
This dictionary has grown out of more than 25 years of cumulative efforts of Christian scholars, both Protestant and Roman Catholic, in the subcontinent. According to Editor's note on the history of this Dictionary the Protestant efforts began with a word list by Dr. J.W. Sweetman at Aligadh in the late forties and were carried on by other Protestant scholars through 1963. On the Catholic side the initiative was taken by Liberius Pieterse whose word list later appeared in a mimeograph edited by Bastiaansen in 1960. The present dictionary has thus its basis in: Tobias Bastiaansen, "Christian Terminology in Urdu", (based on Liberius Pieterse's word list), 1960, R.M. Clark & S. John, English-Hindi Glossary of Theological Terms, 1963, combining the cumulative word lists by Sweetman and Liberius Pieterse), and a joint Roman Catholic and Protestant project undertaken in 1968.

While defining the scope of the Dictionary to be "understanding [Christian] terms", the Editor hopes that it will also provide a valuable tool for those who, in a spirit of dialogue and openness, are concerned to reduce misunderstandings about the Christian faith (p. v).

Such hopes, even on secondary level from books such as this Dictionary in a setting where lack of knowledge and misunderstanding about each other's faith prevails on either side are rather unwarranted. As the Editor has rightly observed, a dictionary cannot serve the purpose of an encyclopedia or a handbook for comparative religion (p. vii). Nevertheless, being a pioneer attempt in the field it is rather susceptible to bring forth not only debates and differences of opinion but also confusion until such time as the Urdu translations of the Christian terms are conventionally accepted. It will take long before it becomes a means of dialogue. The Urdu reader of the Dictionary will be in constant need of referring to some other reference book for the understanding of the terms. Since such a reference book does not exist at the moment the Dictionary would have been of greater use if it has been a little bit more generous in explaining the terms.

The translation of Christian terms into Urdu has always been a difficult task. Like Arabic, Urdu vocabulary has grown in an Islamic environment, and consequently not only Islamic world view but its value-structure as well dominate its semantics. Although the Editor claims:

"In spite of the fact that many religious and theological terms in Urdu have been derived from Arabic and Persian the editors decided not to include the Muslim meanings of certain words. Inclusion of the Muslim meanings would have involved us in a wide range of often controversial comparative studies......"
Yet sometimes explicitly and more often implicitly it has not been possible for the Editors of this Dictionary to exclude Muslim meanings or Urdu equivalents which are loaded with Muslim meanings. To illustrate, the terms "Alleluia" (p. 4) and "Halleluja" (p. 48) of Hebrew origin have been translated as سُلَوَةٌ فِيْر. Not only that it is far from literal translation of the original term, it also does not faithfully convey the idea of the Hebrew phrase (which according to Webster's Dictionary means: "praise (Ye) the Lord"). On p. 65 "Matins" is translated as سَلَاةٌ. Similarly on p. 35 "Divorce" has been translated as خَلُع. It is doubtful whether the Christian personal laws allow the manner of divorce which is known in Islamic law as خَلُع. Such examples can be easily multiplied, particularly in the area where these terms have entered into Urdu vocabulary with a definite semantic evolution in the context of Islamic law and theology.

One may contend that such translations were inevitable in order to make the communication possible. This leads us to our second point of observation. While suggesting that such translations tend to confuse the understanding of the terms originally used in two different semantic systems, we would like also to point out that it was done perhaps more for the sake of convenience than anything else. The fact that these equivalents seemed to be readily available may have prompted their use. The situation may be compared with the areas where the parallel phenomena do not exist in Urdu system and hence a translator has to strain his brains to find an equivalent in Urdu. Consequently there the Urdu translations are usually literal, even at the expense of Urdu grammatical rules and idioms. Thus sometimes the translations are awkward and often unfamiliar. Not that the Editor is not aware of such possibilities,

["Christians should be aware of the trends and developments in the general linguistic culture, lest their linguistic communicational pattern become introverted". p. xiv. (Italics by the reviewer)].

but a non-Christian Urdu reader finds Christian Urdu literature strange and rather archaic. This feeling is not so much due to his unfamiliarity with the Christian terminology but also to the use of old style of expression which sometimes implies a sort of indifference to Urdu grammatical structures. It has thus already pushed the Christian Urdu literature away from the main stream of the Urdu literature.

Some of the examples: p. 10. شادی کی پکڑ (Banns of marriage); p. 13. انسان انسان کی دعوت (sacred Banquet); p. 17. مکی (chain prayer); p. 18. فرشماک (cherubic); p. 65. مسجد (open air Mass); p. 45. اخیال خالی (freedom of thought); p. 92. متامل مشتبه (scrupulous) etc.

At places the western bias has also found its way in translations. E.g. p. 7 anti-Semitism is translated as يهود دشمنی while the Arabs may perhaps be equally called Semites.
Whereas much care has been taken in producing English text accurately (even to the extent of warning the reader against the absence of French and German diacritical marks), regretfully the same cannot be said about the Urdu text. It is replete with grammatical, orthographic and above all, printing mistakes. A few instances are given below:

Having said the above by way of observations I would nevertheless welcome this Dictionary as a big step in cross-cultural communication.

Islamabad

Muhammad Khalid Mas'ud