

LETTER

TO THE EDITOR:

May I please be permitted to respond to Dr. Eden Naby's letter (*Slavic Review*, March 1978) in which she questions a point in my article "A Neglected Source of Lenin's Nationality Policy" (*Slavic Review*, March 1977). Specifically, Dr. Naby takes issue with my assertion about the uniqueness of N. I. Il'minskii's approach among nineteenth-century Christian missionaries.

I have of course not been unaware of various other missionary linguistic programs both before and after Il'minskii's activities. The Bible, after all, has been translated (by 1962) into 1,180 languages and over 450 of the new languages were "reduced to writing" by nineteenth-century missionaries (see Wonderley and Nida in *Anthropological Linguistics*, January 1963). The linguistic work of such missionaries as Henry Martyn (Urdu), William Carey (Bengali), Veniaminov in Alaska, American missionaries in Iran, as Dr. Naby pointed out, and in Hawaii, French missionaries in Polynesia, the Bremen missionaries in Africa, to mention a few, all took place in the nineteenth century. However, the scope and consistency of Il'minskii's work and his supreme respect for the integrity of the mother tongue and national cultures in general, I maintain, was unique and can bear comparison only with the recent work of the Summer Institute of Linguistics. Il'minskii was a missionary working in his home country (Kazan' is almost the geographical center), largely among those already converted to Russian Orthodoxy. He was promoting the use of the mother tongue in church and school not as a necessary temporary expedient but as a positive "good." Il'minskii even broke the government ban against publishing in Mordvinian (the language was banned on the grounds that Mordvinians were Russified), and promoted the mother tongue even in cases where the parents preferred Russian. His almost total reliance on native teachers, ministers, and linguist-translators, as well as the enormous quantity and range of his publishing venture in Kazan' had no nineteenth-century parallel. In an article devoted to Lenin's nationality policy, it was impossible to detail Il'minskii's activities (for an analysis of his system see the *International Journal of Sociology of Language*, 22 [1979]).

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