LITERATURE IN AFRICA

The following extracts from the Report of the All Africa Conference on Christian Literature and Audio-Visual Communication held at Kitwe, N. Rhodesia, in 1961, are reprinted by kind permission from Books for Africa, *January 1962. In many respects they are relevant to Bible translators, both in Africa and elsewhere. Ed.*

Literacy

Before the written word can be read, there must be literacy. Some 100 million people in Africa cannot read.

The Conference recommends that the Churches should take part in helping to abolish illiteracy by co-operating in Government and community sponsored schemes and in undertaking some literacy schemes themselves. These should be related to a total programme for the development of the people in terms of their need both in evangelism and education. They should carefully seek the active co-operation of the people themselves. The Churches have a continuing responsibility to teach their own members to read.

Vernaculars

As we consider a plan for Christian literature, we agree that men and women can best hear the Word of God and worship their Father in the language in which they learned to talk. There are so many vernaculars, however, that available resources are not adequate to provide in each of them that range of literature which will fulfil a man's life in the modern world. Choices have to be made between many small localized vernaculars, those vernaculars spoken by large communities which we can designate as "main" vernaculars, and the linguae francae such as Swahili, French, English and Portuguese.

Decisions on these choices will not necessarily be the same tomorrow as they were yesterday. Independence and nationalism are changing language policies and altering their relative importance. In addition to political factors, social, cultural and economic factors are influencing these relationships. The Churches can influence what is taking place at certain levels by sharing in community and Government decisions, but the Churches cannot determine the issue. And when a government is seeking wider language associations within the nation to promote national unity, the churches need to question their own policy if it seems to foster divisive units.

In this situation we are agreed that we should seek to ensure:

a. The availability in a few main vernaculars and in the linguae francae of the whole range of Christian books which the Church needs for its witness, its training and its devotional life;

b. The availability in the other main vernaculars, and in such smaller vernaculars as seem likely to have future significance, of such books as provide a foundation for worship and training;

c. Such provision of literature in other vernaculars as will provide for Christian instruction and worship and form a bridge to the main vernacular of the region or to a lingua franca.

Decisions on priorities within this three-fold programme must be taken at area level; a continent-wide decision is not possible.

Where the lingua franca is a European language, a new literature must be written from within the social and cultural life of the region, some of it being in a simple version.

Encouragement should be given to the development of union vernaculars, and the policy of Bible translation into very small vernaculars should be kept under review by the Bible Societies and the Churches.

Research is required into the social dynamics of populations and into the changing nature of particular languages.

A Church working in a minor language area will consider it as a main language; nothing in this report should be considered as preventing such a Church serving itself in literature from its own resources as it may deem wise and be able to do so.

Simple English

The Conference notes the need for Christian literature in extremely simple English for school children, for many school-leavers and for certain adults. We ask the Christian Literature Council of the British Conference of Missionary Societies to have prepared a report on the guidance already available from different sources about the writing of English at this level.

SIMPLE ENGLISH

The following is a brief extract concerning the writing of theological books in simple English, taken from an article entitled "Theological Books for Africa" by Miss F. M. Dearing, which appeared in Books for Africa, *January 1962, pp. 5-7. We are grateful to the editor of this publication and the author of the article for permission to reprint this extract. Ed.*

No work of this kind can be done in isolation. The more people there are who care about the problem and who are willing to co-operate and make suggestions, the better. Above all, an African contribution is necessary. Any new writing or translation should be tested widely for its worth in communicating the Christian truths it contains. "Simple" English is not really enough. The English of *Africa* is needed; the English which is becoming a living African language alongside the vernacular tongues, which borrows expressions from everyday life in Africa, and which conveys, in terse and telling phrases as well as in elaborate metaphor, the ideas which move the hearts and minds of men and women.