

2. Little or nothing can be done to avoid, or even to tone down, references to fire and food.
3. Though it is neither possible nor desirable to observe everywhere the distinctions between ordinary and honorific language, this can and ought to be done to a limited extent: but it must never be done where the result would be a loss of precision or of clarity.

THE USE OF HONORIFICS IN BURMESE

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In Burmese, as in many other languages, there is a special vocabulary which is used with reference to royal persons and members of the Buddhist Sangha. In addition there is a series of personal pronouns graduated according to the rank of the speaker and the person addressed. It has long been felt that this usage poses a special problem in the translation of the Christian Scriptures though no one has been able to suggest a satisfactory solution to it.

Dr. Judson, in making his famous translation 150 years ago, felt the necessity of using the honorific structure whenever the Divine name was used. One or two illustrations will make this clear. Wherever God, or Jesus, or the Holy Spirit is the subject of a verb, the honorific particle *daw mu* is added giving the meaning that the action is performed in a royal way.

A particularly good example may be found in the story of Jesus with Martha and Mary after the death of Lazarus: Jn. 11:31, Mary goes to the grave "to weep loudly"; Jn. 11:33, Mary and the others "weep loudly"; Jn. 11:35, Jesus' tears "fall royally".

Again in the story of Jesus stilling the wild sea we read that Jesus was asleep on a cushion in the stern of the boat: Mk. 4:38, Jesus, as a royal person, was "sleeping royally." (Here there is a special word for "sleeping" as well as the honorific particle).

In more than one place, Judson has translated "Teacher" or "Rabbi" by a word of address used for "reverend characters and officials of rank" (Judson's Dictionary). It brings to my mind scenes of 30 years ago when on a jungle path a country Burman would get down on his knees and with his head in the dust, would address me in this way. I have seen the same thing happen before a Burmese official in his office.

In the use of pronouns it is perhaps inevitable that Jesus should be made to use the form which is kept for a superior addressing an inferior. Other pronouns have within them the idea of "slave" or even "your royal slave" and so are felt to be unsuitable.

The Bible Society Version of the Burmese Bible, which was first

published in 1926, continues the use of honorifics and court language.

There is a good deal of discussion taking place and many would like to break away from the usage if it were possible. Most Burmans feel, however, that they prefer to think of Jesus as rather above them and point out that a translation without honorific would be unacceptable to Buddhists.

In a question like this no decision can be made by a missionary or by any foreigner. However, it does seem to me to be the place of the missionary to ask questions and to go on asking questions until he is sure they have been faced squarely and discussed fully by nationals in the Churches. Some of the questions would be these:-

1. Does the use of court language and honorifics hinder the intimacy of the contact of Jesus with people? This intimacy and directness make an essential part of his authority as well as of His love.
2. In a story like that of Lazarus referred to above, is there not some loss of the reality of the sympathy Jesus felt for his friends?
3. Does not this usage take away something vital from the incarnation? Unless it is quite plain that Jesus became what everyman is, there cannot be any real gospel for everyman.
4. Is there not a theological weakness in the Churches which might be traced to this usage?

READERS' CORNER

From Russell Reed, Mindoro, Philippines:

We have a problem for which we are hunting ideas and solutions. Since there are so many names of people, towns and other cultural features which must be introduced into a Bible translation as borrowed or transliterated words, there appears to be a fertile area for the use of local words in the plant (and animal?) names of the Bible. As with all "primitive" peoples, the tribe in which we are working lives in intimate contact with their environment and we realized from the beginning that the only way to understand their lives was to appreciate their knowledge of the plant world. It has only been since the publication of the two book reviews in *The Bible Translator* on Bible plants,¹ however, that we have seriously been trying to equate the two plant groups. Because neither the Biblical names nor the local names are what would be called "scientific" (i.e. for only one species) it would seem reasonable to use one for the other, if we feel fairly certain that a Biblical

¹ *TBT*, 10:43-47 (Jan. 1959). The letter from which this extract is taken was written in December 1960, but was not then published since plans are afoot to produce a "Help for Translators" on Flora and Fauna in the Bible. However, since the completion of this project is not yet in sight, we are not holding up this letter any longer.-Ed.