

BOOK REVIEWS

A Translator's Handbook on the Gospel of Mark. By Robert G. Bratcher and Eugene A. Nida. Published for the United Bible Societies by E. J. Brill, Leiden. 1961. xviii, 534 pp. \$7.00, or 50/-.

Volume II in the series "Helps for Translators" breaks new ground, providing translators with a handbook on one book of the Bible in which practically all the information and suggestions that they could desire are presented in a compact form. Translators of an earlier day might well feel envious could they see the resources thus placed at the disposal of their successors. And if this handbook on Mark is the harbinger of others which will eventually cover the whole Bible, its appearance may mark the beginning of a new era for Bible translators.

The text

The text of Mark is printed, a verse or two at a time, and followed by notes on *Exegesis* and *Translation*. Where necessary, the Exegesis is preceded by notes on *Text* and *Punctuation*. The text which is used as a basis is that of the R.S.V. with the recent changes discussed in the last issue of *The Bible Translator*; thus the centurion in Mark 15:39 is made to say: "Truly this man was the Son of God" (not, as previously in R.S.V., "... a son of God"). The right rendering of the centurion's confession is a well-known difficulty, to which our attention has been directed afresh quite recently by the rendering in the New English Bible. There is a possibility that the centurion and the Evangelist may have meant two different things by the expression; if the Evangelist's understanding of it is to be followed (which is the proper course in a translation), there is much to be said for the new R.S.V. rendering which is also preferred by Dr. Bratcher (who is responsible for the notes on text, punctuation and exegesis).

The textual and exegetical notes

The textual and exegetical notes are thoroughly practical in intention; the features chiefly dealt with are those most relevant to the work of translation.

One problem presents itself at the very outset of the Gospel: what is the relation of verse 1 to the verses which follow? The Greek-English Diglot published by the British and Foreign Bible Society links it closely with verse 2 ("The beginning of the Gospel about Jesus Christ was as it is written in the prophet Isaiah . . ."); others regard verses 2 and 3 as parenthetical, and link verse 1 closely to verse 4, making the public appearance of John the Baptist the beginning of the gospel. Dr. Bratcher discusses these alternatives, but follows "the overwhelming majority of translations and com-

mentators" who take verse 1 as the title of the Gospel.¹ As against the B.F.B.S. Diglot, he retains the words "the Son of God" at the end of verse 1.

For translation into some languages it is important to know the precise force of the genitive in the phrase "the gospel of Jesus Christ". Is it the gospel *about* Him, or the gospel that *comes from* Him? "Almost without exception the translations and commentators prefer the first interpretation", and so does Dr. Bratcher—rightly, beyond any doubt.

In Mark 1:4 the sense of the preposition before "forgiveness" must be determined. "The English preposition *for* with its various shades of possible meanings, and its equivalent in other languages, is the best translation." But there may be some languages which do not have a preposition or equivalent form with the wide range of meaning of Greek *eis* or English *for*; translators into such languages will find real help in the paraphrase quoted from F. C. Grant: "a baptism of immersion, undertaken at John's direction and in response to his preaching, preceded by repentance . . . and followed by the divine forgiveness", and of course the matter is treated further in the translational section.

On Mark 2:8, where the title "the Son of man" appears for the first time, the translator is warned: "Strictly to be avoided is any translation which would equate the title merely with 'man', 'a human being'." Nothing is said in the exegetical note on 2:27 of the disputed relation between the twofold occurrence of the generic "man" and "the Son of man" which follows. This is probably because the translator is expected to reproduce the Evangelist's understanding of the saying, and not any other sense which could be inferred from the underlying Aramaic. Similarly it is said on 4:12: "This verse poses great difficulties to the interpreter; to the translator, however, there are somewhat fewer complications, for despite the difficulties in understanding, it should be rendered in a simple, straightforward manner." It may be questioned, however, whether *hina* here, even for the Evangelist, denoted purpose as unambiguously as the usual English versions would imply; it is not necessarily a watering down of the Evangelist's meaning to translate it otherwise.

In Mark 13:14 the R.S.V. is reproduced, but the exegetical note recognizes rightly that "it would be preferable to translate 'standing where *he* should not' rather than 'it'" in view of the masculine form of the participle "standing". In some languages it may make a difference to render the parenthesis "let the reader understand" so as to indicate that the public reader in church is meant—an interpretation which Dr. Bratcher regards as probable.

¹ But curiously, in a note on the punctuation of verse 4, we read: "This verse stands as the conclusion of v. 1 . . . (cf. v. 1)"—twice over "v. 1" is a slip for "v. 2", as the context makes plain.

From these few samples it will be evident that the notes on text, punctuation and exegesis are full of material which translators will find of the greatest usefulness. Other translations and commentaries are freely referred to; so are such standard works as Arndt and Gingrich's *Lexicon* and Professor Moule's *Idiom Book of New Testament Greek*. Where the text now generally accepted differs from the *Textus Receptus*, attention is drawn to the fact; on pages ix and x there is a helpful footnote on the genesis and nature of the *Textus Receptus*.

F. F. Bruce

THE TRANSLATIONAL NOTES

When, after some years of preparation, I really started translating parts of the New Testament into Balinese,² I found it a difficult task. I had a reasonable knowledge of the source language and of the receptor language, but I could not see how I was going to fit the one into the other. One of my mistakes—as I see it now—was that in Balinese I unconsciously wanted to keep too closely to the formal features of the Greek. At that time I received a duplicated copy of "A Translator's Commentary on Selected Passages", by Eugene A. Nida (Summer Institute of Linguistics, California, 1947). The linguistic material used in that book was primarily taken from American languages; examples from Indonesian languages were few, if any, and from Balinese nil. Nevertheless the book was of great use to me. With its help I worked through the first chapter of Mark, and in doing so I felt my courage rising to tackle the problems I was going to encounter in the gospel of Luke. And in the next months that feeling was proved true again and again.

Presumably I have not been the only translator in the field who appreciated this kind of practical help. Therefore, the author has continued his efforts, has widened the range of his material, and now has published translational notes on the whole gospel of Mark.

There is, indeed, one category of translators who will not need such a book: those who are blessed, as it were, with a translational variety of the gift of tongues, or, put in another way, those who by sheer linguistic and translational genius have a natural feeling both for all the niceties of source and receptor language, and for all the translational requirements of the latter, e.g. the necessary transformation of semantic structures, substitution of formal categories, reorganization of syntactic constructions. Such translators may be said to have an instinctive sense of direction that guides them in the translational labyrinth. More ordinary mortals, however, will appreciate, I think, a map in that labyrinth, or at least sign-posts that

²The language spoken on the island of Bali, Indonesia, not to be confused with Bali, a language in W. Africa. Ed.

help them to feel their way in it. It is such sign-posts that are provided by the translational notes in the book under review.

The notes discuss translational problems that have been met with in a large number of languages, giving possible solutions, and quoting, where available, examples of such solutions from translations of the Bible in different parts of the world. Many translators will not, of course, find the language mentioned in which they are working. But what they will find are tools to tackle the problems they are struggling with. For a successful use of those tools there is only one condition, but that a very important one, to wit, that they should know how to work by analogy, how to apply material from one language to another; ready-made solutions they should not expect.

Some examples of the method are to be found on the sample pages that have been printed in the last issue of *The Bible Translator* (Apr. 1961, pp 54-55). One of the remarks made there, on the difficulty of rendering pronouns, may sound too self evident to be necessary. It is a fact, however, that translators of many otherwise excellent modern versions would have read it to their profit. That is proved, for example, by the rendering of Hosea 4:14b in the German translation of Helmuth Frey, in the German Zürich version, in the Dutch New Version, and in Powis Smith's American Translation,³ where the use of the third person plural pronoun is misleading, or at least ambiguous: most readers will be inclined to take it as feminine; the Hebrew, however, uses the masculine, which Moffatt and RSV rightly make clear, "the *men* themselves". Other especially useful "sign-posts" are, for instance, those signalling the possible difference of viewpoint in the choice of 'to go' or 'to come' in 1:14 (p. 36), the precise nuance 'murder' should have in 7:21 (p. 235), or the rendering of the infinitive constructions in 12:33 (p. 386).

There are cases, of course, where one disagrees with the author. I for one am not convinced that "to make clean", or "to cleanse", in 1:40-42, can be rendered by 'to heal' (p. 67ff). The latter word suggests that lepra was only a disease, whereas it also involved ritual prohibitions, and one of the means of making that clear is the use of 'cleanse' in this context. It may be that in a certain language it is quite impossible to use a word meaning 'cleanse' in this verse, with the result that the rendering 'heal' is the only solution at the translator's disposal, but it should be indicated that this is only a last resort. Similarly I feel that two of the suggested renderings of "declare clean all foods", Mk. 7:19, namely 'he said: all food is good, or: good to eat' (p. 232f) are rather inadequate; here one should use at least something like 'allowed' instead of 'good'.

³ As also in the AV and ERV.

In Mk. 7:15 and 7:19 we come across the double use of the opposites 'to go in' (*eisporeuomai*) and 'to go out' (*ekporeuomai*); here I miss on pp. 230-32 a translational note about the play on words, especially as this is lost in the rendering the RSV gives, i.e. "going into" and "enters", "come out" and "passes on". In some languages it has been possible to do better justice to it, e.g. in Javanese, where *ekporeuomena* (vs. 15) is rendered *kewetu*, which means 'brought out' but also 'brought forth', 'produced', and *eis ton aphedrōna ekporeuetai* (vs. 19) by *metu marang pakiwan* 'goes out to the left-place (i.e. the abject place, a polite but perfectly clear term for "privy")'. Another instance where the reader might wish for more particulars is at the verse "With what can we compare the kingdom of God" (Mk. 4:30, p. 148); the pronoun "we" may prove a puzzle here: inclusive, exclusive, majestic plural? A note on this point would be desirable.

This leads me to mention two general desiderata:

(1) The quoting of more examples of both desirable and undesirable renderings from modern versions, or revisions, in well known languages with a long tradition of Bible translating. That these will often carry more weight than examples from first versions in "exotic" languages is an undeniable psychological fact, although both categories of examples have, of course, exactly the same linguistic and translational value.

(2) The adding of indications of language family or subgroup in the "Index of Languages". This index rightly mentions the place where the language in question is spoken. But this is often not enough. Navajo is located in the United States, but not every reader will know, without being told so, whether it is perhaps a Pidgin of American-English, or an Indian language; it is good to be told that Malagasy is spoken on Madagascar, and Palau somewhere in the South Pacific, but it would be still better to learn that both are members of the Malay-Polynesian language family.⁴

This book ventures on unbeaten tracks; that is its first and undebatable quality. This fact may also have its drawbacks, but these can be removed. In my opinion it will be an important, and attractive task for readers of *The Bible Translator* to send in positive criticisms for this book, and so help "to make a good one better"—to quote the preface of the King James Version.

J. L. Swellengrebel

⁴ A few minor errors that I encountered may find a place here:

"Tae" is the name for a language usually called "South Toradja". It is confusing to use both names; therefore p. 79, line 1, and p. 531, line 23 and 4 from the bottom, should be altered accordingly.

"Indonesian" (p. 9, line 30) should be "South Toradja".

"KJ" (p. 20, second line from the bottom) should be "AV" according to the abbreviations listed in the preface (p. XI).