

BOOK REVIEW

The New Testament, A New Translation: Volume 2, The Letters and the Revelation, by William Barclay. Collins, London, 1969. 25s.

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The first volume of this translation was reviewed by the Rev. Harold K. Moulton in *TBT*, Vol. 20 (April 1969), pp. 89–91.

Before commenting on the translation itself, a word is in order about the book's arrangement. There is an introduction for each book, plus a general introduction to Paul's letters which are arranged in the order in which Barclay thinks they were written: Galatians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Romans, Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon, Philippians. Then follow the Pastorals, in the introduction to which (pp. 151–2) Barclay offers the view that perhaps a devoted friend and follower of Paul's, after the apostle's death, "took certain personal letters he had from Paul and added a message for the church of his day, and sent it [*sic*] out in the name of his great missionary master".

Hebrews, the General Letters, and Revelation follow the usual order, except that Jude is placed immediately after 2 Peter, "because the two Letters are very closely connected".

The Introductions concentrate on the purpose and contents of the book itself, with less attention to matters of authorship, place and time of writing, and readers. Generally a fairly adequate statement of differing viewpoints on these matters is provided. Barclay is willing to state his own position: he considers it quite possible that 2 Peter is a pseudepigraphon, and thinks that possibly Jude was written very early, before the final canonization of the Old Testament, as shown by its quotations from *The Assumption of Moses* and *The Book of Enoch*. But this assumes that the latter two pseudepigrapha were possible candidates for the Old Testament Canon, which is a most unlikely assumption indeed.

A section on New Testament Words (pp. 278–339) has 143 entries, "largely a matter of personal choice". Oddly enough, the King James (called the Authorized Version in Great Britain) wording is used for the entries. There are frequent citations from the Revised Standard Version and the New English Bible. These notes vary from the very good to the trivial (e.g. AND, JESUS). In his note on CHURCH Barclay justifies his use of "church" for the whole church, and "congregation" for local bodies (*à la* NEB). But is not this to introduce a frame of reference which distorts the New Testament view of the relation between the local group and the whole body? The section of Word Studies at times leaves the impression that it was rather hurriedly done; a stricter editing would have improved it.

The section "Notes on Passages" (pp. 340–351) discusses 22 passages in which Barclay explains some of his translations. Most of these are very

helpful, e.g. Heb. 1:3; some seem unnecessary, e.g. 1 Cor. 9:9; and some, in my opinion, are wrong. In Jas. 1:9 surely the *hupsos* of the poor brother (as well as the *tapeinōsis* of the rich) is God's action, not "life's hard experiences". In these notes Barclay explains and defends the need of expanding what in the original is compressed and succinct, if the modern reader is to understand the passage as well as did the reader of the original. Gal. 3:20 is probably the passage which has been given the greatest expansion of all. The Greek is, quite literally, "A mediator is not of one; but God is one". In Barclay's translation this verse reads:

That is to say that the validity of the law depends on two parties, one to give it and one to keep it, and on a mediator to bring it from one to the other. But a promise depends on only one person, the person who makes it, and when there is only one person involved there is no necessity for a mediator. And in this case God is the one person, and on him alone the promise depends.

Dynamic equivalence with a vengeance!

In the body of the translation itself Barclay inserts some extra notes: on pp. 46-7 there are three alternative translations of 1 Cor. 6:36-38; on pp. 47 f. there is a note on eating meat sacrificed to idols; on p. 53 a note on the veiling of women; on p. 54 a note on the Love Feast of the early church; on p. 58 a note on speaking in tongues, understood as ecstatic speech, not foreign languages; on pp. 148-150 a long note on spirit and matter; on p. 184 a note on the double use of *diathēkē* in Heb. 9; and on p. 261 a note on 666 in Rev. 13:18. All of these notes are valuable, and provide for translators a good demonstration of how much information there is which was shared by writer and readers, without a knowledge of which the modern readers will find these books puzzling or unintelligible.

It is impossible to characterize the translation with one or two descriptive words. It is, above all, clear; very rarely is it ambiguous or unclear. One notable exception is the very long sentence in Heb. 11:11, where "for he had made up his mind" refers back to Abraham's faith, not (as the incautious reader might suppose) to his inability to beget children.

Professor Barclay does not hesitate to make clear the meaning he sees in the passage. In Jas. 2:7, for example, "the good name that was given you" is interpreted as "the fair name of Jesus, which was pronounced over you, when you became his in baptism". In Rom. 12:20, the obscure "heap coals of fire on his head" is straightforwardly translated "you will make him feel the pangs of burning shame". He is not afraid to represent correctly the Greek *haima* by "death" or its equivalent in some passages (e.g. Rom. 3:25, 5:9; Eph. 1:7, 2:13; Col. 1:20; Heb. 10:19, 13:20; 1 Pet. 1:2). There is one translator, at least, who devoutly hopes that Professor Barclay will be spared the abuse and criticism he has received for doing this.

I would recommend that all translators avail themselves of the rich fund of information and skill that is provided by this translation. I do not recommend that they always try to imitate it, but that they always use it, in the attempt to reach the translator's ideal, which is that those who read his translation will understand as much and as well as did the first readers of the original texts.