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A table of contents for *Indian Journal of Theology* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_ijt_01.php

Letter to the Editor

New Testament Greek in the B.D. Curriculum

By

D. CHELLAPPA

SIR,

I have no pretensions to rush into this controversy except (if I may say so) that I did classical Greek at the University, N.T. Greek at the Theological College, was an Examiner (not in Greek) and have responsibility for ordinands and especially junior clergy. It is alas ! only too true that the securing of the B.D. degree and entry into the Ministry are heralded by the cry : 'Abandon Greek all ye who enter here.' Perhaps a revision of our policy might leave less grim memories about Greek studies on our Ministers' minds!

Before we indulge in *obiter dicta* about the standard of Greek to be rightly expected from B.D.'s, we need to ask ourselves what the object of the B.D. degree is. Is it a scholar's degree or a working Minister's degree ? The Serampore degree is surely a graduate working Minister's degree. From this, it follows that the standard required should not be too high for all (to the detriment of other subjects); nor should Greek be omitted altogether. The working Minister need not be a Pandit; nor must he be a slave to translations of his 'charter of salvation'.

1. I would suggest that 'Elementary Greek' is compulsory for all. By 'Elementary Greek' I mean enough Greek to read the New Testament (especially the Epistles) intelligently, to translate from Greek into English (not necessarily back) and to understand the points made by commentators. Three years are more than enough for reaching such a standard. In my experience, after six months, I was able to pick up enough Greek (and Ecclesiastical Latin) to follow the New Testament and Old Testament lessons in Chapel from the Greek Testament and the Vulgate respectively. A good prior knowledge of the English

(or Tamil) New Testament is an additional advantage. (Unfortunately, we can no longer assume a good knowledge of English grammar even from graduates, let alone matriculates.) If Greek is taught through the vernacular medium, a non-graduate, with his background of vernacular grammar, can acquire an adequate knowledge of Greek for his purposes as a preacher, expositor and leader of the Bible Class. It is amazing what quick progress is made once the alphabet is mastered, provided one does not get bogged down in syntax. My first thesis, then, is: 'Greek for all'. I should like to see even the laity dabbling in Greek!

2. For the specialist, for the student with linguistic ability, for him who enjoys it, a higher standard should be made possible, excusing him from certain subjects or parts of certain subjects. It is from such that we must look for the Indian Greek scholars of tomorrow. It was with surprise that I learnt that the Indian Church was richer in Hebrew than in Greek scholars, although this may be partly due to the Hebrew and Greek languages respectively, and not necessarily because the latter is compulsory and the former not. (Incidentally, if Hebrew had been taken seriously earlier by the Indian Church, it might have been spared the debunking of the Old Testament which was such a hobby of the Chenchiah-Chakkarai School). My second thesis then is: 'Advanced Greek for the few who ask for it.'

Yours sincerely,
DAVID CHELLAPPA
(Bishop in Madras, C.S.I.)

It is with great regret that we have to record the sudden death of Bishop Chellappa. This letter was received from him just too late for inclusion in our July issue, and we print it now as our tribute to a great leader and servant of the Church of Christ.—Ed.

OUR CONTRIBUTORS

Miss M. E. Gibbs, formerly lecturer in history at St. John's College, Agra, is now engaged in historical research for the C.I.P.B.C.

The Rev. K. V. Mathew is on the staff of the Theology Department, Serampore College.

The Rev. Dr. M. L. Kretzmann was until 1963 Principal of Concordia Theological Seminary, Nagercoil, South India.