

Recent Christian Theological Publications in the Regional Languages

2. TAMIL

D. RAJARIGAM

The Protestant church in the Tamil country, which had its inception in the Danish-halle Mission of the eighteenth century, has been growing for the past two and a half centuries in stature and consciousness, as well as in numerical strength, as a result of the ministry of the Word of God through the power of the native word and the pen. The 250 years' history of Tamil Christian literature shows how, in all these years, it has played its rôle, growing steadily both in quality and in quantity, in the establishment of the Tamil church. It also shows how the different denominational churches have been jointly endeavouring to develop a literature to serve the spiritual need of the Tamil Christians. Needless to say, how much more it should be made to play its rôle as a dynamic communication of the living Word in these days, in order to meet the challenge of the powerful forces that come from without.

Since the attainment of freedom, India has undergone a number of changes politically, economically and culturally. The rapid changes in these spheres have created a new mental climate among Tamilians. Though Christian literature in Tamil has always had to fight against odds, never before had it to face such a strong opposition as it is encountering today. Erotic, filthy and poisonous literature is being produced most promiscuously, and it paralyses the spiritual life of Tamilians.

Besides, the Saiva Siddhanta Kazhagam and other Hindu Muts are steadily producing distinctly Hindu-Tamil literature at an amazing speed. When non-Christian literature is ranged against Christian literature in such a mighty array, the latter would lose much ground, if it did not make more powerful counter-attacks and take fresh strategic moves. The Tamil church has taken cognizance of this fact, and so it is taking possible measures to produce new types of literature to meet the

changed situation and to help to develop the Tamil church to fuller stature and greater strength. In this short article an attempt is made to present a brief account of the present state and future prospects of Tamil Theological literature.

Today the Tamilnad Christian Literature Committee (T.C.L.C.) acts as the literature committee for the Tamil country, and is recognized as such by both the Tamilnad Christian Council and the National Christian Council. Fifteen Publishing Houses and Printing Presses are represented on the committee, apart from the fifteen representatives appointed by the Tamilnad Christian Council. This committee makes efforts to co-ordinate the work of the various Christian publishers, both regarding publication as well as distribution, with a view to avoiding overlapping of effort and consequent wastage, and at the same time to promote faster distribution. The first step taken by this committee was to appoint a sub-committee to survey the existing Christian literature in Tamil. The survey of this sub-committee was then published in 1959. The newly prepared catalogue has helped to some extent the co-ordination of the publications and their distribution. But the pace of production is far from satisfactory, when we realize the strength of the powerful forces ranged against Christian influence today. The following tabulation, taken from the reports of Mr. J. Daniel, Secretary, T.C.L.C., giving the publications of 1958 and 1959, shows that there is need for more effort from some of the Publishing Houses.

Publisher	Number of publications	
	1958	1959
The Christian Literature Society	... 20	25
Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge	... 5	1
Evangelical Literature Society	... 8	4
Tirunelveli Diocese	... 9	8
Madurai Diocese	... 5	*
Strict Baptist Mission	... *	10
Missouri Evangelical Lutheran India Mission	... 17	*
Layman's Evangelical Fellowship	... 3	1
Tranquebar Publishing House	... 3	*
Tirumaraiyur Theological College	... *	4

The above tabulation of publications provides an illuminating picture. The fall in the production of books is very glaring. One cannot but feel a sense of distress to note that the fall in production comes at a time when increase in production of

Note : * indicates want of information.

Christian literature is most called for, to counteract the many influences against the Gospel. One of the difficulties encountered by the publishing concerns seems to be that of commanding the necessary resources for a publishing capital. With a view to helping such publications, attempts have been made to start an independent publishing capital which may serve as a revolving fund for advancing the capital required as a loan. Another is the lack of responsible awareness of the situation and the lack of literary sensitiveness and creative venture to meet its demands. Most of the churches, as the second East Asian Christian Literature Conference (Hakone, Japan, August 1958) says, do not give Christian literature the place it deserves in their thinking, planning and budgeting. The amounts allotted for literature in the annual budgets of certain churches are comparatively negligible or practically nil. Unless there is an awakening in the minds of the leaders of the churches with regard to the dire need for more new literature and they plan a well-thought-out scheme for the production of this vehicle of communication of the Christian message, both to the Christians and to the non-Christians, the challenge of Christian literature is bound to become greater as the demands constantly increase with growing literacy and population in the Tamil country.

The catalogue of Tamil Christian literature, published by the C.L.S. in 1959, contains a list of all the books available today. A study of the catalogue will show that there are 52 books under Biography, 18 under Bible Study, 28 under Commentaries, 20 under Doctrine and 107 under Devotional Literature. It is evident that there is no proper balance among the different fields of theology. A very surprising fact to note is that there is none under Church History and under the functional field. It is a consolation, however, to see three books under Biography which deal with the biographies of Church Fathers, Martyrs and pioneers of the Church in the mission field. At the last meeting of the T.E.L.C., held at Madras on 17th March, 1960, the Secretary stated that the first volume of the *History of the Church*, written by the Rev. D. Rajarigam, was in the press and that the second volume would be out in the near future.

All the books on Doctrine (except *Towards an Understanding of Christian Faith* by Bishop Kulendran) and most of the books under Commentaries are translations from English works. It is under Biographies and under Devotional Literature that we find a sizable number of original works from the pen of Tamil writers. Translations are, of course, needed badly. But they should be reproductions rather than literal translations, in order to remove the oft-criticized 'foreignness' in them. Christian terminology in Tamil affords a particular difficulty in the production of Christian literature intelligible to the modern generation. For Biblical language is gradually falling into disuse in our generation. Translating Biblical and theological words into

modern Tamil creates much confusion. This difficulty is accentuated because the Tamil language has a non-Christian background. Moreover, as there is no consensus of opinion regarding the theological terminology in Tamil, the different authors use different words for the same English expression. Basic research on the theological terms in use is also badly needed; for it is doubtful wisdom to use some specifically Hinduistic terms to explain the Christian content. This work can only be undertaken by men who are competent both theologically and linguistically. In this context mention must be made about the attempt to publish a Theological Vocabulary. The Tamil Theological Literature Committee at its last meeting held at Madras on 18th June, 1960, appointed a small committee to prepare this booklet. When this booklet comes out, there will be some uniformity in the usage of Tamil Christian terminology thereafter.

While the present state of affairs with regard to theological literature in Tamil is not as it could be, there is every hope of seeing a better future in this sphere of production, when the two schemes of the T.C.L.C. are completed successfully. The first scheme is to select and translate books from the Christian Students' Library and World Christian Books to fill the gaps in the existing literature and to include new material in the scheme, after approval for language, standard and content. Since 1956, this scheme is being worked out by slow degrees, and the following books have been published up till now: *John's Witness to Jesus, The People of God in the Old Testament, The Christian's God, Christianity and Communism, The Parables of Jesus, Hebrews, Outlines of Christian Doctrine (Volume I), Acts of the Apostles* and *I Corinthians*. The translations of eight more books of these two series are ready for publication.

The second scheme is the five-year plan, chalked out through the Tamil Theological Literature Committee, to promote the textbook programme of the Theological Education Fund of the International Missionary Council. The Rev. A. D. Manuel is its convener and a full-time worker. The responsibility of the committee is to make a clear and comprehensive survey of the present situation and to lay bare the needs, with suggestions for those who can, at the expense of the Fund, help to meet the need. This committee met at Madras on 18th June, 1960. A five-year plan has been worked out to write about forty books on the basic and essential texts anticipating a grant of Rs.90,900 from the Theological Education Fund of the I.M.C. along with Rs.57,250 from local resources. The Theological Education Fund, thus, offers a great and new opportunity to break through the present situation regarding Tamil theological literature.