

THE BIBLE TRANSLATOR'S ASSISTANT

Dartmouth Professor Wants to Bring God's Word to all Nations

D Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all peoples — 1 Chronicles 16:24

Even in today's communications savvy world, relaying the truth of the Bible among all the world's people is a challenge. According to Dartmouth University Research Professor Richard Denton, there are currently more than 2,000 languages that don't have access to any portion of the Bible.

Denton is a co-founder of The Bible Translator's Assistant, a non-profit organization working to develop computer software that enables understandable, accurate, and widespread translations of the Bible. The goal of the The Bible Translator's Assistant (TBTA) is to translate the entire Bible into all of the world's languages.

The professor, whose research specialty at Dartmouth is computer modeling of space plasmas, first became interested in pursuing Bible translation out of the desire he and his wife have to become missionaries after he retires from the university. The couple is preparing for missions work in the area of Bible translation.

At Dartmouth, Denton took a course in computational linguistics, where he began thinking about the implications of using computers in Bible translation. Subsequently, he pursued that topic for his course project.

"The most important idea that came out of the project was that if you put a lot of effort into analyzing the meaning of original text [of the Bible], it's possible to get accurate translation out," said Denton.

With that realization and his completed project, Denton approached Wycliffe Bible Translators, a ministry based in Orlando, Florida. Wycliffe Bible Translators (WBT), put him in touch with Dr. Tod Allman, a software engineer and Talbot Theological Seminary graduate who was already working on Bible translation software. Denton now works with Allman and fellow TBTA co-founder and University of Maryland Research Professor Dr. Stephen Beale. Together they are moving forward to further develop and use the software, which is aimed at significantly reducing the time required to produce an accurate, understandable Bible translation.

Currently, TBTA is working with Dr. Karl Franklin of WBT to translate several Old Testament books in the western dialect of Kewa, a language spoken by roughly 100,000 people in Papua,

New Guinea. Additionally, the non-profit is working with missionaries from Wycliffe and the North Tanna translation committee to translate Old Testament books for approximately 4,000 people living in The Republic of Vanuatu, a South Pacific island. The organization also works with missionaries in Asia.

Despite the time-reducing software, translating the Bible into so many languages still takes vast hours and great care and detail.

Denton's role with TBTA is to help develop the semantic representations, or meaning-based representations, of the biblical books. He recently finished the first phase of his work on the Book of Luke.

"It takes a long time," said Denton. "I've been working on the Book of Luke since 2007, and I estimate I probably put in 700 hours over that amount of time."

Additionally, he explained, his work with the Book of Luke consisted of more than just a translation into another language. His work in semantic representation means he had to analyze the individual words and phrases in the book very carefully and use a simplified vocabulary and grammar for the translation. From that, the TBTA software can help translate it into another language.

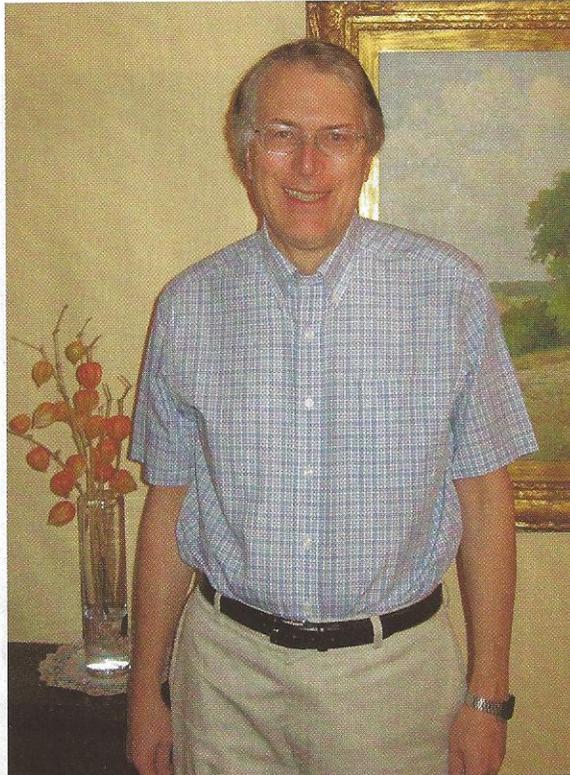
According to Denton, "There are a lot of phrases we read through [in the Bible], but we don't think about what they mean."

He admits that translating the Word of God is an awesome respon-

sibility. "We do try to do a good job and we pray that God will inspire us," he said. "A lot of people have the feeling like 'you can't fool around with this; this is the Bible.' But anything you read in English is a translation. Some people might take a look at the English and say it's not exact, but that is the translation."

Denton estimates that as he and his colleagues develop more semantic representations of the Bible, the amount of time necessary for translating it will be cut tremendously. For example, he believes that while it now takes 10 to 20 years for just the New Testament to be translated, eventually, it will only take two years to translate the entire Bible.

And so, as Dartmouth's motto harkens, "A voice crying out in the wilderness," Denton, through hard, prayer-filled work is seeking to bring the Gospel to thousands who currently have no way of reading God's Word. ■



Dartmouth Professor Richard Denton is helping develop Bible translation software that will bring the Gospel to those who have never read it.