

Schonfield, Hugh J.: **The Original New Testament**. New York: Harper & Row 1985. xxxiv+594pp., \$19.95

The publisher's "blurb" on the inside parts of the dust jacket makes high claims for this translation:

This landmark New Testament translation returns the Gospels and Epistles to their historical and cultural context and recaptures to their historical and cultural context and recaptures the force, urgency, and meaning of the original message.

Th[is] . . . one-man translation of the Bible [*sic*] . . . emerges as a book astonishingly unlike the familiar New Testament as it has been handed down to us today—yet it is arguably much closer in language and spirit to the original writings . . .

[Schonfield] systematically corrects mistakes in translation that were compounded over time, and corrects for later theological developments that he believes were falsely ascribed to the original writers . . . He has created what may be considered the first truly historical translation, with no Christian sectarian or theological axe to grind.

In the Preface (p. ix) Schonfield himself explains the meaning of "Original":

The term 'Original' in the title of this version of the New Testament documents is intended to convey that it aims at giving back their contents to the modern world in the meaning intended by the writers, and at the same time to represent as closely as possible the original structures. Necessarily, since these writings represent conditions and ideas current in the Mediterranean area some two thousand years ago, the accompaniment of explanatory studies, notes and references has been essential, indeed indispensable.

As examples of what this translation does, the outside back of the dust jacket cites some passages. Phil 1.21 in the KJV reads: "For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." This translation has: "It is useful for me to live, and an advantage to die." Here, says Schonfield, the Greek *christos* "has carelessly been set down by a scribe in place of *chrestos* (useful), which is called for by the context." In Phil 2.6 "in the form of God" (as a translation of *en morphē theou*) is wrong; "the sense relates to Christ as the second Adam, not to his Deity," and so the translation must be "though he had godlike form." In the *Introduction* (pp. xxix-xxx) Schonfield himself cites his translation of Luke 2.14 in support of his contention that a knowledge of Jewish liturgical literature is indispensable to the translator of the N.T. It is because previous translators have disregarded this literature that they have wrongly translated "and on earth peace." The correct translation is: "Glory be to God on high and on earth; //Peace be to men who please him."

Schonfield has also replaced "familiar ecclesiastical terms" such as baptism, church, apostle, bishop, deacon, by terms which correctly give their original meaning: immersion, community, envoy, supervisor, administrator (*Preface*, pp. x-xi).

He informs the readers that he has occasionally used the *Gospel of the Hebrews*, which he identifies as “the account of Jesus produced by the body of his Jewish followers in the Near East . . . The *Gospel* of these Jewish believers in Jesus as Messiah had been composed in Hebrew, but it was known anciently to the eastern division of the Gentile Church, and also to Jewish scholars in the Holy Land” (pp. xviii-xix). In the Appendix “Bibliography of Antique Sources Employed” (pp. 591-4), along with other N.T. sources he cites “Old Hebrew (Du Tillet) version of *Matthew*” (p. 591). The only other light shed on this source is found on p. 56 (footnotes to Mt 1.13): Restored from an old Hebrew MS (Du. Tillet) in the Paris National Library.”

To say the least, this is all very confusing and, for the average reader, misleading. The average reader will be led to believe that there is still extant a (presumably complete) Gospel of Matthew that was written originally in Hebrew, whose text helps correct and supplement the canonical Greek Gospel of Matthew. It is variously referred to as “an old Hebrew MS of *Matthew* (p. 39); “the Hebrew Gospel” (p. 61); “the old Hebrew” (pp. 68, 72, 80, 98, 122, 123); “the ancient Gospel of the Hebrews” (p. 99). It is the footnote to Mt 19.23, on p. 99, that makes it possible to identify this “Gospel of the Hebrews.” In the footnote Schonfield says: “the ancient Gospel of the Hebrews adds, ‘But the rich man began to scratch his head, and it did not please him . . .’” This addition is from what is called “The Gospel of the Nazarenes” which M. S. Enslin (*Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. III, p. 524) identifies as an “Aramaic Targ. of the canonical Gospel of Matthew, current in the second century in Aramaic-speaking N. Syria” and which Hennecke (*New Testament Apocrypha*, vol. I, 139) calls *The Gospel of the Nazaraeans*, “a Gospel read in a Semitic speech (Aramaic or Syriac), which is attested by Hegesippus and Eusebius, Epiphanius and Jerome, which according to the latter was in use among the Nazaraeans, the Syrian Jewish Christians, and which showed a close relationship to the canonical Matthew.” He dates it in the first half of the second century (p. 146). (It should be added that there is much confusion about what are called the Gospel of the Hebrews, the Gospel of the Nazarenes, and the Gospel of the Ebionites) for details see Enslin and Hennecke.)

The main question, of course, is: What is the difference between this *Original* New Testament and Schonfield’s 1955 *Authentic* New Testament? The answer, simply put, is: Not much. A careful reading of ten chapters (Mt 5-7; Mk 1; John 1, 21; Rom 1-2; Heb 1-2) revealed that changes in *meaning* are so few as to be practically non-existent; most changes are stylistic, made to improve the English text. There is really not much difference between the original *Authentic* and the authentic *Original*. As Schonfield himself says (p. xii):

In the meantime knowledge has increased by so much and so many fresh sources of information have come to light, that revisions have been necessitated, not only in the translation itself but more particularly in the references to sources and background information, and in the chronology of events.

One example may be given of a change that involves meaning. Mt 5.18 in the *Authentic* is: “I tell you positively, until heaven and earth pass away not one iota,

not a single stroke, shall be removed from the Law till everything has come to pass"; the *Original* reads: "... removed from the Law until it has completely been put into effect." Another change, presumably not intended, is to be found in Mt 19.18, which now reads: '... you must commit adultery.' Will this edition be known as 'The Wicked Original'?

By and large the translation is well done; the language is usually contemporary, but at times is quite high level. The construction of the text is at times complex and unnatural, following somewhat slavishly the form of the original. Heb 2.2-4 is translated as one single sentence:

For if the Message spoken by angels held good, and every failure or neglect brought just retribution, how are we to escape punishment if we should prove negligent of so great a salvation, which, originating with the Master's own declaration, was confirmed to us by those who heard him, and corroborated by God by signs and wonders, and by a variety of phenomena and distributions of holy Spirit at his discretion?

I defy any reader to sustain the interrogative until the end of the sentence.

The most helpful feature of this translation is the footnotes, where a wealth of information is displayed, generally having to do with Jewish beliefs and customs, which help the reader understand the text. The ordering of the books follows a (roughly) chronological order, not the canonical one. There are four letters to the Corinthians: (1) 1 Cor 9.1-10.22 and 2 Cor 6.14-7.1; (2) 1 Cor (less 9.1-10.22); (3) 2 Cor 10-13; (4) 2 Cor 1-9 (less 6.14-7.1). All readers will profit from a close reading of the Introduction.

In conclusion, however, I do not find that this translation lives up to the high claims made for it by the publisher. I bought the *Authentic* in paperback long ago, when it cost 50 cents; I do not think the *Original* is worth \$19.45 more.

ROBERT G. BRATCHER

Gnilka, Joachim and Hans Peter Rieger (ed.): **Die Übersetzung der Bibel—Aufgabe der Theologie. Stuttgarter Symposium 1984.** (Texte und Arbeiten zur Bibel 2). Bielefeld: Luther-Verlag 1985. 315 pp., DM 54.

Over sixty linguists and theologians from German-speaking countries and the the Netherlands met near Stuttgart in April 1984 for a symposium on Bible translation initiated by the German Bible Society in cooperation with its Roman Catholic counterpart, Katholisches Bibelwerk. The papers read, together with extracts from and summaries of the discussion, are published as the second volume in a scholarly series published for the German Bible Society.

Despite the title, the concerns of the symposium were not exclusively theological. The body of the book is divided into three parts, the first of which, concerned with "basic questions of translation from linguistic and theological viewpoints", will probably prove to be of the most general interest. In it, Wolfram Wilss outlines recent developments in the science of translation, with special reference to the relation between theory and practice. Katharina Reiss returns to an area she has explored in *The Bible Translator* (32.124-134; 34.301-8), in a paper entitled simply "What is translation?" (The answer is not so