

Book Review

The Lord Is God, by H. Rosin. Published by the Netherlands Bible Society, 1956.

(In the following review Mr. P. D. Latuihamallo, rector of the Theological College of Djakarta, discusses Dr. H. Rosin's treatment of one of the basic problems found by all Bible translators, namely, how to render the divine names. Dr. Rosin's book, published by the Netherlands Bible Society, is available free to all Bible translators, who may address their requests to the editor of *The Bible Translator* or to the Bible Society to which the translator in question is related. — Ed.)

The subtitle of this book issued by the Netherlands Bible Society (1956) reads: "The translation of the divine names and the missionary calling of the church." This is a very important dissertation which Dr. Rosin presents to both theologians and Bible translators. It is important for at least five reasons:

1. An attempt is made to find a method which could be of universal significance as to the rendering of the divine names.
2. The theological presuppositions are convincing.
3. The missionary obligation of the church is clearly pointed out.
4. There is a brief treatment of the theme of the ecumenical movement.
5. Dr. Rosin renders a splendid service to the churches in Asia particularly, in that an attempt is made to purify the use of the divine names. Furthermore, in taking a critical position, Dr. Rosin confronts us with the question of our naturalistic monistic background.

Whether the work is philologically justified lies somewhat beyond my judgment.

The book is written in readable language. The way in which the thesis is presented is clear and the suggestions made are based on solid foundations, so that one needs feel no hesitation in going carefully through the book. The main thesis which the author unfolds is formulated in the concise title: *The Lord is God*. The purpose as stated in the preface is to serve the practical work of Bible translation and to promote the unity of the church in this field. But in order to serve Bible translation in a responsible way one should have not only a certain amount of philosophical knowledge, but also a theological foundation. It is true that any Bible translation is likely to be an interpretation in itself. So, one should consider seriously the suggestions made by the author.

The book falls into two major parts: (1) *YHWH* is God, (2) the nature and rendering of the Biblical designations of God. An appendix completes the book.

Part I

In this section the relation between *YHWH* and *Elohim* is explored. This can only be satisfactorily treated if a long text is available. Dr.

Rosin finds the answer in the Book of Jonah. The reasons are: (a) Jonah contains a broad conception of religion, a fact which gives more evidence for the penetration of Israel's God into the sphere of the Gentiles, and (b) the Book of Jonah gives the most striking examples and variations as to the use of *YHWH* and *Elohim*.

From the outset it is generally assumed that a real proper name is untranslatable. The name *YHWH* has been revealed only and exclusively to Israel, not to the Gentiles. The problem is how should this name become universal. That means that the Name should proceed from Israel to the Gentiles. And this presupposes the outreach of the "church." But in what way should the Name be made known? What should be the principle of translation and what is the concept guiding that principle? At this point Dr. Rosin takes a stand which is theologically correct. Since the proper Name is not to be translated, one should look for designations. And the author suggests rightly that an approach should be made from inside the Name itself, which means self-disclosure, the process of taking the Gospel from the Jews to the Gentiles. That implies that the process of translation should inevitably follow the same method. The Biblical witness says that God, preceding all translations, has translated Himself into the Name of Jesus Christ. The Incarnation of the Word of God is the self-translation of God. The significance which this statement has in the field of translation should stand primarily at the service of the Biblical word to be translated, not in the opposite manner, as is often the case (p. 8).

The first part of the Book of Jonah (1:1-2:1) gives evidence of the relation of *YHWH* and *Elohim*. Originally speaking, the concept of *Elohim* has no relation with *YHWH* of Israel. But Jonah 1:6 speaks of "your God." With the expected reply of Jonah, which could be nothing else but *YHWH*, the relationship is made clear. *Elohim* in this connection, however, receives its full meaning from its link with *YHWH*. The same happens with "*YHWH* God of heaven" in Jonah 1:9, which indicates the relation of the *YHWH* to the pagan conception of God. It seems that the climax is reached in Jonah 1:10-2:1, when the *YHWH* has become known and accepted, which means the victory of the Name, because the pagans on board the ship called upon the Name of *YHWH*, feared *YHWH*, offered sacrifice to *YHWH*, and made vows to *YHWH*.

In Jonah 2-4 a varying stress is to be recognized: *YHWH* is *God* and *YHWH* is *God* (italics are used here for emphasis). And in this varying stress lies the dynamics of the name *YHWH*. Whenever *Elohim* or *ha-Elohim* is mentioned, it indicates the name which is already known, i.e. *YHWH* who is God. In this connection it is clear that what originally is a general and indefinite term is now occupied by *YHWH* and is therefore a designation to the name. That is why *Elohim* is translatable. Furthermore, *Elohim* becomes grammatically an independent equivalent of the name only as it takes its content from the name (pp. 36-43). This process in which *Elohim* can be regarded as similar to a proper name and is therefore able to replace the name has also taken place in LXX. Greek *Theos* stands for *YHWH* or *Yah*.

The suggestion made by the author reads: "The word that is chosen in a translation for the rendering of *YHWH* must be used without exception in every instance where the name occurs. This word may not be used for the absolute *Elohim* as well, and vice versa the word that serves to translate *Elohim* may never be used for *YHWH* likewise" (pp. 52-53).

Part II

A real translation of *Elohim* "must start from the improper, general and appellative meaning which *Elohim* has in the Old Testament and leave it to the Scriptures, the Revelation, the name *YHWH*, to change the chosen word and elevate it to its proper sense" (p. 64). In this connection we notice Rosin's remark saying that in a translation no distinction should be made between the relative differences between *el*, *eloah*, and *elohim*. But there is the problem of variation in translation which depends largely upon the use of *Elohim* in the absolute and relative senses. Buber-Rosenzweig, in their translations, show that in fact there is no exact rule about such usage. Much depends upon the exegetical insight of the translator.

We notice that the God of Israel allows Himself to be compared with other gods. This often happens in cases where a religious encounter takes place between Israel and Canaanitic paganism. In such instances the notion of *Elohim* is important in that it becomes the medium of such an encounter. What is the translation in this case going to be? "Only an indigenous term which can be used as an appellative and which can be applied to God and the gods will really serve the meeting of the divine Revelation and any people's language" (p. 85). Dr. Rosin recommends that "the word by which the pagan conception of God is expressed in the most general and comprehensive way and which is therefore able to designate the indefinite superhuman and divine as such must be used for the translation of *Elohim* in its whole extent and in every significance" (p. 89). This is exactly the problem with which the Indonesian translation is confronted, that is to say, in the use of *Allah* and *illah* as being suitable translations for *Elohim*.

Swellengrebel's remark in *The Bible Translator* (Vol. 6, No. 3, July 1955) is right with regard to the present development of the Indonesian language. The hypothesis as defined by the Bible Translators' Conference in Djakarta in 1952 is to my mind excellent. All the nuances and variations of the use of *Elohim* and related forms in the Hebrew Bible can be rendered by using *Allah* and *illah*. But after serious examination the Advisory Committee in Djakarta turned down the working hypothesis. They were forced to do so particularly because of some new Indonesian translations of the Koran and by the present connotation *illah* has in the Indonesian community (i.e. close to the idea of idol). It is to be regretted that this was necessary, because one gets the impression of a leveling of ideas, including religious presuppositions which might be due to naturalistic monism. The translation of the divine names might be a test of the confessional consciousness of the church. "The teaching of the Bible will by degrees purify and

raise the ideas associated with the word used," as expressed in the Guide for Translators, published by the BFBS and ABS. This is really a tremendous task of the church.

The last section of the book deals with the relation of *YHWH* to *Adonai*. What is the relation between the Tetragrammaton *YHWH* and Jesus? First of all comes the question of translation or transliteration of *YHWH*. Since a real proper name is untranslatable, it is out of the question that we should attempt any translation now. But the Old Testament gives evidence of a substitute for the *YHWH*, namely, the title *Adonai* (*Kurios* in the New Testament). The use of *Adonai* means that a title is substituted for a proper name in order to take the place of *YHWH* without superseding it. This title, which is, by the way, not used for foreign gods in the Old Testament, does not claim any independence, but points to *YHWH*. As such, the title has only a pronominal function. Accordingly, *Adonai*, when used as a substitute, has in a sense the same breadth of significance as *YHWH*. The title itself is indeed translatable. Rosin suggests that in translating it, a word should be chosen out of the social sphere.

In his concluding word Dr. Rosin remarks that what applies to the Old Testament rendering of the divine names applies in principle to the New Testament as well. This means that a total view of the Bible is required, even if only a small portion is being translated.

As I have said already, this book is of great significance for Bible translation. We deal here with a universal problem which is at the center of the Bible and as such at the center of the church and of human life, i.e. "The Lord is God."

Style and Syntax

How many Bible translators think that their work is done when they have checked every word to make sure it is clear and correct? How many take the next step and make sure that every sentence is well-constructed in the native idiom, that it flows freely and easily? How many then test every paragraph, every chapter, every book to see that it sounds right?

An extremely important part of the translation process is to go back to paragraphs, chapters, and books *after they have been left cold for weeks or months*, and then have them read aloud by native speakers, repeatedly, with other native speakers listening. The reading should not be done sentence by sentence, but paragraph by paragraph, and later even chapter by chapter. Three times over each paragraph would be the very minimum. Points at which the reading is difficult should be detected. Points of pause, where punctuation should be used, should be noted. But most of all, the native speakers should be taught to listen for *style*, the arrangement and choice of word and idiom, that quality which is very hard to analyze, but which makes the difference between lifeless, pedestrian literature and a communication which has life and zest, a translation which will compel people to read.