

CHRISTIAN TERMS IN HEBREW*

After many years of preparation the United Christian Council in Israel (U. C. C. I.) has published a list of Christian terms in Hebrew which in a very interesting way reflects the on-going efforts of Hebrew-speaking Christians in Israel to express their faith and prayers in Hebrew. In May 1963 the U. C. C. I. decided to form a panel of scholars for the purpose of compiling a dictionary of Hebrew equivalents to Christian terms commonly used in English, French and Arabic. The first compilation of terms was undertaken by a Protestant team convened by Dr. Maas Boertien and assisted by Dr. S. Paul Re'emi. Then a lengthy document was added containing equivalents in Roman Catholic usage. The earlier work was reviewed by a board of Protestant and Roman Catholic scholars, assisted by a representative of the Orthodox Church. On a number of questions the advices of several Jewish scholars connected with the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, was also sought.

Christian Terms in Hebrew gives, in four languages (Hebrew, Arabic, English and French), 540 terms systematically listed according to six categories that the editors have defined as follows: Theology; Scripture; Life of the Church; Life of the Believer; Organization of the Church; Vessels, vestments and buildings. Each entry is numbered. In addition there are Hebrew, Arabic, English and French indices, alphabetically listing the equivalents in each language of the terms which appear in the main body of the volume, with the number of the entry under which they occur. This collection does not attempt to be formally strict or exhaustive. It is concerned with creating a framework for accomodating responses to needs, the urgency of which was felt through experience in matters of faith, prayer, and Christian practices. Thus the work cannot be reproached for not enabling us to translate into Hebrew the latest studies on the theology of liberation, on the charismatic movement, or essays of materialistic exegesis. The modesty of these beginnings, rather, is a sign of seriousness. By this remark, we do not mean to detract from the admiration which the work accomplished by the U. C. C. I. must arouse. It is necessary to draw from the Bible, from Jewish tradition, from modern Hebrew, a language whose evolution is marked by an inventiveness appropriate to a language of relatively recent renaissance. Sometimes it is necessary to create new terms whose "viability" is demonstrated only through use. When Hebrew will have become the mother tongue of two or three generations of Christians, it will be possible to rework this first labour. As it now appears, it must be welcomed with total gratitude.

* Hebrew title: מונחים משיחיים נוצריים; בעריכת ר. ל. לינדזי. Published by the United Christian Council in Israel, Jerusalem, 1976, 94 pp.

Nevertheless, some critical remarks may be preferred. The collaboration of Roman Catholics seems to have been insufficient. Proof of this is that a number of terms marked by an asterisk as appropriate for this community have not been in use for several years; conversely, current usage has not been taken into consideration. As for the Orthodox Church, it must be known that it has no Hebrew-speaking congregation. The "preferences of the Orthodox Church" (cf. the Introduction) are, in fact, the preferences of several individuals who are well-acquainted with the tradition of the Eastern Churches, but for whom Hebrew is not their mother tongue, no more than it is, to be precise, for the vast majority of Hebrew-speaking Christians. What Christian born in Israel would employ *Kiyor* (washstand) to speak of baptismal fonts?

The remarks on details which follow indicate the interest we have taken in consulting and utilizing *Christian Terms in Hebrew*. Why translate the Second Coming of Christ, or *parousia*, as "return of the Messiah"? The New Testament speaks only of the *coming* of Christ in glory. For the Passion of Christ, it would be better to offer only *yissurim*, without adding as a synonym 'innuyim (a term with connotations of torture). The call (of God) is rendered by *tzaw* (command). This restricts the import of a very rich expression. Catechumen is rendered by *qashav* (attentive listener). This suggests an eminently desirable quality in those who attend the catechism lessons but it would perhaps have been better to retain the definition proposed in parenthesis: one who is preparing for baptism. The compiler hesitated to translate 'agnostic' by *kofer* (one who denies the existence of God), therefore a question mark is added to the Hebrew word. The term used by Roman Catholics for confirmation is *chatimah*, and not *ha'amanah*. The same Christians employ *maqdash* for sacrament, not *taqdash*. For liturgy, *pulhan* (ritual) should be rejected because of its pejorative connotation. "Departure" of the *Shekhinah* does not convey well the idea of man's abandonment by God.

One should, as a counterbalance, enumerate the very numerous instances where the proposed translations are not only good, but, it would seem, excellently arrived at. Interesting new forms of existing roots are sometimes used, e. g. *hochid* (from the root *y-ch-d*) from: to give communion to, or *nochad* (from the same root) for, to receive communion. Some of the translations are very significant from a theological perspective. The term "the Old Covenant" is translated by *ha-berit ha-rishona* (the first covenant), while "Old Testament" is rendered by the acronym "Tanakh" and "Bible", (in the sense of the Old and New Testament) by "sefer ha-beritot" (Book of the Covenants). Let it suffice for us to warmly recommend *Christian Terms in Hebrew* which the U. C. C. I. has put at our disposal. Our recognition goes to all those whom the Editor, Dr. R. L. Lindsey, mentioned in the introduction. Nor should we forget to express to him our sincere and profound gratitude.

Reviewed by Michael de Goedt