

## Leaving the Old Ways Behind

### The dedication of the Dawawa New Testament

Martin and Beate Knauber

The dedication was only a few days away when **all the Dawawa chief men were called to a meeting by Egbert**, who has been the head chief man for many years.



His message to them was this, "I am a very old man. Everyone else in my generation has died, even the people who were born after me. **God has kept me alive to this day for only one reason; to tell you that I have learned that God is more powerful than all the spirits and magic we have ever known. I stand here today to tell you that the time has come when we must leave our old ways behind to**

**allow the new way to come."** All the chiefs agreed with Egbert and they decided to break with the old ways. They determined to do this the day before the dedication by performing an exhibition of the most powerful magical ceremony and publicly renouncing the powers behind it.



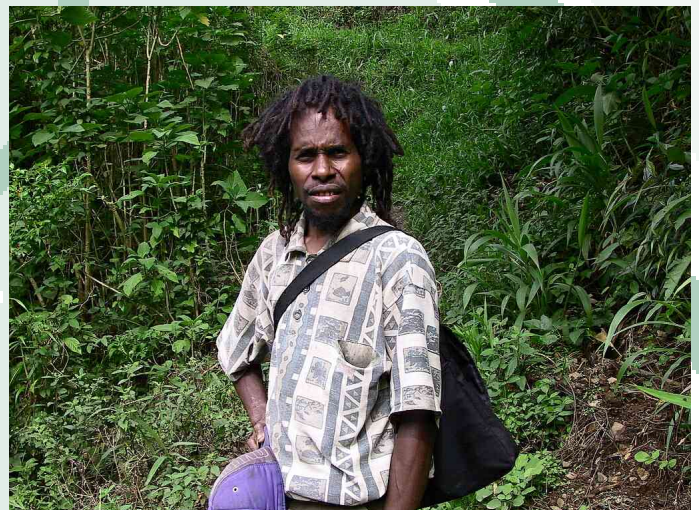
**In the meantime many guests from near and far had come to join**

**us in the celebration of the New Testament dedication. All of us were seated on pandanus mats and a great feeling of excitement and expectancy, combined with solemnity, prevailed.**

The Bishop opened the ceremony with a wonderful prayer of thanksgiving.

Next, **Augustin**

**Sambo**, the first Christian in the village and today, a respected Christian leader, explained how over the years he had prayed that, "One day the darkness in the village would end and that others would come to know God and step into the light." He said, "I feel that God has answered my prayers. **God's Word has truly arrived to show others how to walk in the light!"**



Sambo went on to explain about **the ceremony** we were about to witness, "This is a very old dance, the Bird of Paradise dance. It invokes the help of very powerful ancestral spirits. It is to be done today for the last time."



Sambo clarified that they would only perform a shortened version of the dance, which should merely serve as an illustration of the evil ritual which the Dawawa people were about to leave behind. There was a strange noticeable tension in the air as people remembered with fear all the terrible things that

usually happened during the performance of the ritual. (The original ritual was carried out in several stages over a number of years.)

Today however was different; this was a public declaration that they now have God's Word and such things would no longer be done. They were making **a covenant with God** that they would cease to dabble in darkness. The ritual appeared to us as a strange slow

dance, which was performed on a makeshift altar.



After the dance, Sambo asked the crowd three times, "Do you really want to rid yourselves of this custom and renounce the evil powers behind it?" With one accord and in one loud voice all the Dawawa people shouted their affirmation, "YES, we do!" This was a very moving moment for all of us.



"These many years of labor, especially the times when we felt so utterly alone and helpless, when we were plagued by sickness and other obstacles that hindered the work from going ahead - all these years were not in vain", I thought to myself. "How good is God to us because He has let us see the fruit of our labor today.



And He has also enabled all of you, dear friends, who have given us much support over the years, to rejoice with us for all the great things the Lord has done among the Dawawa people."



Then, after Sambo had spoken **a prayer of renunciation** on behalf of the Dawawa people, the dancers tore off the related costumes, broke apart an upside down tree that was part of the ritual, and together with the altar, they burned this last vestige of divination.

**Copland Gororiba**, our senior translator and committee chairman, still in deep mourning for his wife who had recently died, fed the fire at the burning altar with great fervor and persistence. It was a clear statement that these deeds of darkness must be completely eliminated.



The next morning, **August 10, 2003**, it was overcast, but then the Lord gave us the perfect weather for the celebration which was to be held out in the open. It was neither too wet, nor too hot, and the atmosphere was electric with excitement and anticipation. It was decided beforehand that **the dedication of the Dawawa New Testament** was to take place during a Thanksgiving church service. Speeches and feasting would follow the morning service.

**Dancers** led the procession to the church to the beat of kundu drums and sang **songs of thanksgiving to God** which they had composed for this special occasion. The New Testaments followed, carried on the shoulders of the men from our translation team.



Eventually, all the guests and village people moved to the church.



**The Anglican Bishop Tevita Talanoa** opened with a prayer, "Thank you for sending those to share the gospel and lead others to the truth."

Later the Bishop proclaimed in his sermon, "These Holy Scriptures are food for our souls and water for our spiritual life. What we have dreamed about in the past has today become a reality - your living Word in the Dawawa language."



The official ceremonies and speeches followed the service. **Jeno Gideon**, who spoke on behalf of our translation committee, said, "The coming of the New Testament represents a new beginning." He held up the Dawawa New Testament saying, "This is the book of our prayers!"

For him, as well as for us, the Dawawa New Testament represents 15 years of hard labor. It was a great moment to finally hold the end product in our hands.



Following the Thanksgiving Service we started selling the New Testaments and a great feast was served. Far into the night, testimonies, dramas and devotions took place under the light of a full moon.



Everyone present felt that they indeed experienced a great celebration of thanksgiving and hope for the Dawawa people.

