

# THE BIBLE TRANSLATOR

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## FROM THE EDITOR'S CHAIR

Translators' 'Institutes' are rapidly becoming a familiar and much-appreciated feature of the service which the Bible Societies seek to render to translators. Five or six have already been held in various parts of the world and have been fully reported in the pages of *The Bible Translator*. At least four more are planned in the course of the next two years, one in New Guinea, one in Alaska and two in Africa. So far the programmes have followed more or less similar lines, and the objectives have been broadly the same. We have tried to recognize in a realistic way that the mid-twentieth century is marked by an intense interest in the tribal tongues of those peoples who as yet have not been reached by the Gospel, and a concern for their evangelization. We have sought to bring Bible Society resources of every kind to bear upon this new revival of practical concern. Above all we have sought to relate it to the historic mission of the Church in general and the Bible Societies in particular. So far our programmes have been largely based on the fact that this missionary task is being discharged by a new generation of linguistically trained personnel from America and the West. Only because Scripture translation is their first priority has it been possible to bring so many of these new translator-missionaries together for periods of four to six weeks to undertake disciplined studies in the art and science of Bible translation. It is proving a rich and profitable experience. But the Bible Societies are learning much from it too and many questions are now being raised.

Are 'Institutes' relevant only to the needs of certain types of pioneer translators or have they a wider significance? If so, what is it? In a day when over 100 Bibles and 130 New Testaments are being translated or revised, are we not concentrating too much of our time and energy on one single aspect of the total field of translational responsibility? We are moving rapidly into an era when major revision and translation work in country after country will be the prime concern of nationals rather than missionaries or expatriates. The Bible Societies welcome this development, recognizing that definitive translations of the Scriptures will play their proper part in moulding the Christian cultures of tomorrow only as they are produced by the inspired and dedicated labours of national scholars. Have Institutes any place in

meeting the needs of this growing constituency of translators or are they in danger of becoming out-of-balance and anachronistic?

There is need for two things. First, to reassure translators everywhere that the Bible Societies are prepared to adapt their resources in all practical ways to enable them to serve their cause more adequately. This is one reason why even an old-fashioned 'conference' was preferred in East Africa in February of this year, at a time when 'Institutes' are so much in demand. For there it just was not possible to ask busy missionaries to give more than one week of their time to our specialist requirements. But how well it worked! Archbishop Beecher's paper on 'Christian Terminology in the Vocabulary of an Animist Society' is a fair sample of the relevance of these meetings and an indication of what may be achieved within limited opportunities. For this paper has already had a significant bearing on the whole future course of Swahili translation and revision. Our one desire is to know the nature of the problems that are emerging so rapidly in this kaleidoscopic translational scene and to adjust our services to meet them in whatever way seems right.

Secondly, there is need to assure the translating constituency that our 'Institute' programme is constantly undergoing modification and adaptation to the changing situations in which we are invited to operate. We are indeed conscious that the burden of translation responsibility is rapidly passing into non-Western hands, and that we of the Bible Societies must adjust ourselves speedily to new realities and demands in this context.

In two years' time (April 1966) we hope to hold, in New York, a major 'workshop' for Bible Society technicians and overseas consultants so that we may pass under its honest scrutiny all our experience of the last six or seven years. By that time Institutes will have been held in all the major fields of current Bible translation and revision work.

There is ample time to apprise us of your thoughts on these matters and to share with us your constructive ideas. We shall be grateful if you will do so. For out of the New York meetings, the planned programme of the following decade will almost certainly grow.

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