

## FOCUS ON TRANSLATORS

### **A translation for the High Arctic Region of Canada**

Some 17,000 people live in the remote north-east Arctic areas of Canada. These are Inuit (as the Eskimos call themselves in their own language), and their language is called Inuktitut. The people are clustered in settlements all along the coast of such Arctic bodies of water as Hudson Bay, Hudson Strait, Ungava Bay, Davis Strait, Baffin Bay and Foxe Basin. Here the expanses of water are covered with ice most of the year. This is the land of the polar bear, the muskox, the seal, the Arctic hare and the lemming. Some of the communities are located more than a thousand miles north of the southern Canadian city of Montreal. The entire region is north of the tree-line; the mountains, hills and frozen water, all covered with snow in the dead of winter, present views of unimaginable beauty, unbroken by any trees or shrubbery.

There are warm, active Christian communities in many of the northern settlements. The Anglican Church has had a strong witness in these regions over the years. Church services are in Inuktitut and most people are able to read this language. Many trained Inuit clergy are in charge of the parishes.

Up until recently, a translation of the New Testament in the Labrador Eskimo dialect had to be used for lack of anything else. Now however, a team of translators has been established to prepare the New Testament and a large portion of the Old Testament in Inuktitut of the Eastern Arctic which will be more meaningful to the population.

Four Inuit priests of the Anglican Church have been designated to do the translation work. Initially, they were asked to set aside a number of hours every week to work on the translation, besides doing their regular parish work. This did not work out very well because of parish and family duties. So a schedule was set up that would allow the four men to spend a month or more together in one place away from their parishes to do the translation. This has worked out satisfactorily and the translation is progressing in such a way that we should have the New Testament and the Old Testament selections finished in two or three years.

All of the translators have had Biblical training at the Arthur Turner Training School in Pangnirtung, Baffin Island. Some of them have had additional training in educational facilities in Southern Canada, including three years of studies at the University of Manitoba for one of them.

These four men represent a number of different dialect areas of eastern Inuktitut. This is advantageous, since working together allows them to try to find forms that will be meaningful and recognizable in all of the Arctic regions where the translation is to be used. Each man tries to do as much translation work at home during the course of the year as possible, but the major part of the work is done at the main sessions held twice each year. They meet together at some chosen place to work in an uninterrupted way for a month or more each time. The mornings are spent at first draft work and the afternoons reviewing each other's work and discussing problems to find a common solution.

An important member of the team is the overall co-ordinator of the project. He supervises the administrative functioning of the project and has the

responsibility of being the main exegete of the team to make sure that the translation into Inuktitut reflects accurately the meaning of the originals.

The language plays a vital role in the home and in the life of the community of the Inuit people. Local newspapers are written in Inuktitut, and there are radio broadcasts all day long in the language. Instruction in government schools takes place in the native language in the first years of elementary school. Even the telephone book is printed in the unique syllabic characters of this language. It is important that the Word of God be prepared in a meaningful and understandable way for this population. The efforts that the translators are putting into this project will result in Scriptures that will speak to the hearts of these people, and bring the Word of God to them in a way that they will be able to understand.

## HOW WAS THAT?

A group of trade union leaders from one country was making a visit to another country in a different part of the world, as the guests of the local trade union organization. During the course of the visit they went to see the working conditions in a factory.

Through an interpreter the local union officials explained that their main task was to make sure the workers achieved the output targets set by the factory. When the visitors asked, "What happens if workers do not reach the target?" the interpreter replied, "They would be shot."

A little while later, when the visitors were arriving back at their hotel, the interpreter from the factory came running up to them. "I've just checked my dictionary" he said. "I meant that the lazy workers would be fired—not shot!"

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Most readers of TBT will be aware of the dangers of taking statements out of their Biblical context and making them apply to other situations. This procedure can also produce some funny results.

One reader has drawn our attention to a statement in the GNB translation of 1 Corinthians 8.8, which seems to be contrary to the experience of most people who are concerned about their weight. It reads: "We shall not lose anything if we do not eat, nor shall we gain anything if we do eat."

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### **The trials of TBT authors!**

"Thanks so much for your reminder of July 30. My promise to write an article for TBT has been on the level of conscious memory nearly all the time. The only problem is that I am constantly persecuted by heavy commitments, which means that numerous important things have to be postponed because of the urgency of other things rightly or wrongly taken as more important. An article for TBT is only one of those numerous important things."

(Extract from a letter to the Editor)