

EDITORIAL

The Bible continues to be the most widely circulated book in the world. With the unprecedented increase of knowledge and the multiplication of mechanical means for producing printed materials the Scriptures still top the list of best sellers in each succeeding decade.

The Bible in part or in whole is circulated in more languages today than any other book ever published. When more than a thousand languages had already shared in its dissemination the challenge of "Two Thousand Tongues To Go" stimulated interest in extending efforts in new translations throughout the world. Languages and dialects in remote areas of this earth's globe became the mediums of wider distribution of the Scriptures in the twentieth century.

Translation of the Scriptures has continued to challenge linguists in each generation. Hundreds and thousands have been and are involved in making the Bible available in modern tongues. Through its many volunteers the Wycliffe translators have responded to tribe after tribe in the remotest part of the world to provide the written or printed pages of the Bible for the first time. The challenge to reach more "unbibleed" tribes offers stimulus to more and more volunteer translators from year to year. The encounter with headhunters, primitive living conditions, atheistic hostility, war, famine, pagan thoughtlessness, indifference and countless other obstacles have not stopped the effort to break new linguistic barriers in Bible distribution in new languages and dialects.

One of the motivating factors in translating the Bible has been a genuine concern to make the reading of the Bible available to the common man. Very likely this desire prompted the Jews to translate the Hebrew Old Testament so that the Greek-speaking Jew could read and study the written Word of God in the Septuagint. In Jerome's time Pope Damasus recognized the need to make a version available in Latin the common language of that era. Martin Luther more than a thousand years later was so sincerely concerned about the importance of the Bible for the laity that he made the Bible accessible to the large German-speaking population of Europe in their own language. Wycliffe had already a century earlier made the Bible available in English. He was also concerned that every man should be able to read the Bible for himself.

Even today in the English-speaking world hundreds of scholars have been and are involved in offering new translations and versions of the Bible. No translation has reached or achieved perfection. Each has its

assets and liabilities. With the changes and modification of the English language from generation to generation the task of the translator never is finished and will undoubtedly continue with ceaseless effort. With each new version the sale and distribution of the Bible is stimulated anew with astonishing acceleration. Whether it is the King James version of 1611 or the New English Bible or the New American Bible or Taylor's paraphrase the sales of the Bible continue in the thousands and millions.

The Bible has stimulated the founding of educational institutions throughout the centuries. The stated purpose of the establishment of one of our foremost universities was to train ministers in the Bible. This same motivation has been apparent in the organization of centers of learning in each generation whether these were universities, colleges, seminaries or Bible schools. As the impact of the Bible was diminished in the course of time in many of our educational centers new institutions were launched with the aspirations to give the Bible the central place in their educational philosophies. This process seems to continue to this day.

The Church has been considered the custodian of the Bible. From its earliest beginnings in the Christian Era the Church emerged as a fellowship of those who responded receptively to the heart of the message of the Bible. Paul succinctly summarized this message as "Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised the third day in accordance with the scriptures" (I Cor. 15:3-4).

In the course of time the Church often became so absorbed in its organization and buildings that the Bible with its message was silenced by neglect. The Church thrived and reproduced itself through the proclamation of the message through which it came into existence. When organization and building began to symbolize the Church it faced serious difficulty. In Russia many church buildings have been turned into museums. In Germany and other European countries many of the large Cathedrals and churches attract a very small percentage of their members. Could it be that the Bible with its life-giving message is not being proclaimed? If it is it reaches very few people. In America an individual who is concerned about studying the Bible may find it embarrassing as he enquires in church after church about opportunities to study the Bible in the weekly program of the organized church. (James D. Smart expresses this problem in the preface of his recent book *The Strange Silence of the Bible in the Church*, Westminster Press, 1970).

The Bible, however, cannot be silenced. Bible reading and Bible study has emerged anew in today's generation outside the bounds of the organized church and its material facilities. Unorganized groups and cells have come into existence spontaneously meeting on campuses, in homes, at breakfasts, at luncheons, and often in unusual places. As they consider the Bible the participants in many study groups are searching for that which is real and genuine. Thousands of twentieth century youth experience that a vital relationship with Christ meets their personal needs as

fully as it met the needs of those in the first century when Paul zealously proclaimed the Bible.

In this day of renewed interest in the Bible may our scholarship provide positive support to aid in its study and proclamation. We have the responsibility to communicate effectively from our scholarly involvements that which can contribute constructively to focus attention upon the central person of the Bible—Jesus Christ—and how a personal relationship with Him can make life here and now meaningful and provide a hope for the future. We must endeavor in the words of Bonhoeffer (*Letters and Papers from Prison*, p. 204) to “tell men of every calling what it means to live in Christ, to exist for others.”