

Bishop Daniel Arichea
TALES OF A PIONEER
Jophen Bauj

Bishop Daniel Arichea, UBS Translation Consultant, majored in Biblical Studies, Exegesis, and Research. He got his PHD in Biblical Studies from Duke University, USA, and did post-doral studies in Linguistics from the Ohio University, USA. At first he thought that he was called to the pastoral ministry and teaching. But these two gifts were not lost as he has been into the business of communication since 1967, when he first got involved with the United Bible Societies. In 1971 back from his studies in Ohio, he organized the Samareno, Panggasinan and Pampango translation projects with PBS. After two years, his family moved to Bangkok to be consultant for projects in Thailand and in Vietnam. Then in 1975, he became a pioneer of translation projects in Indonesia.

Danger Zone

For three hours, the questioning went on. Dr. Arichea was thankful that he knew enough Indonesian to explain his purpose in coming to North Sulawesi. “We have a mandate from the government to translate the Bible into various Indonesian languages,” he explained to the officer-in-charge.

The officer was not impressed. “When another plane comes, you should take that plane and fly back to where you came from. You can’t translate the Bible here. We are Muslims.”

These government soldiers had intercepted a telegram Dr. Arichea sent to an Indonesian translator. The telegram said that he was coming that day. The soldiers apprehended him at the airport, and held him for interrogation.

After three hours of waiting for another plane to come by, the officers had to let Dr Arichea go. The winds were howling and no plane dared brave the bad weather.

“Okay,” the officer declared. “In the meantime, you may go with the lady, but we will get you when the weather is fine. But you can’t do your work there. We are watching you.”

Dr. Arichea breathed a sigh of relief and murmured a prayer of thanksgiving. He went to the house of the lady translator. She was a retired teacher and the only Christian in her family and in the whole village. The two did not waste time and they proceeded with their ongoing task – translating the Bible into *Gorontalo*, the language in the area.

That night, the teacher-translator invited villagers into her house. She wanted to read to them whatever she had translated so far. Dr. Arichea was apprehensive. Shouldn’t they do this more discreetly? But the lady, matter-of-factly, proceeded with her ‘pilot-testing’. Dr. Arichea could understand only the Indonesian bits of discussions that went on until midnight. He listened and sometimes joined in, but his eyes darted once or twice outside the verandah; there could be a spy out there or even among the invited villagers.

The next morning, a policeman came. “What are you doing?” he asked. “You’re not supposed to do that.” But his expression did not match his stern voice. In fact he was smiling. He was a spy sent to investigate this “illegal” business of translation. But he grinned and said, “Go ahead with your work.” He even gave comments on some of the translations. It turned out that he was a Christian. Of all those policemen he was the one sent.

When the weather cleared, more policemen came and put Dr. Arichea on a plane out, but his job had been accomplished. God had once more ensured that His work would proceed.

Texts and Contexts

This was only one of the many anecdotes that peppered Dr. Arichea’s fulfilling thirteen years work in Indonesia. In 1974 his family moved there when he accepted an offer from the United

Bible Societies. UBS had been assigning people from the West to take on language projects in Indonesia, but nobody they sent could last even a year.

“It was difficult in Indonesia, a country that has the most number of Muslims. There was plenty of work. That’s where I grew in my knowledge and capabilities in Bible translation. Indonesia has over more than 700 languages. In a sense I was a pioneer in the establishment of translation projects especially in another language. When I got there we concentrated on a translation into common Indonesian language. We hired three translators, all women, one was a Catholic nun. I corrected their drafts and learned more Indonesian as I worked with them. ... Half of the month, for two years, we met and read the translation. The idea was to translate in a common Indonesian base text which could serve all the other Indonesian languages ... We finished the New Testament in less than two years, the whole Bible in less than five years. This base text became very useful in translating the Bible into other languages in Indonesia. When I left in 1987 there were 65 language projects going on....”

Currently, Dr. Arichea reviews Bible translations in Philippine minor languages. He checks translations and conducts Bible translation workshops. During the workshop, teacher and translators discuss problems in translation. Some translators find parts of the Bible unsupportive of their theological understanding. Since Dr. Arichea’s training is in historical critical studies he has already resolved many of the same questions during his studies. But how to impart some answers to some valid questions about the Bible texts – that has always been a challenge.

“One way is to add humor to the whole thing. If Mark has one blind man and Matthew has two, and with Matthew, most of the time, they come in pairs, maybe that is because Matthew could be crossed-eyed. Matthew always sees things double. But seriously, it’s just Matthew’s style. He is a Jew. Jews always got to have two witnesses.”

Dr. Arichea ensures that Bible translation into any language is faithful to the source text and understandable to the target readers. “Many parts of the Bible can be considered wisdom literature. They can be understood without context. But all biblical texts have their own contexts, and most of the time, in order to translate accurately, one needs to know the context.

A Most Fulfilling Job

In the translation workshops, he mentors translators in the field. “One of the most fulfilling aspects of my job aside from developing friendships with translators is when I see the effect of translation in other people’s lives – the conversions, the revitalized churches,” he said.

“I remember Aceh, the one hit by the Tsunami.¹ Missionaries don’t go to Aceh, but we translated the Gospel of Luke into the Aceh language. We did that of course outside Aceh. One Aceh Christian did the translation and finished it in 1975. But when we brought the translation into Aceh, the people gathered all the printed copies and destroyed them.

“One of them, the leader of the young people destroying the copies of the Bible, a very fanatic Muslim, kept one copy in his pocket and forgot all about it. One day, he found this copy again and began to read it. It made an impact on him. So he left Aceh and looked for Christians. He found many Christians in Sumatra and he began to talk to them, and he became a Christian and got baptized. Then he wanted to translate into Aceh.

“I didn’t know this man, but one day in 1981, he knocked at my door. I told him to come in and he told me his story. He said that he wanted to translate the Bible – that if the Gospel of Luke could talk to him, then what more the whole Bible.

“We trained him and we assigned him in Medan (the capital city of North Sumatra), and not in Aceh. But he decided that he had to move to Aceh. He wanted the translation to be culturally acceptable too.

“In fact translating into Aceh in Aceh was very dangerous. One day, at a mosque, an IMAM preached about the Christians being at it again. The IMAM said that he heard that a translation was going on.

“After the meeting, the translator from Aceh went to see the IMAM and asked, ‘I heard your sermon, do you know who this translator is?’”

“The IMAM answered, “I heard that he was translating in Medan.”

So the Bible translation into Ache pressed on.

Unstoppable

Dr. Arichea sees this work of translation as a stewardship. The church needs the Scriptures, and so, if the translation process is slow or if the translation is not satisfactory, then either he trains more translators, or fires those whose work doesn't meet the expectations.

Definitely, the Bible has got to be translated in all languages of all people groups. Dr. Arichea has been one of those gifted with every gift suited to get the job done. Indeed God uses him to spread His Word, and God is simply unstoppable.

“I organized the Waray project in 1971. The way I organized it was – first, I wrote a letter to Bishop Urjel, the Catholic Bishop at the time. A few days after, I received his telegram. He wanted me to come immediately, so I went, and I was taken to the Bishop's palace, and he welcomed me like a long lost brother. Then he told me that he dreamt, and that he died in his dream. He was in front of a throne and the one sitting on the throne, asked him, ‘Urjel, why did you not translate the Bible in *Waray-waray*?’ Then he told me that the next day, he received my letter.

“With that dream, he then gave me everything I requested in order to organize the translation project– I requested an office and he gave me an office. There were no hindrances. He made sure that I had everything I needed. So I was able to organize the Waray project so quickly. When it was finally finished, Bishop Urjel witnessed its dedication. The Samareno Bible was launched in his place. Two weeks later, the Bishop died. He just waited for the translation to be finished.”

Dr. Arichea has worked and reworked through Bible texts. The more he worked on it, the more he believed it to be God's Word. “I distinguish between Word and words. It's the Word of God because it speaks to us, in God's unique way. But the Bible will always be described accurately as both human and divine. As a human book, it can be studied as any other book, that's why we can translate it. Meanwhile the divine aspect is God's message in it, the theology. When we put too much focus on the divine, we lose its humanness. If we put too much emphasis on the human, we will take it as merely another book. There should be a happy balance between these two.”

ⁱ In March 2005, a Tsunami destroyed the bigger part of Sumatra north of the Republic of Indonesia and Banda Aceh area, to the North of the Island is the most affected part of the world, it suffered 80% of total damage at its populated coastal area over 10km distance inland. The number of victims in this area is more than 230,000 dead (90% of them were buried). The main coastal roads were damaged, a state that made it difficult to reach there in order to identify the extent of needs and to assist the victims.