

Recent Christian Theological Publications in the Regional Languages

1. Kannada

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This is a brief account, by no means exhaustive, of the present state and future prospects of Christian theological literature in the Kannada language. It is based on the personal knowledge of the writer and some of the literature conference reports. Because of the difficulty in getting information from the different publishing houses and the lack of up-to-date catalogues, it must be recognized that the scope of this article is limited.

I

Kannada is one of the four Dravidian languages of the South, at present chiefly confined to the Mysore State, although, Kannadigas are scattered all over India. There is close resemblance between the Kannada and the Telugu scripts and recently there was some talk of evolving a common script for the two languages. Such a step would undoubtedly be a great advantage to both the languages. Kannada is a full-fledged language with a long history of literature. Some Kannada words are to be found in Greek dramas and some of the important inscriptions of Asoka. In recent years Christian missionaries, labouring in the Karnataka area, have contributed a great deal to the development of the language. Dr. F. Kittel, one of the early German missionaries working in South Kanara, wrote a monumental dictionary of the language which is recognized as standard work and is used as an important basis for later dictionaries. The work of the missionaries has to be recognized in the matter of printing also.

While Mysore State is the chief centre of the language, Mangalore in South Kanara, formerly in the Madras State, and Dharwar in North Karnataka, formerly in the Bombay State, are the other centres where this language is spoken. Political

differences and cultural variations have resulted in certain noticeable differences in idiom in these areas, particularly in the spoken language, but with the reorganization of the States on a linguistic basis a process of integration is taking place. This is a healthy, but slow process which will gradually contribute to the strength and growth of the language.

It is an obvious fact that since 1947 a great renaissance is taking place in all the vernaculars of India and Kannada is no exception to this. All kinds of literature—newspapers and magazines, dramas and detective stories, works on science, politics, religion and philosophy—are flourishing and are read with great interest. Since we are concerned here with theological literature, one need only mention some of the translations of and commentaries on the *Vedas*, the *Upanishads* and the *Gītā*, the different publications of the Ramakrishna Mission and, among others, those of the *Adhyātma Kāryālaya*, Hubli, which has published such books as *Upanishadrāhasya* (2nd Ed.), *Upanishad-kathavali* (3rd Ed.), *Gitarahasya* (4th Ed.), etc. There is no doubt that renaissance Hinduism is finding one of its most effective expressions through the medium of the vernaculars and there is plenty of evidence to show that this process will continue to grow. The *Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan* of Bombay not only publishes books in English, but has also definite plans to put them into the major vernaculars of India.

II

It is clear, therefore, that there is a great hunger for good reading matter and an increasing desire for more serious types of literature dealing with religion, theology and philosophy. But there is little evidence that the Christian Church as a whole is alive to the implications of this fact and the opportunities it offers. It is true that certain organizations are making efforts to produce Christian literature, and that there are individuals here and there who are interested in this question, but the general Christian community does not seem to have either a responsible awareness of the situation or a literary sensitiveness and creativity to meet its demands. The Christian literary output in Kannada is extremely unsatisfactory, particularly when one compares it with the literature that is being produced in the other South Indian languages like Tamil, Telugu and Malayalam.

There are many reasons for this state of affairs. One is the lack of co-operation between the different publishing agencies in the Karnataka, which have different missionary and national backgrounds. The Bangalore Tract and Book Society, the Basel Mission Press, Mangalore, the Wesley Press, Mysore, the Scripture Literature Press, Akkitimmanahalli, and others have each published individually a number of books, but there is little evidence of responsible co-operation, careful co-ordination and far-sighted planning in the production of Christian books. Another difficulty

is that of publicity and distribution. It sometimes happens that one area does not know what books are available in another area. Distribution is a major headache. Press managers will rightly point out that religious publications in the vernacular lie unsold in their storerooms for years and years so that investing money in such books is not just a risk, but a definite loss. On the business side, Christian bookshops seem to be more concerned with English books published here and abroad than in the production of vernacular literature. Along with this, one must also take into account the attitude of the Christian community towards *buying* useful *Christian* books or magazines. The quality and subject-matter of the books might have something to do with it, but more serious is an attitude which seems to be a carry-over from a past missionary era when Christian books, pamphlets, etc., were published in large numbers and distributed either freely or at a nominal cost. As a result, people seem to be psychologically conditioned to expect Christian religious books more or less free. Unless there is a definite change of attitude in this respect, the future of Kannada theological literature does not seem to be very bright.

A brief review of the existing theological literature might be made here.* This has necessarily to be selective and does not give a picture of all the books available. Among the commentaries, mention may be made of the following :

W. E. Tomlinson, *St. Mark's Gospel*, W. Perston, *St. John's Gospel*, M. Anandamurthy, *Revelation*. There are a few other commentaries also, but with very few exceptions, all of them are old and outdated. *Vedakosha*, a Biblical dictionary, although an old work, has been a great help to theological students and ministers.

Books on Christian theology are very few. *Christa Vedantasara* is a Kannada translation of a Telugu work by W. C. Campbell. *Notes on the Doctrine of the Atonement* by C. B. Firth is a critical account of the various theories of the Atonement. Some of the other books are—*God's Plan of Salvation*, *Marrow of Methodism*, *Studies in the Word of God* by Ellis Roberts, *Seven Words on the Cross* by H. Daub and various explanatory booklets on Catechisms.

The following are some of the books on Church History: *First Church History*, by Vere E. Walker, *Ancient Church and Modern India*, a translation of G. Philip's book by P. Gurushanta, *Landmarks of Church History*, etc.

Among other books are the following: W. E. Tomlinson, *King of Truth*, W. E. Perston, *A Summary of Gospel History*, G. H. C. Angus, *An Introduction to the History and Message of*

*For a fuller list see the appendix in the *Report and Findings* of the Kannada Christian Literature Conference, Bangalore, September 1958. This is a comprehensive list, but does not give the date of publication of the books mentioned nor does it always indicate whether the work is original or a translation.

the New Testament (Tr.), *Introduction to the Message of the New Testament* by Campbell, *Forty Meditations* (Lenten Readings), A. C. Clayton, *Paul Herald and Witness* (Tr.). Besides these there are a number of booklets, pamphlets, etc., published at different times.

A few observations might be made here about the available books. The first is the most obvious one, viz. that the existing theological literature in Kannada is woefully inadequate either for the spiritual nurture of the Christian church or for an intelligent exposition of Christian Doctrine to others. There is no proper balance between Biblical, Theological, Historical and other works. Almost all of them are translations, the number of original works being negligible. Second, most of these books are written by missionaries, the majority of whom belong to a previous generation. To them a tribute must be paid for the labour they have put in to learn a language foreign to them and for the sustained efforts they have made to produce Christian books in Kannada. Third, one must note that all these books are written by Christians for the Christians. They are limited by the religious needs and the literary standards of the Christian community. Very little effort has been made to reach the literary, educated non-Christian who will be disappointed if he should seek an authoritative, literary book on the Christian faith equal in standard, for example, to a Kannada book on modern Hinduism. These observations are made not by way of criticism, but merely as a description of the existing state of affairs as it appears to the writer, hoping that our analysis of the present situation might help us to plan for the future.

Mention must, however, be made of certain books which are in the process of being printed or in MS. form. One such book is C. B. Firth's *Christian Doctrine According to the Creeds*. It has the authority of many years of teaching theology in an Indian setting. The writer had the opportunity to go through it in MS. and is impressed with its breadth of scope, clear presentation, theological insights and literary structure. Another is a translation of Dr. S. Estborn's book, *The Christian Doctrine of Salvation*, prepared by some members of the faculty of the B.E.M. Theological Seminary, Mangalore. It is hoped that both these works will be published before long.

III

While the existing state of affairs with regard to theological literature in Kannada is not very encouraging, one need not be pessimistic and minimize the possibilities for the future. Dr. W. Scopes, the Literature Secretary of the National Christian Council, is giving constant encouragement to the regional councils in this respect. The Karnataka Christian Council in its recent meeting at Raichur in January 1960 has appointed a Kannada Literature Board with Dr. S. J. Samartha as its chairman and Rev. M.

Anandamurthy as its secretary. Plans are being made to publish the manuscripts which have been ready for some time and to work out a programme for the future. Some points to which attention will have to be paid are the following:

1. A qualified, full-time person has to be set apart to be in charge of this work under the direction of the Literature Board. Steps are already being taken about this and various bodies in the Karnataka are co-operating to meet the expenses involved.

2. A Plan has to be prepared carefully for the production of theological literature in Kannada, with topics, writers and priorities listed. Basic works such as Dictionaries, Word Books, Commentaries on the major books of the Bible have to be produced before long. Theological works giving an outline of Christian doctrine and also dealing with specific doctrines are necessary keeping in mind the intellectual context of present-day India. Books on Church History, particularly the history of Christianity in India and the biographies of great Christian leaders, have also to be considered. Encouragement should be given to original works, but one need not avoid translations or adaptations of good books which are available such as the World Christian Books and the Christian Students' Library series published by the Senate of Serampore College.

3. Co-ordination of work between the different Christian printing and publishing houses in the Karnataka is a necessity along with proper attention being given to publicity and distribution. Unless a greater measure of co-operation is achieved between these organizations, manuscripts prepared with a great deal of labour cannot see the light of day.

4. To find the proper people with literary gifts and theological background is not an easy job. They have to be discovered, encouraged, nurtured and used properly. Promising students in the regional theological seminaries and teachers in such institutions could help. But, it is the Church itself which is responsible to look for such people and, if necessary, to set them apart for certain periods for literary work. Production of literature anywhere is a slow, painful process. Ideas are easy to conceive, but hard to deliver. Too much cannot be expected too early. Moreover, one should not forget that the goal is not just the production of books, but the spiritual nurture of the Christian Church and the effective exposition of Christian truth in all its aspects. The success of a literature programme therefore depends, in the final analysis, not so much on committees, boards and subsidies, although these are useful, as on the spiritual sensitiveness of the Church and a responsible awareness of its growing maturity.