



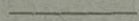
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**Conferences on**  
**Literature for the**  
**South African Bantu**

**BLOEMFONTEIN,**  
**JUNE, 1936.**

**JOHANNESBURG,**  
**OCTOBER, 1936.**



**THE LOVEDALE PRESS.**



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## FOREWORD.

Dr. John R. Mott recently declared that one of the signs that the world is on a rising spiritual tide in our days is that Christianity is at last beginning to make up its leeway in its use of the printing press ; in the output of Christian books.

In the printed word we have one of the most powerful of agencies, and the more education spreads among the peoples of Africa the mightier will that agency become.

To assist in making adequate plans for a forward movement in the production and distribution of literature for the Bantu two conferences were held this year, one in Bloemfontein in June and the other in Johannesburg in October. The former was attended by over thirty representatives of churches, missionary societies and publishing houses. The latter was composed principally of African authors and was unique as being the first of its kind held in this country. Representatives of the Xhosa, Zulu, Northern Sotho, Southern Sotho and Tswana groups were present.

This booklet gives accounts of the discussions which took place at both conferences. For these accounts we are indebted to the Rev. E. W. Grant, Lovedale, and Mr. J. D. Rheinallt Jones, Johannesburg.

Hearty thanks are due to the Bantu Welfare Trust which by financial aid made possible the convening of the African Authors' Conference and the publication of this booklet.

ROBERT H. W. SHEPHERD.

Lovedale,  
Cape Province.

# Christian Literature for Africans

CONFERENCE AT BLOEMFONTEIN,  
JUNE, 1936.

A representative gathering of various missionary presses, church publishing houses and persons interested in missionary vernacular literature met in Bloemfontein on 23rd June. Rev. R. H. W. Shepherd, Director of Publications of the Lovedale Press, presided. Mr. Shepherd had recently visited the United States of America to make an investigation into literature produced by and for the Negro people with a view to assisting in the publishing of literature for the South African Bantu. The result of his experiences and his recommendations have been published in *Literature for the South African Bantu : A Comparative Study of Negro Achievement*, published by the Carnegie Corporation Visitors' Grants Committee. This book was frequently referred to during the discussions.

Two visitors to the Conference were Miss Margaret Wrong, Secretary of the International Committee on Christian Literature for Africa, and Mr. Kenneth G. Grubb of the World Dominion Press, London.

The Chairman emphasized that while it might be said there were not too many evangelical or educational or medical missionaries there were certainly too few missionaries devoting themselves to literary work on behalf of the Bantu people. He acknowledged valuable work had been done in the past in various fields but felt that the time had come for a forward movement in regard to literature

production and distribution among the Native peoples. They had met to pool experience and to harvest ideas.

Throughout the day animated and most helpful discussions took place, many points of view being frankly stated and experiences shared.

The following *Resolution* was passed, and was subsequently unanimously endorsed by the Christian Council of South Africa at its first meeting, on 25th June, 1936 :—

Resolved :

“ That the following suggestions be commended to the earnest consideration of the Christian Council as a means whereby the production and distribution of literature in the vernacular could be furthered :

- (a) The formation in each language area of a Committee on which each Society working in that area shall be represented, to deal with the need for literature in the particular vernacular of the area ;
- (b) The formation of a Central Committee consisting of the Conveners of the several language area Committees ; the Convener of this Central Committee to be an additional member appointed by the Christian Council.”

The following is a *summary of the day's discussions*. The points noted are not resolutions, but suggestions made during the Conference and recorded for the consideration of the Literature Committee of the Christian Council.

## I. MAIN GAPS OR NEEDS IN CHRISTIAN VERNACULAR LITERATURE.

1. Churches should co-operate to produce one good Christian newspaper within each vernacular area.

2. For religious purposes, more use should be made of the African secular press, which is, on the whole, very sympathetic.

3. It is recognized that, at the present stage, such publications as hymn-books and school books are most productive of profit. This fact should be exploited to make possible the publication of commentaries and works of a more general nature, for which the demand is not yet so great, but the need for which is unquestioned.

4. Provision should be made for the production of (a) simple Bible pictures, and (b) pictorial helps for Day School work.

5. Strong support is given to the plea for the publication of Reference Bibles in the several vernaculars.

## II. CO-OPERATION IN PREPARATION AND PRODUCTION.

1. The need for and urgency of co-operation are unanimously and strongly realized.

2. The ideal to be sought is the recognition of one press for each language area. This would not only avoid duplication, but would ensure cheapness of production. Each Missionary Society should be urged to recognize this principle, and to consider the setting aside of a missionary in each language group, for literary work.

3. In order to make fully effective the surveys of literature already made, there should be added to them an assessment of the character and value of each publication.

4. An effort should be made, through a central and representative Committee, to secure the following :

(a) Standardization of orthography, etc., within each language group.

(b) An estimate of the probable consumption of vernacular literature within each group.

(c) Co-operation in production.

5. Unanimous support is given to the idea of the use of "basic texts," not necessarily for literal translation, but rather for reproduction in the idiom and with the local colour of each language. Such basic texts should deal with the following and other subjects :

Missionary Development and Biography ;

Notable Deeds of Africans ;

Nature Studies for Children ;

Family and Home Life ;

Hygiene (within smaller areas) ;

Christian Conduct, and other purely religious subjects.

### III. THE PLACE AND WORK OF AFRICAN AUTHORS.

1. It is suggested that the proposed Central Committee should give support to the proposal made by Mr. W. G. Bennie to raise a fund, say of £5000, to make possible the publication of suitable works of African authors, some of which are at present held over for lack of funds.

2. The Committee should also act as a body for the consideration of such material for publication ; and should inform the presses working in the various language areas of the nature of material available for publication.

3. An effort should be made to bring together in Conference those African authors who are already producing, and other possible writers, for consultation with each other and with expert European advisers.

4. It is noted with gratification that the Inter-University Committee on African Studies has suggested that Universities give further opportunities to African students to receive training in language study.

5. It is also noted with appreciation that African authors are beginning to enter fields of production other than that of the novel.

#### IV. METHODS OF DISTRIBUTION.

1. It is recognized that this is a greater problem even than that of production, and that the whole need for stimulating the love of reading underlies it. The Conference draws attention to the valuable suggestions included in the report, "Literature for the South African Bantu," by the Rev. R. H. W. Shepherd.

2. Many Missionary Societies work through their African Ministers. In some parts of the country this is made difficult by the necessity for taking out trading licences, and by the demand for credit which is often made by purchasers of books.

3. It is emphasized that the need for introducing books to the notice of the people is as urgent as the need for improved distribution; and that an organized system of *introduction and distribution* is essential if literature is to be brought to the people who need it most. Various methods should be devised to meet the different conditions of, for instance, town locations and rural areas.

4. The view was expressed by some members that the system of education in primary schools does not always stimulate the love of reading; and that many of those who purchase vernacular books are people of the older type who have acquired the rudiments of education.



## V. THE COMMITTEE ON CHRISTIAN LITERATURE FOR AFRICA OF THE INTERNATIONAL MISSIONARY COUNCIL.

1. The hope was expressed that it might be possible to help financially the work of the Committee. Appreciation was expressed of the value of Miss Wrong's visit to South Africa at this time.

2. The Conference listened with gratitude to a statement by Miss Wrong respecting the functions of her Committee. She declared that her Committee was anxious to help those who were preparing Native literature in South Africa, and expressed her pleasure in discovering that so much had already been done in this country to meet the literature needs of the Native people.

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### NAMES OF THOSE ATTENDING CONFERENCE ON CHRISTIAN VERNACULAR LITERATURE.

<i>Name</i>	<i>Church or Society</i>
Arthur Amor, S.S.J.E.	Church of the Province
J. Baumbach	Berlin Mission, Pretoria
W. G. Bennie	(Retired public servant) Cape Town
H. I. E. Dhlomo	Presbyterian, <i>Bantu World</i>
George Dieterlen	Paris Evangelical Missionary Society
W. Eveleigh	Methodist Church of South Africa
Miss E. L. Gordon	Montreal, Canada
E. W. Grant	Methodist (Lovedale Bible School)
Kenneth E. Grubb	World Dominion Press, London
A. J. Haile	London Missionary Society, Tiger Kloof
J. E. Hallendorff	The Church of Sweden Mission

<i>Name</i>	<i>Church or Society</i>
K. Hallendorff	The Church of Sweden Mission
Mrs. J. W. L. Hofmeyr	Women's Missionary Board, Dutch Reformed Church, Cape Town
James J. R. Jolobe	Presbyterian Church, New Brighton
J. D. Rheinallt Jones	South African Institute of Race Relations, Inter-University Committee for African Studies, <i>Bantu Studies</i> , (Witwatersrand University Press)
Henri P. Junod	Swiss Mission, Pretoria
John S. Likhing	South African National Sunday School Association
Henri Mabile	Paris Evangelical Missionary Society
I. L. Mogorosi	London Missionary Society
N. S. Motshumi	Methodist Church
S. E. Rune Mqhayi	Congregational Church
Ernest Muller	Berlin Mission, Bloemfontein
G. de C. Murray	Dutch Reformed Church, Umtata
J. A. Persson	Methodist Episcopal Church, Cleveland
Robert H. W. Shepherd	Church of Scotland, Lovedale
F. Stakes	Presbyterian Church, Johannesburg
K. H. Swensson	The Church of Sweden Mission, Roodepoort
James Dexter Taylor	American Board Mission, Johannesburg
D. Wark	Presbyterian Church, Cape Town
Arthur W. Wilkie	Church of Scotland, Lovedale
Miss Margaret Wrong	Edinburgh House, 2, Eaton Gate, London, S. W. I.

# African Authors Conference

JOHANNESBURG, OCTOBER, 1936.

A Conference of African authors—the first of its kind—was held on Thursday, October 15th, 1936, at Florida, Transvaal. The gathering had been convened by the Rev. R. H. W. Shepherd (Editor of *The South African Outlook*), as convener of the Committee on Christian Literature appointed in June last by the newly-formed Christian Council of South Africa, in order to encourage and assist African writers, and to consult with them regarding the steps which can be taken for the development of the literature of the Bantu languages of Southern Africa.

The main Southern Bantu language groups were represented at the meeting as follows:—Xhosa—Mr. D. D. T. Jabavu; Zulu—Messrs. R. T. Caluza and B. W. Vilakazi; Southern Sotho—Mr. Z. D. Mangoaela; Northern Sotho—Mr. R. V. Selope Thema; Tswana—Mr. D. M. Ramoshoana and Mr. S. S. Mafoyane. Mr. H. I. E. Dhlomo attended as an African writer who has used English as the medium of his literary efforts. Apologies were received from the following:—Xhosa—Rev. J. J. R. Jolobe, Mr. H. M. Ndawo and Mr. S. E. K. Mqhayi; Southern Sotho—Mr. T. Mofolo; Northern Sotho—Rev. H. Maimane; Zulu—Mr. R. R. R. Dhlomo.

There were also present Rev. R. H. W. Shepherd, in the chair, Miss Margaret Wrong, Secretary of the International Committee on Christian Literature of the

International Missionary Council, London; Professor C. M. Doke and Mr. J. D. Rheinallt Jones, Editors of *Bantu Studies*, and the Rev. A. Sandilands.

Having opened the Conference with prayer, the Chairman welcomed those present, and referred to the unique nature of the occasion. This was the first time that African writers had been gathered together, and he hoped that it would prove the beginning of new developments in Bantu literature. The Conference was following a conference of representatives of missionary and other bodies held at Bloemfontein in June, 1936, to discuss with Miss Wrong the literature needs of the African people. That conference had shown the need for stimulating the production of good reading material in the Bantu languages for the use of old and young.

### OBSTACLES TO PUBLICATION.

The Conference set to work without delay and began by considering how the existing obstacles to the publication of authors' manuscripts could be overcome. A cited example of the difficulty experienced by African authors in securing publication was that of the late Sol. T. Plaatje whose *Mhudi* was rejected by many publishers. When it was eventually published by the *Lovedale Press*, it received a long notice in the *Times Literary Supplement*. Many similar examples could of course be given from the literary history of every nation. For the African author, however, the comparatively small reading public in the Bantu languages is an additional hindrance. Thus it occurs that publishers will not publish meritorious material because it can only command a small reading public, and

the reading public is not being extended because of the lack of reading matter.

Instances were given of the disappearance of manuscripts through lack of publication. One writer described how the manuscript of a play written by him years ago had disappeared in passing from hand to hand, until recently he found the play being produced and found a remnant of the manuscript in the producer's hands. The late Rev. E. Makiwane collected a large number of Xhosa proverbs, but he could find no publisher, and the manuscript was burnt in the fire which destroyed his house.

Where publishers are willing to risk financial loss, African authors are often unwilling to part with their works without a lump sum payment, since often the authors are poverty-stricken and are in desperate need of the money. Some publishers are prepared to publish manuscripts likely to have limited sale out of the profits they make on other publications ; but they are naturally reluctant to purchase the manuscripts as well as to publish them.

The discussion yielded general agreement that royalty on sales is the fairest form of recompense for authors, and that African writers should be encouraged to accept this system.

The editors present drew attention to the lack of care too often shown by African writers in the preparation of material for publication. Authors submit manuscripts in which the writing is difficult to read and both sides of the paper are used ; paper of uneven sizes and of different kinds is also used. Thus a most unfavourable initial impression is made upon those who have to consider the literary merit of the manuscript.

It was agreed that it would be helpful to African writers if a pamphlet were issued containing advice on the preparation of literary material for publication, and on the finance of publication. Mr. Shepherd was asked and undertook to write the pamphlet.

### **MATERIAL FOR PUBLICATION.**

Discussion then turned to the question of what unpublished manuscripts are in existence. An informal survey revealed a fairly extensive and varied amount of unpublished material in the various languages. They comprised poems, folk songs and lays, plays, novels, short stories, folk lore, histories and biographies. In Music there are praise-songs, work-songs (chanties), hunting-songs, etc.

In this and the earlier discussion, the need for some method of assessing the merit of literary and musical compositions was mentioned several times and resulted later in definite suggestions.

### **PUBLICATION FUND.**

In view of the financial disabilities attending the publication of works in Bantu languages, attention was given to a suggestion made a few years ago by Mr. W. G. Bennie, that an endowment fund be created to assist in the financing of Bantu publications. The meeting decided to seek the co-operation of the Inter-University Committee for African Studies and the Christian Council of South Africa in approaching several bodies for this purpose.

### **COMPETITIONS.**

The direct encouragement of creative work was next considered. Appreciation was expressed of the competi-

tions conducted under the aegis of the International Institute for African Languages and Cultures; and the May Esther Bedford Trust; and the Eisteddfodau held at several centres in the Union. It was felt that there is no need for any extension of these competitions—that they are adequate for the present—and that the most urgent need is the means to publish existing material.

### TRAINING IN LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE.

Frequent references had been made in the earlier discussions to the importance of maintaining a good standard of literary criticism in assessing the merit of the work of African authors. It was felt that authors themselves suffered from a lack of training in literary appreciation and criticism, and also in grammatical structure. The Inter-University Committee for African Studies has urged that African University students be encouraged and assisted to specialize in Bantu linguistics, so that they may be equipped to undertake research in that field. They should also be helped to a deeper appreciation of literary form and matter in the literature of the Bantu languages.

It was decided to recommend to the Inter-University Committee for African Studies that vacation courses or other means be provided for the cultivation of sound literary appreciation and criticism in Bantu languages.

### ORTHOGRAPHY.

No conference of this kind would be complete without a discussion on orthography—than which no subject is more divisive: truly it is a sword, splitting friend from friend, even father from son. But on this occasion the

discussion was notable for calm and dispassionate argument. The most valuable fruits of the discussion were :

- (1) Professor Doke's terse explanation of the purpose of orthographic reform : accuracy, simplification, and uniformity.
- (2) Consideration of the suspicions aroused by the reforms. These reforms were said to be (a) designed to help Europeans to oust Africans from those forms of employment in which knowledge of a Bantu language is essential ; (b) transforming Bantu languages into " White man's languages " ; (c) making less easy the use of Bantu languages in printing and typing processes ; (d) dividing the old from the young in Bantu life. The intrinsic value of the reforms and their gradual acceptance must be the means of eliminating the suspicions.
- (3) General agreement that the new Zulu and Xhosa orthographies made those languages infinitely easier to read, and that children can teach their parents to read in the new orthography. In Natal, ministers are teaching the people.
- (4) The practical suggestion that historical and other material likely to interest the older people should be presented in the old orthography, while the new should be used in the school reading books.

There followed an inconclusive discussion on the value of the unification of dialects. Clearly patience and understanding are called for on the part of the linguistic authorities who endeavour to press towards the goal of amalgamation.

Concern was expressed by the Sotho-Tswana members at the differences which exist in the orthographies of the



Sotho-Tswana group, and the discussion led to the following resolution :—

“ That this Conference of African authors urges that the Education Departments concerned and the Inter-University Committee for African Studies take steps to re-open the question of orthography in the Sotho group (particularly Tswana), and to ensure that there is adequate representation of competent Africans at any discussion on this matter. Further that both Northern and Southern Sotho be included in any such discussion.”

This was adopted unanimously.

### TASKS.

The Conference was asked by the Chairman to consider what particular tasks called for attention. He referred to the exhaustive survey made by a sub-committee of the Inter-University Committee for African Studies and published in *Bantu Studies* of March, 1933. The meeting felt that the topic should be given further thought, and suggested that it be placed on the agenda of the next conference.

### LANGUAGE MEDIUM.

A question by the Chairman: Should studies on history, folk tales, etc., be submitted for publication in English or in a Bantu language, led to a keen and interesting discussion on the use of Bantu languages as literary media. Some speakers said that the motives of Europeans who urge the use of Bantu languages were questioned by Africans. Africans desired the utmost freedom to use whichever language they desired. It is true, they held,

that Africans must write for Africans, but English is the medium through which Africans can be reached. It is impossible to produce a national literature through the use of a tribal language; only tribal literature will result. Others held that the audience must decide, and that if one writes in a Bantu language, one does not thereby limit one's intellectual freedom.

As in the case of orthography, this discussion showed clearly the unhappy effects of the recent political controversy over the Native Bills, and of the efforts of those who wish to confine the Africans to "development along their own lines." It was pointed out in the discussion that whatever the restrictions imposed on the political and economic freedom of the African population in the Union no restriction has so far been placed upon their intellectual freedom, and that African writers were still free to use whatever medium they desired for literary expression.

As a result of the discussion, the following minute was adopted:—

"While this Conference is particularly concerned to encourage and assist the production of literature in the Bantu languages, the Conference expresses its conviction that African authors should be entirely free to use any language medium they desire, and that those who use English or Afrikaans are fully entitled to help and encouragement in their efforts to produce works of merit."

### **USE OF NATIVE PRESSES.**

In view of the closing to Africans of many avenues of employment, it was decided to make an appeal to Mission Societies and other bodies to use mission or other presses

so that publications to be used by Africans may be printed and bound by Africans.

It was decided to support the recommendation of the June Conference that Mission Presses should be urged to concentrate on publications for their own language areas. In this connection, it was also decided to ascertain to what extent this principle can be put into effective operation in regard to Zulu, Northern Sotho and Tswana.

### MAGAZINES.

There is a lack of magazine reading matter in the Bantu languages, and this lack is felt more particularly among the Bechuana. One editor said that many short stories and articles suitable for magazines are unsuccessfully submitted to Bantu newspapers. The suggestion was made that the newspapers might find it possible to make a beginning by having a weekly magazine section like the European newspapers.

### BANTU ACADEMY.

The Conference now turned its attention to the possibility of creating an organization which would continue the work begun that day, and bring African authors together from time to time. A scheme submitted two years ago by Professor Doke to the Inter-University Committee for African Studies was considered in this connection, and it was decided to support, in principle, the proposal to set up an academy of Bantu languages and literature, and to approach the Inter-University Committee and the Christian Council for their co-operation in the matter. Messrs. Vilakazi and Selope Thema were appointed to serve on a Joint Committee to be formed by these three bodies.

## DISTRIBUTION OF LITERATURE.

There followed an interesting discussion on means of distributing literature among the African people. Advertising in Bantu newspapers; colportage; use of students and retired teachers as vendors; and personal circulars were forms of distribution suggested. The value of the Carnegie Library services in bringing books to the notice of readers was stressed; reading circles were also recommended.

Attention was drawn to the publication *Books for Africa* published by the International Committee for Literature for Africans—this contains accounts of books published. It was decided to ask the Education Departments to consider the possibility of distributing copies among schools. The same Committee publishes a magazine—*Listen*—for African children.

## NEXT CONFERENCE.

There was a strong desire that a further conference be held at Easter-time in 1937, as many matters still remained to be considered when the conference came to a close after sitting from 10.30 to 5.

## THANKS.

Before the Conference closed, hearty votes of thanks were passed to the following: The Bantu Welfare Trust for a grant which made the Conference possible; Mr. and Mrs. Rheinallt Jones for hospitality; Miss Wrong and Professor Doke and the Rev. A. Sandilands for their presence and help; and the Chairman, the Rev. R. H. W. Shepherd, for convening the Conference and presiding over it.

Thus closed a notable gathering, notable not only for its unique character and the friendly, helpful spirit displayed throughout, but also most notable of all, for the hope it gave of greater things to come in Bantu literature.

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# Literature for the South African Bantu

## A Comparative Study of Negro Achievement

Report of a visit to the United States of America under  
the Auspices of the Visitors' Grants Committee of  
the Carnegie Corporation

*By*

R. H. W. Shepherd, M.A.

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