translating Scriptures**

Location Discussed  
**Guatemala**

People Group (if named)  
**Mam**

**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 Wes Collins today. You are someone that I met in training years ago, and we are visiting right now in Dallas, Texas, where we met when both of us were training to be Bible translators. You are now a Ph.D. and very much involved in training others. My wife, Kathleen, and I met you and Nancy who had arrived, I believe, from Ohio. How did God lead you into Wycliffe and Bible translation?

**Collins:**

You are right; Nancy and I are both from Ohio. When I was growing up I was involved in an organization called Christian Service Brigade, which is something like the Boy Scouts, but it is a Christian organization. The leader that I was with encouraged us to be involved in a couple of mission trips that he set up. That following year was when I ran into Wycliffe for the first time. We went to Mexico and visited some friends of my Brigade leader. I began to think about, wow, these guys deal with the Bible. They deal with every verse of the New Testament; they have to understand it in order to translate it. That made a lasting impression on me.

A couple of years later on another missions trip, this time to the Caribbean, I met Nancy, who eventually became my wife. We were interested in missions from the beginning of our relationship. My meeting with Wycliffe was providential in that we just thought, *This is something that is important to God*. The opportunity for people to have access to the Scriptures was something crucial to what ministry is about around the world, so we pursued that.

**Lightbody:**

Now did that lead to a master's degree in the middle 1970s?

**Collins:**

Yes. Nancy and I both came to Dallas, and we studied applied linguistics, and we both got our master's degrees before going to the mission field.

**Lightbody:**

And you went to Guatemala, right? Tell us about your time there and what the Lord had you working with.

**Collins:**

We went to Guatemala when Nancy was pregnant with our first child, Elisa. She was born two months, to the day, after our arrival. We went to Guatemala and began to learn Spanish. After about six months and a little bit of Spanish, we moved to the rural part of Guatemala in the western highlands and began to learn another language called Mam. We eventually began to work with Mam coworkers and printed some books and established an alphabet and did some literacy work and eventually translated the New Testament into that language.

**Lightbody:**

What were the changes you saw in the lives of the Mam people over the time they were receiving portions of God's Word, and then the entire New Testament?

**Collins:**

There was a small church there that was established by missionaries that had also worked in the language. Yet we saw the preaching was in Spanish. Although it was accessible to some Mam that were bilingual, the majority did not understand well, especially the women. So as I worked with one of my language helpers, Antonio, he would print out what we were working on that day and take it home and preach it at night. That was exciting. The fact he wanted it, that it was so current, and the fact he was using it with his own people added confidence that the Scriptures were communicating well.

I had an interesting experience with a fellow named Juan. Juan and Antonio worked with me often. We were working on Hebrews 7, where it talks about Melchizedek and that Jesus is our high priest in the order of Melchizedek.

He said, "You know, I've read this a bunch of times. I've been to Bible school in Spanish, and I've even preached that Jesus is a high priest in the order of Melchizedek, and I was clueless about what that meant. I could preach it, but I didn't really understand it until today as we sat here and spoke about and talked about and discussed this Scripture in my own language. I understand who Melchizedek was and why he was important. So it is not just words anymore, but I've really come to understand what this means."

Experiences like that encouraged us that the Scriptures were needed for the maturity of the church and for people to just understand what it is that the Bible and what the Gospel is about.

**Lightbody:**

As far as you know, since you've left, the Scripture is still being used?

**Collins:**

When we left, another Wycliffe couple went to promote Scripture use and promote use of the Scriptures and the production of literacy materials. We also were involved in a number of small projects that would give people the opportunity to read and create literature. We started a bookstore that sold Mam Scriptures and Mam books as well as school supplies, paper. We had a photocopier there. That was a neat experience, because it brought the work in Mam into the mainstream—into the market place. And I think that is important.

**Lightbody:**

A lot of people probably don't really know it [Bible translation] is a holistic ministry. We are interested in seeing growth in social, economic and other areas of life.

**Collins:**

One of early projects was to take advantage of the area as an apple producer. The apples weren't very good looking, but they were quite tasty. So we bought a cider press, and two Mam men and I went into the small business of pressing apple cider. It was a good business that went on for three or four years. The thing that I was impressed with was the Mam did not have a way to refrigerate or get the apples to last, so when they had apples they had millions of them, so the value of the apples was pretty low, because there were so many that turned ripe at the same time. By pressing apple cider, although we didn't use preservatives, what it did

was it added value. And when the people would come out and say, “How much are your apples?”—the Mam would say they were 20 cents a pound. The truck drivers could say, “Well, that is too bad; we are only paying five cents a pound.” The people had to decide whether they were going to take their apples home and let them rot, or sell them for a nickel. But by adding value to the apples, and having a little cider business, the people could basically say, “No—we are not going to be taken advantage of. We are going to make apple cider.” And that was a good thing.

**Lightbody:**

Then you moved on—you went back to Ohio State University and got your Ph.D. in linguistics.

**Collins:**

We left Guatemala in 1998, after 19 years. I love to teach and I enjoy linguistics. We had spent a good amount of our adult lives working among indigenous people, so I thought a good way to invest in that experience would be to continue to train others. In 1999 the New Testament was dedicated, and in 2000 I began a Ph.D. program at Ohio State University. My degree is in linguistics, although my research and dissertation is in the field of linguistic anthropology—the relationship, the overlap, between language and culture. Since my graduation in 2005 I’ve been in Peru. I work in Lima with a local university. The program is called CILTA, which, in English, stands for the International Course for Linguistics, Translation and Literacy. That is where we train native Spanish-speaking young people who are university-level in the skills we believe they need for cross-cultural ministry. These students want to do Bible translation, literacy work, development work, but they want to do it cross-culturally and cross-linguistically. That’s what I’ve attempted to parlay my experience and education into being a professor for these students.

**Lightbody:**

I understand some of them go into Bible translation and they go into literacy. It may not be actually be with Wycliffe Bible Translators, or one of our sister organizations, but maybe with a partner. They are from different mission groups learning to do this cross-cultural type of work. Have you heard stories of individuals who have gone on and are learning the languages and engaged in Bible translation?

**Collins:**

I’ve been doing this for three years. Most of the grads have gone on and gone to the field. Some stay in Latin America and work in literacy and translation in the Americas, mostly South or Central America. Some have gone on and headed overseas. We are happy about that.

A recent graduate is involved in work in Argentina, which is his home country. He originally thought together with his wife to go overseas, but they are a key couple in the church, and the church takes advantage of them being fairly close to home. People from the church go out and visit them in their allocation and people that have a missions vision have the opportunity with people they know and love to visit the field and see—“Oh, this is great. We can get involved in this; we can get excited about this.” We are happy to not only to be training people who are going to be involved in training people who are going to be involved in translation and literacy work, but also the blowback to the local churches is a very positive thing.

**Lightbody:**

Have you heard any statistics or general statements about involvement of the church in South America in missions generally?

**Collins:**

Well, it is a growing enterprise. It is interesting that for many, many years that the First World, the English-speaking world, and then Western Europe did for the Third World. But now the large majority, in terms of numbers and percentages—the large majority of cross-cultural missionaries no longer are from the United States or from the traditional sending countries. Now the countries that used to be net receivers of missionaries are now net senders of missionaries. Many of them are funded by their own churches or a consortium of churches, just like we are. We are excited about that. It still is an issue for prayer and promotion that the Latin America church would really take this on as their own, and not as something that the expatriates do and we help them with—it is the church that has been positioned to go and make disciples, not the foreigners' church.

**Lightbody:**

Are there any other prayer requests you would like to ask for this whole movement?

**Collins:**

CILTA is a one-year program. It is extremely intense. We don't allow students to work or do anything on the side. They basically come to class. They study. They read. We have them for an entire university year. Right now we are putting together the cohort program for 2009. In South America, classes begin in mid-March and they run to mid-December. We are always praying for a good chemistry. We want students to not only be gifted academically. CILTA students become sort of an extended family where they've been through a lot together. They've studied together; they've spent time together; they pray for each other; they weep over issues. It is very precious and special, but we never take that for granted.

**Lightbody:**

Before we go, perhaps somebody out there that is listening is a Spanish speaker, and they might like to study at the University of Ricardo Palma in Lima, Peru. How would someone find that information, Wes?

**Collins:**

Bueno, si alguna persona es hablante del Español podria ir a nuestro sitio de Web: <http://www.sil.org/capacitar/universidad>. Si hay preguntas o dudas contáctenos por email en: [capacitar@sil.org](mailto:capacitar@sil.org).

**Lightbody:**

Thank you for that word, Wes. God bless you, and everybody have a great day.

**Announcer:**

We hope that you have enjoyed *Speeding the Word*. Arthur Lightbody would love to hear from you personally if you are interested in becoming part of the Bible translation movement. He welcomes your call at 1-704-843-6048. You may look us up on the Web at [www.jaars.org](http://www.jaars.org).