

Raymond E. Brown: **The Epistles of John** (The Anchor Bible vol 30). Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company Inc. 1982. xxviii + 812 pp. \$18.00.

This commentary follows on, and supplements, Professor Brown's earlier volumes on the Gospel of John in the Anchor Bible (nos 29–29A) and his charming little book *The Community of the Beloved Disciple* (New York: Paulist Press/London: Geoffrey Chapman 1979). It is an excellent piece of work, very balanced, very clear, with a full survey of all pertinent research and a personal judgment on all problems posed by the text—an ideal commentary for those interpreters (and translators) who have to work far from a theological library. The price is surprisingly low!

The question may arise whether this book does not present far too much material for the translator in the field. *A Translator's Handbook on the Letters of John* (to which the present reviewer contributed) contains only 171 pages! Here one should point to a feature of this commentary mentioned by the author on pp. xii–xiv of his Preface which serve as guide for the reader. Here he draws attention to the elaborate notes (followed by the Comment Sections which concentrate on the overall view of particular passages). These notes give careful comparative studies of Johannine vocabulary and style and they deal with the many possible interpretations of the relatively obscure grammar of the Epistles. Both the grammar and the relatively limited vocabulary are only superficially simple; and because also the structure of the first Epistle is rather loose (the 'letter' gives a 'meditation' rather than a discourse) many different interpretations are possible. Here the reader will welcome Brown's excellent surveys of primary data and scholarly opinion, and his personal decisions in difficult matters.

Still another valuable aspect of the book should be mentioned. As in his *The Community of the Beloved Disciple*, the author is very much interested in the historical background of the Epistles. Some seventy pages of his Introduction are devoted to this problem. His views are very illuminating, and I find myself in almost complete agreement with them (the author himself remarks on p. 69 that his approach 'in the range of contemporary scholarship, is closest to the views of the Jonge and Houlden'). The Epistles of John were written in the context of a fierce debate on the true interpretation of 'Johannine' theology, which had already led to a secession. Those who left the community to which the author belonged continued to influence the hearts and minds of its members, and the author, starting from this opponents' views, tried to correct them by placing their statements in a different perspective.

Here, if anywhere, the old adage proves true that says that two people need not mean the same thing if they say the same thing. In the development of the 'Johannine' communities 'Johannine' statements were used and interpreted differently by different groups. In the Epistles we have to take into account at least three points of view: the 'traditional' one, that of the author's opponents, and the author's own, formed in constant debate with his opponents. The interpretation of the 'Johannine' concepts and phrases used in the Epistles is, therefore, very difficult and clearly impossible without a clear view on the historical situation in which they functioned. It is here, in particular, that Brown's commentary gives expert guidance.

For obvious reasons Translator's Handbooks have concentrated on the text and said relatively little about the historical circumstances in which it originally functioned. This commentary reminds us that knowledge of the historical background is indispensable when we study (and translate) letters written in crisis-situations. Translators should take Brown's commentary very seriously.

M. DE JONGE

Hammond, Gerald: **The making of the English Bible**. Manchester: Carcanet New Press 1982. 249 pp., £9.95.

This is a study of the principal English versions of the Bible from Tyndale to the Authorized Version (including the Douai-Rheims translation). The author, who lectures in English Literature in the University of Manchester, approaches his subject from the literary angle, not as a biblical scholar. He concentrates for the most part on the Old Testament, which (among other things) "gives the widest range of literary genres and kinds to test the translator" (p. 13).

One of the aims of the book is to analyse the stylistic relationships between the translations and their original. In the pursuit of this aim Mr. Hammond is better equipped than most lecturers in English Literature: he is familiar with Hebrew and can give a competent assessment of the renderings of the Septuagint and the Vulgate.

The "Bible English" for which Tyndale set the pattern follows the syntax of Hebrew as closely as English idiom will allow. But with Tyndale this was not a special kind of English used only in translating the Bible: Tyndale's account of his unsuccessful approach to the bishop of London in 1523 shows the same kind of co-ordinate structure as his version of the Pentateuch—a structure well calculated to maintain narrative suspense. In this Tyndale shows himself superior to Jerome: "there is, after all, not a syntactic form more certain to destroy narrative suspense than the ablative absolute" (p. 29).

When he wishes to compare the translation technique of Tyndale and his successors with that favoured by modern translators, Mr. Hammond chooses as his basis of comparison the best of the modern English versions—the New English Bible. The scholarship of the N.E.B. translators is far in advance of anything attainable in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but one thing they lack: a feeling for words, an appreciation of the impact which the sound, as well as the sense, can make on the hearer or reader of the Bible. Thus Ezekiel 33:1-6, which in the A.V. is "a powerful prophetic warning", becomes in the N.E.B. "something more like a civil defence handout" (p. 6). It may indeed be unfair to the N.E.B. translators to blame them for failing to achieve what they were incapable of achieving, but the point that Mr. Hammond makes here is highly relevant to the goal of dynamic equivalence. Some of the newer versions seem, he thinks, to presuppose that "modern readers are idiots incapable of any kind of imaginative interpretative response" (p. 3).

One of the most valuable features of the book is its identification of the particular strengths and weaknesses of the versions that are reviewed. What Tyndale lacked in scholarship he made up for in sound judgment: where the A.V. departs from him, it does not invariably improve on him. As for Coverdale, his confessed ignorance of "the tongues" meant that, where Tyndale