



THE MOVEMENTS OF TODAY REST UPON THE SACRIFICES OF CENTURIES PAST



BY RICK WOOD
EDITOR OF MF

CONTACT

Rick Wood
rick.wood@frontierventures.org

One hundred thirty three years later in 1517 an obscure Augustinian monk named Martin Luther burst onto the world stage by once again challenging the most powerful political and religious leaders of his day with the simple idea that our faith and practice as Jesus followers is based on God's Word, the Bible, not upon the edicts of an all powerful church or its leaders. Our final authority is Scripture alone—*Sola Scriptura* in Latin.

All the power of the Holy Roman Empire and the Roman Catholic Church was set to crush this troublesome monk and his "dangerous ideas." The problem for these powerful leaders was that Luther had become the most popular man in Germany among the common people—more popular than the Pope or the Catholic Church. Luther's writings published with the latest technology of the Gutenberg presses sold wildly and made the printers rich. Woodcut prints of Luther's likeness along with Luther's signature made Luther the first "celebrity" of the 16th Century. It was this popularity and the protection of certain German leaders that kept Luther from suffering the same fate as John Huss who was burned at the stake in 1415 for spreading views of Scripture similar to those of Luther.

Luther was called to the German city of Worms (pronounced V-or-ms) to recant his writings before the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V. Upon his arrival, Luther was greeted like a conquering king with an escort of 100 horsemen and thousands of cheering well-wishers.

When Emperor Charles V demanded that he recant his writings on April 18, 1521, Luther replied, "I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not recant anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience." As Eric Metaxes makes clear in his excellent biography of Martin Luther, Luther's confession at the "Diet of Worms" (*diet* meaning assembly) was a turning point in human history where the freedom of conscience was first established as a bedrock principle of Western civilization, which lives on in the founding documents of the United States.

This breakthrough in religious freedom that Luther and others made possible is the foundation that all Bible translation and movements to Christ rest upon.

The **653 kingdom movements** multiplying around the world, transforming the lives of millions, growing faster than the overall population, would not be possible without the freedom that Wycliffe, Luther and pioneers like them have purchased for us.

How much do you love the Word of God? Would you be willing to lay down your life in order to not lose the ability to read it? For most of us in the English-speaking world, we take the Word of God for granted. We have always had access to Bibles in numerous translations. But it has not always been this way and the Scriptures are still not available for roughly 1,500 language groups that need a New Testament translation to begin. The price that many have had to pay for the freedom to read the Bible in their own mother tongue has often been very high.

Over 600 years ago in 1384 a fearless scholar named John Wycliffe invited a death sentence by translating the New Testament into English for the first time. Wycliffe believed that it was the Scriptures that should be the basis for the faith and practice of all Jesus followers. Wycliffe was the first glimmer of hope for those who wanted to read the Bible for themselves. He was one of the first pioneers of what would become the Protestant Reformation. Wycliffe died before he could be executed for his "crime" of translating Scripture so the Catholic Church dug up his remains and burned them anyway.

As we seek to translate the Bible into every language that still needs a translation, we stand on the shoulders of giants like Wycliffe, Huss, Luther, Tyndale and thousands of others who have risked their lives and sometimes sacrificed their lives in order to bring the Word of God to every people in their heart language. Let's not take for granted the freedoms that others paid so dearly to secure for us. But rather, let's honor their sacrifice by completing the translation task that they so nobly began.

THE PACE IS ACCELERATING

We are privileged to live in the greatest period of Bible translation the world has ever known. Great progress has been made over the last 100 years but it is nothing compared with what we are seeing today. In the year 2000 there were 366 complete Bible translations. Today, just 18 years later, there are 677. During this same time the number of complete New Testament translations has gone from 928 to 1550. That is a 67% increase in just 18 years. This is an even more remarkable figure when you consider that it took many decades of prior effort to get to 928. Most exciting of all is that the number of languages still needing a translation to begin has been cut in half from over 3,000 to just 1,559 in just 18 years. Recent progress is nothing short of astounding. So what is leading to this dramatic progress?

Around the year 2000 Wycliffe Bible Translators realized that at the rate they were going it would take 150 years for a translation to be started in every language group that still needed a translation. This was not acceptable to them, so they decided to re-evaluate and rethink everything they were doing in order to pick up


the pace of Bible translation. They set for themselves the goal of starting a translation in every language that still needed one by 2025. This issue of *MF* is all about what Wycliffe is doing to reach this goal.

As you read through this issue one thing becomes clear. Technology has enabled translators to not only speed up the translation process but to also improve the quality of the end product by including a wide range of people in the translation process. Increasingly, the people who will use the translation are becoming active participants in the translation process. This improves the usefulness of translation as well as the ownership of it by the people who will be using it. It does no good to do a translation if the people who need it don't use it.

There has been a revolution in Bible translation over the last 20 years and that revolution continues to grow as ever improving technology brings the completion of the initial Bible translation task into sight. With 3,334 languages now having some portion of Scripture in their language, we can now anticipate the day when every people group will have a complete Bible in their heart language. We will not have to wait 100 years for it to happen. There will always be a need for revision and updating of previous translation work, but in the not too distant future every people will have access to Scripture in their language if we will continue to press forward.

A KAIROS MOMENT FOR MOVEMENTS AND BIBLE TRANSLATION

Around the world over 653 movements of discipleship and church planting are growing faster than the rate of the overall

population. Central to all of these movements is the focus on obedience to the Word of God. The future growth of these movements is dependent upon having at least some oral portions of Scripture available in the languages where these movements are taking place. Wycliffe has recognized the importance of developing an oral approach to the translation of Scripture. See the article, "The Voice of God Speaking to Siberian Hearts" starting on page 19 for an example of how oral stories from Scripture can transform lives. I do not believe it is just a coincidence that these Scripture-centric movements are growing and spreading at the same time that the availability of the Scriptures both oral and written is increasing. They build upon each other and serve one another. Both Wycliffe and the 24:14 Coalition have set the same end date of 2025 to reach their respective goals. Whether the global Church succeeds in bringing the gospel to every people in our lifetime will largely depend on whether these goals are met. 

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