

PRONOMINAL REFERENCE TO BE USED FOR 'HOLY SPIRIT' IN ASHANINCA (CAMPA), PERU

For the past several years Mr Sylvester Dirks of the Mennonite Brethren Mission and I have been engaged in missionary work with the Ashaninca sub-group of the Campa tribe in Peru, and have collaborated on Christian vocabulary items and translation as well as other phases of our missionary activities. For the 'Holy Spirit' we are using 'the Good Spirit of God'. The normal pronominal reference for spirit, whether it be a human spirit or the spirit of a god, is third person feminine inanimate. Long ago, Sylvester and I agreed that we would force the use of the third person masculine animate pronoun to refer to the Holy Spirit, *although we recognized it was contrary to the grammatical system of Campa*. We did this because of a theological bias: the Holy Spirit is referred to in English as masculine, and we think of the Spirit as a masculine member of the Godhead. We ignored the fact that it has a neuter reference in Greek.

In the Gospel of Mark and also in the book of Acts, my translation consistently uses the third person masculine pronoun to refer to the feminine inanimate spirit. There has been a reaction against this by the people as they hear or read these portions of Scripture, though some of the believers have accepted it when it was explained to them why it had been done.

This past year while I was continuing working on other portions of Scripture, I was again troubled by the non-grammatical use of the pronominal referent.

I checked again with some of my colleagues here in Peru and they agreed with me that it might be wise to switch back to the correct grammatical usage. So I checked with Mr Dirks and he did not object to the change.

Because of the importance of the issue, I also wrote to Dr Eugene Nida and Dr John Beekman for their opinions. They both suggested the use of the grammatically correct forms. The following is a quote from Dr Beekman's letter:

'There is a distinction between animate and inanimate reference in one of the Zapoteco dialects of Mexico. All spirits fall into the inanimate class. The weight of theological considerations led the translators to use the animate form contrary to usage. In consultation, however, it was agreed that it would be preferable not to violate the grammatical pattern especially since the informants felt that the use of the inanimate form did not necessarily mean that the Holy Spirit was not a person.

The translators are now using the inanimate form to the satisfaction of all of the believers.'

I have switched the pronominal reference throughout John and it has just been printed. The reaction of the few people with whom I have checked

this has been good. The question has been asked: 'How does having two masculine members and a feminine-inanimate member affect the Campas' idea of a triune God?'

One day I was talking to my informant (still a relatively untrained believer) about the different gods in which his fellow tribesmen believe. And I said, 'What does the Bible teach about God? How many are there?' (Note that I used the unmarked form that might be either singular or plural.) He answered, 'There is one God'. Then after thinking a minute, he said, 'There are two—there's Jesus'. Then afterwards he said, 'There are three—there's God's Spirit'. It seems to me he has understood the doctrine of the Trinity about as well as most Christians. For the last few months we have been using a feminine inanimate referent for the Holy Spirit and this has not seemed to hinder his understanding of the Trinity. Time will tell the reaction of the rest of the people.

BOOK REVIEWS

Biblical Words for Time (Studies in Biblical Theology, No. 33), by James Barr. London: SCM Press, 1962, pp. 174; 13s. 6d.

In his review of Barr's *The Semantics of Biblical Language* in this journal (*The Bible Translator*, XIII, October 1962, pp. 227–31), Dr J. L. Swellengrebel concluded with the request that Dr Barr 'gird up the loins of his mind' and write a book 'On Sound Semantics of the Biblical Languages'. The volume under review is not quite that, but it does provide a study on the subject of Biblical words for 'time' which is of great value to translators.

The author begins by way of examining and critically evaluating the handling of linguistic evidence in this area in such well-known works as Cullmann's *Christus und die Zeit* (English translation *Christ and Time*), John Marsh's *The Fulness of Time*, J. A. T. Robinson's *In the End, God . . .*, and articles in Richardson's *A Theological Word Book of the Bible* and Kittel's *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum neuen Testament*. Following the same line of discussion developed in his earlier book, Barr attacks the contention that the lexical stock of the Biblical languages, Hebrew and Greek, originates in and reflects the way in which the Biblical writers conceived of the matters to which the words refer. Whether or not the Hebrews conceived of time as linear; whether or not they thought of time and eternity as being of the same 'stuff'; whether or not they distinguished between 'time' in terms of chronology or of content; whether or not they differed from the 'Greek concept' of time—none of these questions is to be answered on the basis of the words used for 'time', but (if at all) on the basis of what the writers actually said, or did not say, about the matter. Nowhere, as Barr points out (p. 148), does a Biblical writer ever say, 'You think time is a circle, but we think it is a straight line', or 'You think that eternity is timelessness, but we think it is the totality of time'. Barr does not argue that (some of) the Biblical writers may not actually have held this position; what he argues, and rightly so, is