

LETTER 15  
1958

**"THOU" AND "YOU" IN THE  
REVISED STANDARD VERSION**

As to what pronoun one should use in addressing God, this is a matter of custom and of individual preference. The Bible was not written in English but in Greek and in Hebrew. In those languages, as in Old English, there is one pronoun for addressing an individual and another for addressing a group of individuals. In our formal services we frequently follow the Old English custom and use its pronoun for addressing an individual. Thus I recall hearing Mr Horner baptizing a child and saying, "I baptize thee in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Mr Horner, of course, was not showing reverence to the child; he was merely using the Old English form of addressing an individual.

In Matthew 16:23 we read that when Jesus wished to show his anger toward Peter, he said to him: "Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me; for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men." In this case Jesus was not showing reverence to Peter, or certainly not to Satan, by using the words "thee" and "thou", which are merely forms of the individual pronoun in Old English.

As time went on, people began to honor the king by addressing him as if he was more than one person and calling him "you". William Penn refused to do this. He declared that since the king was only a man, and not a god, he would not address him with "you" as if he were several individuals, but would use the ordinary English "thou" just as he addressed other human beings.

Since that time it has become customary to address all human beings with the plural form "you", and it has almost entirely taken the place of the singular. Since God is a Trinity I personally like to show reverence to the Lord Jesus Christ by including all three members of the Godhead in my prayer and using the pronoun "you", instead of seeming to exclude Him by merely speaking to the Father alone and using the Old English singular "thou."