

The New Testament: Vol. 1, The Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles, A New Translation by William Barclay. Collins, London, 1968, 25s.

There are few people more steeped in the New Testament than Dr Barclay. He combines academic proficiency with popular appeal. His series of expository commentaries for the general reader has sold into the hundreds of thousands. His learned articles remain fresh and vivid. He has taught generations of students in Glasgow, and who knows how many have listened to him on the radio?

What better preparation could there be for making a translation of the Book? Theoretically, one might translate first and expound afterwards. Practically, one is not equipped for translation until years of using have shown what is involved in the task. Here then is a volume that has very deep roots in experience.

Wisely Dr Barclay lets the New Testament speak first for itself with the minimum of introduction, but translators will naturally turn very soon to pp. 308–52, 'On Translating the New Testament', with its sections on general principles, detailed words, and problems of expansion, omission, sentence shapes, etc. These are the concern of all of us, and the experience of a master who is at the same time a fellow-struggler is something for which we cannot but be grateful.

A brief but characteristically lively account of the history of translation emphasizes the principle that is summed up in the words of St Jerome: 'I render sense for sense, and not word for word.' In fact, Barclay prefers the term 'transmutation' to 'translation'. He quotes Ronald Knox saying that the translator must never be frightened by the word 'paraphrase'. He also quotes: 'My old teacher, W. M. Macgregor, that prince of interpreters of the New Testament, always asked for a paraphrase. He insisted that, from the examination point of view, it was possible to translate a passage of the New Testament without having any idea of what it meant, but that to make a paraphrase a student must not only know the meaning of the Greek words, but must also understand the mind and intention of the author.'

Barclay is also aware of the risk of the translator putting something of himself into his work. When it was alleged that Euripides sometimes spoke with the voice of Gilbert Murray, Murray's answer was: 'It is not a ventriloquist's trick, only a translator's occupational risk.' There are risks of every kind, particularly in Bible translation, where the result means so much more to the reader than an ordinary book does—but the translator seeks to be in unison with the mind of the author and to translate with courage, knowing all the time that perfection is unattainable.

The section on words gives background for words that describe not merely things but ideas, e.g. comforter, doctrine, inherit, mystery, offence. Many of these ideas will still baffle the translator, but at any rate he will know what he should be looking for.

Expansion is not to be shunned when it brings out the meaning that would have been perfectly clear to the original readers. For example, Barclay feels quite happy to translate 'No one puts new wine into old wineskins' by 'No more do people pour new fermenting wine into old wineskins that

have lost their elasticity', and 'for he had a vow' in Acts 18: 18 is clarified by 'because he had taken the Nazarite vow'.

On the other hand, omission is often justified, especially omission of the small connecting words by which Greeks naturally joined their sentences, but which are not necessary in English. 'And', 'for' etc. are essential in Greek. They are very adequately rendered in English by mere juxtaposition of sentences or clauses.

Other justifiable omissions are those of 'Behold' and 'It came to pass'. Such expressions are natural in Hebrew, not so natural in Biblical Greek, and quite unnatural in modern English, though familiarized to us by centuries of the Authorized Version.

Sentence shapes also vary in different languages. Greek has more subordinate clauses than English normally uses, and the natural English order of clauses is often the opposite from Greek: 'As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them' reads much more easily in English as 'I send them out into the world, just as you sent me into the world.'

Some translators know these things, either by instinct or by experience. Others do not. In either case it is good to have them reiterated so perceptively.

Dr Barclay's clear exegesis at points of difficulty is always helpful. In Luke 12: 5, 'Fear the *One* who has the power . . .' makes it plain that Jesus is speaking of God, not the devil. In many languages an honorific can be used as the equivalent of the English capital letter. In John 19: 35, '*God* knows that he is telling the truth' interprets a Greek pronoun that is difficult to make sense of in any other way. In John 2: 15, he translates explicitly 'He drove them *all* out of the Temple precincts, and the sheep and oxen along with them.' This verse has recently been discussed in *The Bible Translator*, as to whether *all* refers to the sheep and oxen only, or to the sellers and the money-changers as well. Barclay comes down clearly in favour of the latter. In Mark 10: 38, the translation is not 'Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?', but 'Can you pass through the bitter experience through which I must pass? Can you be submerged in the sea of troubles in which I must be submerged?' 'Cup' is not really a modern metaphor. 'Baptism' has a far more restricted sense today than it had in the first century. Both words make way for terms that express their true meanings.

Perhaps one cannot always agree. John 4: 20 seems to miss the point. The Greek does not say 'Jerusalem is the place . . .', but '*In* Jerusalem is the place . . .', meaning in all probability the Temple, and it would have been quite justifiable to expand to 'the Temple in Jerusalem is the place . . .'. In Mark 12: 10 and parallels, the word 'headstone' is perhaps not right. It is not a modern architectural term, except possibly as the keystone of an arch. Today it is used mainly for a gravestone. The Biblical connotation is probably that of the main stone built into the wall at no particular height, but leading up to a corner. I do not find the word 'heart-sorry' (Mark 6: 34 and many other places) in any of three large standard dictionaries, though one of them has 'heart-sorrow' in the sense of sincere sorrow. It may be native to Scotland, though two of the three dictionaries pay special attention to Scottish words. It is a suggestive term, but it may occasion a sense of

oddness rather than acceptance. In Mark 9: 5 and parallels, 'It is a wonderful thing for us that we are here' is perhaps a misreading of the situation. Peter doesn't really know what he is talking about (v. 6). He is not speaking of a spiritual experience. This would require a non-existent dative in the Greek. He is saying rather, in his stumbling way, 'It's a good thing we are here. We can make you all comfortable.'

Such things, however, are comparative trifles. Different readers will react in different ways. A more important question is that of the length to which paraphrase should go. For the general reader it is nearly always helpful. How often such a person exclaims: 'Well, I never understood that verse before', when he reads it in an expanded form which fully clarifies the meaning.

The translator, however, has to be a little more cautious. A paraphrase will show him the meaning of the Greek, or what one translator believes to be the meaning of the Greek. Yet he must not attempt to translate the paraphrase literally. What is idiomatic in one language is not necessarily idiomatic in another. If he needs translations to help out his imperfect Greek he needs a minimum of two. One should be a translation which closely follows the form of the Greek, such as RV or RSV. That will keep his feet on the ground. The other should be a translation such as TEV, Phillips or Barclay, in their different styles. They will get the meaning across to him. Then, to use the stock phrase, he can produce 'the closest natural equivalent', not straying too far from the original but not hide-bound by it. Barclay's translation can be creative for a translator, provided he is no more a slave to it than he is to any other version.

Two or three illustrations will present the two sides of the case. 'Full well do ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your tradition' (Mark 7: 9, RV); 'You are experts in finding a way to cancel the commandment of God in order to preserve your man-made traditions' (Barclay). 'Whatsoever thou spendest more, I, when I come back again, will repay thee' (Luke 10: 35, RV); 'If you incur any additional expense, I'll square it with you on my way back' (Barclay). 'David after he had in his own generation served the counsel of God, fell on sleep and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption; but he whom God raised up saw no corruption' (Acts 13: 36-37, RV); 'David served the will of God in his own day and generation, and slept the sleep of death, and went to join his ancestors. He thus did actually experience death's decay. But he whom God brought back to life again never experienced death's decay' (Barclay). Let the translator put these pairs, and a thousand others, together and reap the benefit of both.

Meanwhile, translator and non-translator alike must thank Dr Barclay for putting at their disposal his fine insights into the New Testament and his stimulating ways of expressing them. This translation will bring its readers nearer to the heart of the Gospel—and that is the purpose of all translation.

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