

mentary and interpretation based upon the story of Abram and Melchizedek in Genesis 14. Heb. 7: 1-3 contain a repetition of the Genesis passage with brief interpretation of the statements concerning Melchizedek, thus the meaning of his name is given, and the fact that he has no genealogy is emphasised to the extent of saying that he is immortal. The next six verses contain a sort of homily upon the person of Melchizedek, showing his superiority to Abram, in the fact that the Patriarch himself paid tithes to the Priest. From this is also deduced the fact that his priesthood was superior to the Levitical, since 'One might even say that Levi himself, who receives tithes, paid tithes through Abraham, for he was still in the loins of his ancestor when Melchizedek met him' (7: 9, 10). The following group of verses point out that the Levitical priesthood was but transient and again justifies the priesthood of the Lord, a descendant of the tribe of Judah, on the basis of Melchizedek's priesthood, who was neither a Levite nor yet a Hebrew, but acceptable to God nevertheless. Finally, the writer quotes from Psalm 110, assuring his readers that God has sworn an oath establishing Jesus in this priestly office. This office is permanent and filled by One Who has made a single, sufficient sacrifice and 'Consequently is able, for all time, to save those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them'.

The figure of Melchizedek in Genesis 14 and in Psalm 110 is used in the Epistle to the Hebrews as a prototype and precedent for the priestly office of Jesus, which the writer wishes to establish as legitimate. The words of the Psalm are naturally applicable to Him and, while we may consider some of the deductions from the Genesis passage rather far-fetched, we cannot say that they exceed the possible limits of Scriptural interpretation: there is a certain logic in their development.

If we cease from analytical examination of these chapters of Hebrews and read them as a whole, we, too, can say, both of Melchizedek, and of the 'great David's greater Son', 'See how great He is'.

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## THE INTERPRETATION OF THE OLD TESTAMENT IN THE NEW TESTAMENT, AND INTERPRETATION TODAY

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1. In the previous papers we have examined the use of the Old Testament in Hebrews and in Paul. But in doing so, we have taken only a partial survey, for as well as being selective in what books we have chosen to examine, we have discussed only those cases in which there was an explicit quotation of the O.T. text. It must be emphasized that as well as these there are innumerable allusions to the O.T., many individual and distinctive words which are taken over, and themes which are often woven through the New Testament writings (such as Exodus, Inheritance etc.). When one takes all these into account, it will be seen that the N.T. is filled with references to the O.T.; these writers lived in the O.T.—for

them it was their Bible. We concentrated on the most exact and rigid N.T. use of the O.T., and there we found a number of factors at work: often there was a very close adherence of N.T. citation to O.T. text; and often there was what may be called a literal fulfilment of prophecy; but we have noted at a number of places that the N.T. author does not quote the text received today, for often he chooses a variant text that makes the point he wants to emphasize; we noted also that they often use a type of exegesis which makes distinctions which are foreign to the text (e.g. Zechariah 9 and Isaiah 65) or import into the text ideas which are not explicitly there (Melchizedek). That is, even in the most rigid form of reference to the O.T. (excluding any examination of less exact citations) we find what I should call 'looseness', for want of a more precise term.

2. The point of this looseness is that the N.T. authors felt the need to interpret the O.T., and to interpret it so that they made the O.T. not only more relevant to their readers, but also more relevant to the events that they had so recently witnessed—the life, death and resurrection of Christ: in large part, the N.T. engages in a Christological reinterpretation of the O.T., and this approach has at least one other effect, to make the O.T. more intelligible to the early Church. They now read it with eyes which have been changed, because they are eyes which have seen Jesus. In attempting to make this new approach as thoroughgoing as possible, they tended to indulge in whatever kind of hermeneutical principle was best suited to their purpose. Thus they could use the O.T. completely historically, so that a given O.T. passage kept its original context and became merely an example of the kind of thing under examination: Hebrews 11 is an extended group of citations of this type. There is no reapplication or interpretation, just illustration. There is also a literal kind of exegesis, which gives great significance to the very words used (in one or other text form) and the N.T. fulfilment of these words. This is common in the gospels, particularly in Mt. where the text is often not a canonical text at all, so that in fact what often seems to be a literal fulfilment is an interpreted one. Some writers have indulged also in typology (e.g. author of Hebrews) and in allegory (some in Paul), though there is little of either of these when seen in the light of the total scope of the N.T. The point is that, first of all, there is a variety of approaches in the N.T. to the O.T.; and secondly, and more important, behind this variety there lies a very basic concern to interpret the O.T. relevantly to its day. It is, in my view, all subsumed under the desire to approach the O.T. through the eyes of a Christian, and in this attempt, the O.T. material is subordinate (in the right sense) to the new things that have come to pass in Jesus Christ.

3. We believe that in so doing the N.T. authors were guided by the Holy Spirit to make these applications. Are we to assume that his guidance to them is the basis for his guidance to us on how to approach the O.T. and the N.T. as well? The question is: Can we expect the N.T. use of the O.T. to circumscribe our interpretation of the Bible? Are we committed to using only those, and all those, methods of exposition which we noted above? My own view, and this is all I can offer, is that we must go behind

the specific kinds of exegesis, and try to discern the underlying motive at work. I should suggest that the authors of the N.T. were each in his own way conditioned by his times. Logically and philosophically their presuppositions and training were different from ours. They were a part of a different kind of society than we, and therefore conditioned sociologically and psychologically in a different way. Our attitude to history, to providence, to hermeneutics, is bound to be different. We should not over-emphasise these differences, but we must recognise real and legitimate differences in outlook and background. Very few of us, I think, would accept as valid the attempt to allegorize, let us say, a parable. By and large we tend to reject this means of interpretation, and, I think, this is at least partly because our education, training and background does not dispose us towards the historical license necessary for such an attempt. In interpreting parables, or any other material, we would all recognize the need to interpret them historically, and very much in their context. Putting the matter in this way, raises questions for us in relation to those cases in the N.T. where the O.T. has been used rather too 'loosely', or in an invalid way. This we need not go into here. But it also serves to emphasize, I hope, the need for an interpretive principle which is consistent with the *aim* of the authors themselves, on the one hand, and the general methods of interpretation of one's own day. One need only survey the vagaries of interpretation on almost any passage over the course of a couple of thousand years to see that *in fact* this is done. I am making a plea for recognizing consciously this requirement.

4. We should then, maintain two emphases; the first that we deal with Scripture at its face value, literally if you like—that we pay extremely close heed to the language and the grammar of the Bible in order to understand what it *says*. And secondly, we must understand *what* it says in its historical, geographical, sociological and ethnical setting. That is to say, literalism and interpretation when properly understood are not mutually exclusive. It is only on the basis of the literal meaning of the words that we can interpret those words in a relevant and meaningful sense; *but we must have interpretation*. The question of prophecy is a special question. We may not deduce from the fact that some prophecy is fulfilled literally the principle that the whole Bible is to be interpreted on a literal basis. In such cases the literal fulfilment is determined by the coming of Christ, and it is only in retrospect that we can see such fulfilment. Moreover, much prophecy is not fulfilled literally, and I question the validity of assuming that *a priori* all prophecy will be literally fulfilled, particularly when much O.T. prophecy has been at least partially fulfilled in Jesus himself or the events surrounding His coming. In these cases it is doubtful whether we should expect *further* literal fulfilment. Moreover, it seems to me illegitimate to put both O.T. and N.T. on the same footing and to determine a schedule of events from an amalgam of two very different types of prophecy. I should prefer in these cases to try to understand what it is that God is trying to do or say or teach, and then to see how this applies to our day. But this is a particular problem, and only an aside.

5. We gain some indication of the process of re-application and re-interpretation in the Sermon on the Mount. Here there stands as an introductory consideration the principle 'not one jot or tittle shall pass away from the law', and then follows a drastic reinterpretation of that law. 'You have heard it said . . . but I say unto you . . .'; and there follows a treatment of the law on killing, adultery, divorce, swearing, retributive punishment, love and hate. *This is interpretation.* The law stands; it is by no means destroyed, but rather fulfilled. Teaching men to break the law means exclusion from the kingdom. But, the law is not self-explanatory. It must be continually brought up to date, not only in Jesus' own time, but much more so now that we can recognize the importance of His death and resurrection. Consequently any treatment of the law or ten commandments, must be viewed backwards through the N.T. to see how it is broadened, deepened, and loosened. For example, in the same kind of context, Paul says: 'For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, not kill, not steal, not covet and any other commandment is summed up in one word, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself' (Romans 3: 9). But we cannot stop even here. Even the N.T. words need to be interpreted today. We can only interpret the Sermon on the Mount if we understand what practices, what opponents, what abuses Jesus is addressing himself to. What is the Council, the judgment, the fire in the context of punishment for hatred? What is the practice of Judaism in the use of oaths? What is Israel's attitude to its neighbours and enemies? Wherein lies the hypocrisy in giving alms? in praying in public? in religious observances such as fasting? in judging others? But more important, how do we update these today. It is a simple thing to say, on a literal interpretation, we must not fast, we must not swear, we must not commit adultery; but perhaps by doing so we miss the whole point. We are required to interpret these words, even words of Jesus. We must ask, on the basis of the real meaning in the original setting taking into account the opponents, the culture, the unquestioned practices of the day, what is the similar situation today to which this word speaks?

6. This I take to be the nub of the whole issue. We cannot abdicate our responsibility to interpret by any facile literalism. We take the text as it stands as a Spirit breathed account of the historical facts, sayings, admonitions and exhortations—as the Word of God. We take this, and we understand it first of all in its context, a step which is indispensable to valid interpretation. Then by an understanding of our own culture, and perhaps even more by a deep consideration of ourselves and our needs, we bring up to date the Word of God, by establishing similar situations in the old and contemporary times. But here we must stress that we must shun allegory (and typology). The resemblances do not lie in small details, so that we may equate detail with detail in a literal sort of exactness. The resemblance must lie in the intent of the passage, the concern for the underlying problem or situation which can be paralleled. This, it seems to me, is precisely what the N.T. authors were trying to do, in their own way, with the methods and materials that lay close to hand. It was an attempt to relate everything to the Lordship of Christ, in the worlds which were created through him.

We must capture the emphasis on the livingness, the immediacy, of the word in the New Testament. We must realize the particularity of the Bible and that its value lies in its continuity.

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## PROBLEMS IN BIBLE TRANSLATION

H. Dennett

There are over fifty different versions of the English New Testament (in the whole or greater part) available to the student today, and over thirty of them are currently in print. Some are the work of individual translators, others of a committee. Some are revisions of a previous work, others a completely fresh translation.

In every one of these numerous versions felicitous and vivid renderings may be found, as indeed should be expected. But in spite of the fact that almost all English versions are the product of great labour and careful scholarship, it is only too easy to find in any one of them the harsh phrase, the unhappy choice of a word, the violation of English idiom or the fanciful rendering for which there is no authority in the original. There is in consequence still room for much research into the whole problem of Scripture translation.

It is, of course, notoriously difficult to convey both the precision and texture of a communication in one language to the speakers or readers of another language. An instructive example of this difficulty in the secular field may be seen in a French translation of Carroll's masterpiece, the 'Alice' books. The subtle sallies and frequent play on words simply will not carry over from the English original. If this be so with a merely human composition, however light may be the touch, how much more difficult must it be to translate into another tongue the words of Scripture for here behind the characteristic style of the individual writer is the specific direction of the Holy Spirit.

There are at least four distinctive styles of translation of the New Testament, each of which represents an attempted solution of the problem of conveying to the mind of the English reader the impression made by the Greek original on its first readers. A brief consideration of these diverse styles of translation will underline the whole problem of communication in English of the Word of God.

**1. The Literal Style.** This style imitates as far as it dare the features of the original Greek, both in syntax and vocabulary. The resulting English is always stiff, and sometimes almost unintelligible. Examples of this style are the translations by Rotherham, Young, and Darby. To a less extent the Authorized and Revised Versions come under this heading. In a literal translation the attempt is made to transport the modern reader back into New Testament times as to a strange land.