

Coping Devices

By Michael Sweeney



Try to imagine for a minute what it's like to live in a small village, deep in a tropical jungle, untouched by modern technology. No TV. No Internet. No traffic. No clocks.

How do you think you would describe your experience? Think of some good adjectives to express your imaginings: Peaceful? Quiet? Serene? Tranquil? Heavenly?

Have you been suffering from similar delusions for a long time?

I am sitting in such a village right now. It's evening. I've been working hard all day. I'm bushed. Someone on the other side of the village is yelling at someone else on this side of the village. I can't tell if he's yelling because he's angry, or if he just needs to be heard; probably the latter. Several small children are screaming, in seeming competition with one another over whose burdens are more unbearable.

The 14-year-old next door has been playing the same tune on his ukulele for the past three hours. I repeat, three hours. He only knows two chords. The thing I find most exasperating about it is that I'm the genius who bought him the ukulele. Did I mention that he's been at it for three hours?

This afternoon I was working in a village checking session. During these sessions, we pull in people that did not work on the translation, read them the translated passages, and ask them questions to see how well the text as translated can be understood. Here's how some of it went (although translated for your benefit):

Me: "So to whom do you think Jesus was referring when he spoke of the 'strong man' in this parable?"

Informant #1: "He was talking about..." (At this point I can't make out what he is saying because some roosters outside of the office have gotten into a noisy altercation.

One of the men says: "I'll take care of that," and heads out the door. Apparently he picks up a dirt clod and throws it, because we all hear a "WHAP!" "BEGOCK!" Silence. He comes back in and sits down.)

Me: "Thank you. So to whom was Jesus referring?"

Informant #1: "He was..." (At this point his words are again blotted out by the sound of a pig squealing loudly just under the window. One of the men says, "That must be my pig. I'll take care of him." He walks out the door and picks up a 2x4 from under the house. We hear a loud "KRAK!" followed by "WHEEEEE!" and then the sound of a pig crashing through the bush. He walks back in and sits down.)

Me: "Thank you. The strong man?"

Informant #1, in exasperated tones: "He..." (At this point two of the village dogs begin barking madly at something. One of the men says, "Hold on a minute, I'll take care of it," and walks out the door. "WHACK!" "AI-AI-AI-AI-AI-AI-AI!" He walks back in smiling and sits down.)

Me: "Thank you." I turn to Informant #1 with an expectant look on my face, but before he can open his mouth the room is filled with the sound of the woman next door shouting at her kids. One of the men says, "I'll take care of it," and starts to get up. Thinking back to what happened to the rooster, the pig, and the dog, I hold up my hand and say, "No, I'd better take care of it this time," and I go outside to ask the woman, gently, to hold down the noise.

Such is life in paradise.

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Aruamu Dream Come True by Marsha Relyea

What a delightful thing it is to work with first-generation Christians and to have a ringside seat as they interact with God's Word, newly translated into their mother tongue for the first time in history! In the last few weeks, as we have completed the exegetical check and the comprehension check of the book of Romans, several insightful comments were made by our Aruamu co-workers.

We had just come to the section in Romans 3 where the Apostle Paul declares, "All people have sinned and fallen short of God's glory." Francis Dagonov blurted out, "Man!

And then our team read, "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus!" Pais audibly sighed and exclaimed, "Now that is really good news!" Bingo, Pais!

God really has the whole human race backed into a corner, without any excuses! The Jewish people had God's law and didn't follow it, so they're condemned. Non-Jews did not have the law, but they could look all around and see things

God made, and they didn't want to follow him. So everybody is a sinner, and nobody has any excuses. The only way out is Jesus!" I thought, "Bingo, Francis!"

Several days later, we worked through Romans 7, where the Apostle Paul wrestles through the big Christian dilemma of the conflicting desires of the old nature and the new nature. The things we want to do, we don't do, and the things we don't want to do are exactly what we do. You could almost feel the frustration around our translation table! "What a wretched person I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?" And then our team flipped our pages to chapter 8 and read, "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus!" Our co-worker Pais Asuari breathed an audible sigh of relief and exclaimed, "Now that is really good news!" Bingo, Pais!

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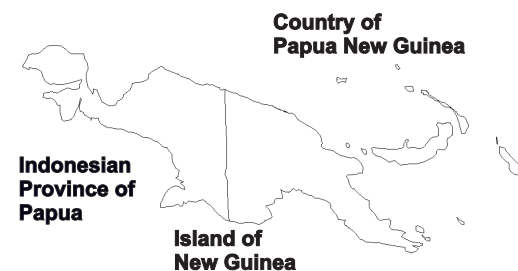
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The Might of the Comma

Did you know the eastern half of the island of New Guinea forms the country of Papua New Guinea, and the western half is a province of Indonesia? Formerly Irian Jaya, this province has now been named Papua. So, if you put "Papua, New Guinea" on your letter to us, that little comma after Papua could send our mail to the wrong country!



Notes

Editor's

"The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel (God with us)" Isaiah 7:14. Isaiah, that most prolific of the Messianic prophets, identifies this prophecy as a sign to King Ahaz from the Lord God himself that He did not intend to allow Judah to be destroyed by the alliance of Aram and Israel, despite her wickedness. Why? His Messiah would come from the tribe of Judah, the house of David, to establish an everlasting kingdom . . . in other words, what Ahaz feared didn't fit into God's plan. Circumstances had Ahaz shaking in his boots, but God said, "Keep calm; don't be afraid; do not lose heart!"

It's the same with us—everything I touched this past week seemed to go wrong: the copy machine was acting up, I

couldn't keep to a too-tight schedule because of it, and my frustration and stress level were through the roof. But everything fell into a godly perspective when a close friend reminded me: God is with us!

Then, after not being able to connect to the Internet for a week and a half, email brought some sad news: a family friend had died, someone dear to me had been injured, another friend was suffering from depression. As I prayed for these loved ones, the Holy Spirit reminded me: God is with us!

What about you? Is life being kind to you, or is every single day a struggle, either physically or spiritually? Let me remind you: God is with us! And He has promised never to leave or forsake us. Remember Jesus' last words before His ascension? "Lo, I am with you always, even until the end of the world." Then He will come, and we will be with Him. Maranatha, Immanuel.



Cross-Cultural Christmas PNG Profile by Ellen Rohrer

Tinsel and colorful ornaments on a fir tree, traditional Christmas carols being sung in English over public address systems in stores, the images of Santa and Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer plastered on billboards advertising Coca-Cola and other western goods—slowly these things are creeping into the consciousness of Papua New Guinean society in urban centers. But Christmas is not nearly so commercialized for the ordinary bushman and his family, nor for many who live in small towns. The Christians of PNG recognize that “holiday” derives from “holy day,” and they keep the holiday accordingly, going to church in the morning, then devoting the rest of the day to quiet family gatherings. Gift giving is usually limited to the new clothes that the mothers have sewn for the family: special brocade or silk *meri* blouses for themselves and their daughters; crisply new, but plain white or light blue shirts and dark blue *laplaps* for the menfolk. Everyone wears his newest and best for Sunday morning worship, much in the same way American families do for Easter.

This does not mean that they have not developed their own Christmas traditions, however. Having heard that the United Church of Madang has some rather unusual Christmas traditions, I asked Larua Ronnie, our office receptionist, to give me an “insider’s” perspective on how her church celebrates the holiday.

ER: Larua, what makes Christmas so special at your church?

LR: Our congregation is made up of members from all the provinces of PNG, but the two largest groups are from Central Province and the island of New Britain. These two groups have the biggest influence on how we celebrate the holiday. For instance, we observe the Central Province custom of singing the *Pareveta* (“Prophet Songs”) from the First Advent prophecies of the Old Testament. These are sung in the Motu, Roro, and Aroma languages (of Central Province). Two or three ladies will start the songs, then the men will come in with their part. Sometimes there will be dancing, as well.

ER: So only the people from these language groups sing the songs in their mother tongues?

LR: Some of the songs have been written down in our Book of Worship, so the congregation can sing the words phonetically.

ER: Is this done only on Christmas Eve or Day?

LR: No, actually it may be done anytime during the Christmas season. In fact, the *Pareveta* are sung on other holy days also, especially on days of thanksgiving. If there is a big *lotu* (worship service) to mark a very special occasion like the opening of a church, a baptismal service, or celebrating New Year's, the *Pareveta* will be combined with it.

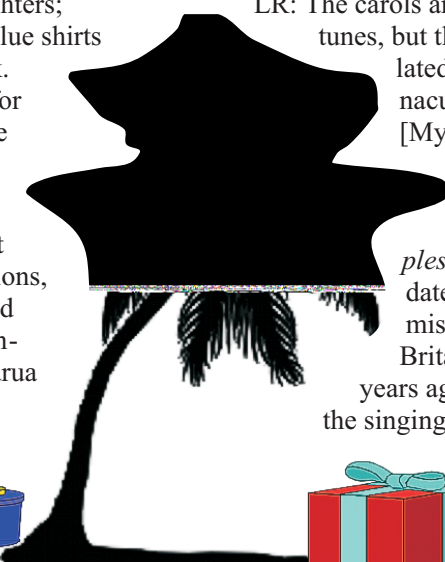
ER: I have been told that your church likes to go caroling on Christmas Eve, but it is not exactly like caroling in the States or in European countries. How is it different?

LR: The carols are sung to the traditional tunes, but the words have been translated into our *tok ples* (the vernacular) or Melanesian Pidgin. [My family is from Kokopo on New Britain, a town about the size of Madang, and our *tok ples* is Kuanua. Our carols date back to when the first missionaries came to New Britain, approximately 110 years ago.] It’s what happens after the singing that’s different. In your country, you might

be invited into the house for hot chocolate or a cookie. Here, we

sometimes receive watermelon or mangoes as a treat to soothe our dry throats. Also, the *papa* or *mama* of the house will hide money, and we are expected to find it. Sometimes, they will hand us a papaya or pineapple and say, “I am sorry that I have no money to give you, but here is something to sell at the market.” Then we know that the fruit has been hollowed out, and money has been hidden inside. Sometimes the *papa* will say, “I have no money, but the fattest one of you may climb up my *buai* (betel nut) tree and see if any is ready to share.” Of course, everyone has a good laugh as the chubbiest young man struggles to climb the tree, and of course there is always money hidden on top. We have found money in a live frog’s belly and at the bottom of a 50-gallon drum full of water. A couple of years ago, my fat uncle was chosen to swim out to a buoy in the middle of a boat channel. We knew that there must be money hidden there, but he is not a strong swimmer and was

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Cross-Cultural Christmas ... continued from page 2

afraid, so finally a young boy was allowed to swim out in my uncle’s place.

ER: So you are always given hints as to where the money might be?

LR: Yes, but sometimes we have to put up with people playing pranks on us if we forget to sing while we are looking. Some people like to throw sugar, flour, or rice all over us! Women might be sprayed with perfume and men with shaving cream—all to fill the night with fun.

ER: But you never go away empty-handed?

LR: No. People are always prepared to give to the carolers. And, really, it’s not for the carolers themselves. All the money is put into a special fund. On Christmas Day, and throughout the year, food is taken to people in the *haus sik* (hospital). Some is used to support the pastors’ college and the senior pastor and youth pastor of our church.

ER: Your evening of caroling sounds like a lot of fun! Maybe I will come with you sometime.

LR: I would love for you to come, but I have to warn you that we start at midnight and it usually runs until 6:00 in the morning.

ER: Oh! Well, maybe not.... What happens on Christmas Day?

LR: No work is done on Christmas Day. Everything is prepared the day before. All the food has been cooked for our feast with our family members. The church has been made beautiful with frangipani, palm fronds, and other *bilas* (decoration). Leafy bamboo forms an arch over the property entrance. Our worship consists of praise songs and hearing the Christmas story told in a sermon or with plays performed by the young people. One of the chairmen and a pastor from the church in New Britain are there to bless our congregation, just as we have sent a chairman and pastor from Madang to bless theirs. The rest of the day is given to our family *bung* (gathering).

ER: That sounds delightful, Larua! Thank you for sharing your family and church traditions with us. I am sure that many of us Americans could benefit from celebrating Christmas Day in the same simple but eloquent way you do.

Larua Ronnie, born in 1979 on New Britain Island, has been PBT’s receptionist for a little over three years. Whether answering the telephone or greeting visitors at the door, she projects a Christ-like spirit that is a valuable asset to the PBT/PNG Branch.

Aruamu Dream Come True ... continued from page 1

A few days later, we came to the end of Romans 12, where the Apostle Paul says things like, “Do not repay evil for evil . . . Do not take revenge . . . If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty give him something to drink.” These words hit our Aruamu friends right on the bulls-eye of a core cultural value! Aruamu have a deeply ingrained “pay-back” system, which works both positively and negatively in their relationships. Siria Ransford said, “This is really a *different* way to do things. We have always paid people back for what they do to us. If we would actually do what the Bible says here, our village would be really different.” Bingo, Siria!

Praise God! The Aruamu Translation Team is working on the exegetical check of 2 Corinthians—our *last book!**

A few days ago I was doing Instant Messaging with our daughter Heather, who is attending university back in the U.S. She prays for our team here every day. She was asking how the translation checking is going, and I was telling her little tidbits of things we are working on. Then she said, “Mom, you guys are making such great progress, but my advice to you is this: Don’t forget to *enjoy it while you’re doing it.*”

Heather’s comment jerked me to reality. She is so right. I do so enjoy translating. I think it is the “funnest” job in the world. I love the part that requires you to delve into God’s Word and search out the deep structure. I love the part that requires you to explore, with a team of co-workers, all available options for encoding meaning into a living target language. I love the “polishing” part, where you tweak expressions to bring out subtle meanings in accurate, exquisite ways. I love the “PR” part—the part where you work with a community to stir up interest in and hunger for God’s Word. I love to see the “lights come on” in people’s eyes when they hear the Word of God read in their own mother tongue. And I love working with a huge, wonderful team, with the Lord at the helm, to make it happen. So, I’m following Heather’s good advice—I’m enjoying it while it lasts!

*Editor’s Note: On the morning of December 3, 2003, the PBT/PNG Branch received with great joy the wonderful news that the Aruamu Consultant Checking Sessions have been completed and the Relyeas have an approved New Testament translation that is nearly ready for typesetting. “Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!”

Marsha and husband, John, have spent the last 18 years translating God’s Word into the Aruamu language. Oldest daughter Heather attends university in the States, and Brigette and Bobby are in school in Ukarumpa, Eastern Highlands Province.

