

- and Williamson, op.cit., p.110.
- 79 Grosvenor Street was like Myrtle Street largely lower middle and artisan class. There is no Liverpool equivalent of Union Chapel, though Princes Gate tried its best.
- 80 Lea, op.cit., pp.76, 180. The £2000 McLaren Jubilee Peoples Institute was built in Rusholme in 1909.
- 81 *The Freeman*, 18th November 1887, p.759.
- 82 BQ, 28, No.4, 1979, p.153; BQ 26, No.5, 1976, p.226.
- 83 Williamson, op.cit., p.218.
- 84 *Baptist Magazine*, 1872, p.709.
- 85 *Ibid.*, 1867, p.677. 86 Lea, op.cit., pp.217, 222.
- 87 Payne, *Baptist Union*, p.105; *Circular Letter of the Lancs. and Ches. Association*, 1877, p.11.

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## THEOLOGICAL LITERATURE FOR EAST EUROPEAN BAPTISTS

### THE BARCLAY COMMENTARIES IN RUSSIAN

In 1979, during the European Baptist Congress held in Brighton, a small group of people met to try to implement a plea made by the Russian Baptists there for a Bible commentary in their own language. Apart from the early Church Fathers and occasional articles in religious journals, practically no help of this kind was available to them. Their pastors and preachers had their Bibles and concordances, but their ministries would be greatly enriched if only they had access to books like these.

A small group, consisting of Baptist and Mennonite Church leaders, pledged their support and the long and painstaking work began. Which commentaries should be chosen? Some of the Russian pastors who understood English had found William Barclay's New Testament *Daily Study Bible* of great help in their private devotions and in their sermon preparation. Careful scrutiny was made of this and other possibilities in both English and German and the decision to translate Barclay was finally taken.

A contract was negotiated with the St Andrew Press for publication rights; an able translator was engaged to be responsible for all the volumes of the New Testament commentaries; a general editor, Dr Henry Wiebe, and a production editor, Miss Mary Raber, were appointed to oversee the complicated task of preparing the text and of liaison with the Russian Baptists; financial arrangements were approved by the Baptist World Alliance and the Mennonite Central Council amounting to between 400,000 and 500,000 dollars and a careful programme worked out covering a period of four years (subsequently extended).

The whole project was a remarkable international enterprise. The

translation, for the most part, was carried out in Canada and passed on to the general editor who in turn sent the manuscripts to editorial groups in the USSR, the Federal Republic of Germany, Canada and the United States. The typing was done in Germany, the typesetting initially in England, the printing and binding in Pennsylvania and the shipping and despatch through the Production Department of the United Bible Societies in Stuttgart.

The general editor continued his arduous task despite serious illness and had almost completed his work when, regrettably, he died in 1986. His work was taken over by his namesake, Professor Herman Wiebe, who had already given invaluable editorial assistance. Towards the end of that same year the task was completed apart from the printing and binding of a number of the volumes.

The work of editing was at times much more difficult than might at first have appeared. What does one do, for example, with a telling illustration involving a description of some of the finer points of the game of golf at St Andrew's? The decision was taken to 'cut the Gordian knot' and change it into a game of chess! But such editing was not confined to matters literary, linguistic or stylistic. It sometimes involved more profound theological interpretation. Not everything in Barclay was equally acceptable to the 'conservative' and 'pietistic' Baptist pastors who would be making use of them. Of particular difficulty were some of Barclay's comments on the Virgin Birth, baptism and his interpretation of 'the last things' in the Book of Revelation. Should such 'unacceptable' sections be re-written to make them more 'acceptable' or should they be expurgated altogether? Internally this raised questions of theological interpretation, and externally questions of copyright! By means of footnotes and other explanatory comments most of the difficulties were overcome and tensions resolved.

Meanwhile ways and means were being sought to gain entry for the commentaries into the Soviet Union, for a clear decision had been made earlier on not to engage in illegal smuggling. Application was made to the authorities for permission to import the books and personal approaches were made. The advice received was that four volumes at a time (later raised to five) should be presented for approval. First off the press was the commentary on the Epistle to the Romans. This, together with four others, were sent out for scrutiny and were presumably read carefully by the communist official or officials involved. Subsequently, in 1984, application was made for permission to import 5000 copies of each of these five volumes. In the event, permission was given for the importation of only 1000 each.

This number was a disappointment, but at least some progress had been made. The whole exercise was in fact a great act of faith, for there had been no guarantee, when the operation started, that any permission would be given at all. So 'thanksgiving' rather than 'disappointment' was the keynote struck, and the operation continued. In due course all fifteen volumes in the 'set' were presented to the authorities and, presumably, read. Then at long last, in February 1987, an announcement was made by Mr Kharchev, Chairman for the Council of Religious Affairs of the USSR, granting permission to import

5000 sets of 15 volumes, making 75000 volumes in all. This permission is without precedent in terms of the number of volumes of a Christian literary work authorised for import. The work of production was immediately stepped up. Offers of copies have been made to the Orthodox Church and it is expected that further applications for extra copies will be made by other Churches within the Soviet Union.

Even before the New Testament project had been completed, investigations were being made about the possible provision of commentaries on the Old Testament books to supplement those of the New Testament. Examination was again made of several different series in both English and German. 'Trial runs' were attempted of some of the Psalms from various sources and submitted to the Russian readers for comment. Choice was determined by several factors, not least their content and their size. It was finally decided that the Layman's Bible Commentary be chosen and that the Russians themselves would accept responsibility for the translation. This is a new and most important development to which the Baptist World Alliance and the Mennonite Central Council will be ready to give support as may be required.

The 'Barclay project' has provided an incentive for further work, not only within the Soviet Union itself, but within other East European countries too. In Poland, for example, the Baptists of their own accord have already translated Barclay's New Testament commentaries and published them for general use; and in Yugoslavia Baptists are currently producing a series of commentaries based on the Tyndale series but including books from other 'sets'. In each case these commentaries are being made available to other Christian communions as well.

Such work, it should be said, is part of a much wider strategy being carried out by the Books and Translations Committee of the European Baptist Federation and assisted by the British-based fund *EuroLit*, sponsored by 'Feed the Minds' and with an ecumenical outreach. Other ventures include the provision of printing machinery (as in Moscow, Budapest and Warsaw), of paper (as in Poland and Hungary), and of books for seminary libraries (as in Hungary, Romania, Czechoslovakia, the German Democratic Republic and the USSR). Conferences are currently being arranged to help train translators and to encourage writers to produce their own literature in their own languages.

There is still a long way to go in the provision of Christian literature for use in Eastern Europe. The production of the Barclay commentaries in Russian is one significant factor in an ongoing work of vital importance.

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