

# Postscript on Section Headings for Bibles

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**I**N my reply to Mr. Bradnock in the Spring 1969 issue of this journal I referred to only three examples of controversial headings in the BFBS list of New Testament section headings. In view of the vital importance of the question whether the Society should include section headings in its editions of the Scriptures, it seems appropriate to consider a few further examples. My hope in so doing is not that the Society will produce a revised list of headings but that they will come to recognise the wisdom of the words of the Revisers' Preface to the Old Testament in the English RV: 'One consequence of the arrangement in paragraphs has been the omission of the headings of chapters, which for other and more important reasons it was thought advisable to abandon, as involving questions which belong rather to the province of the commentator than to that of the translator', and abandon section headings altogether.

We may begin with the heading for Matt. 26: 57 ff., 'The trial of Jesus before the high priest', which may seem quite uncontroversial to the uninstructed but in fact throws the weight of the Society's authority into the scales in favour of one view in a much-debated and extraordinarily difficult question. Was what is related in these verses and in the parallels in the other Gospels a trial or rather only a preliminary inquiry held for the purpose of formulating a charge to bring against Jesus before Pilate? This distinction will not seem a mere quibble to anyone who is well informed and aware of the far-reaching issues which this question involves.

As a second example we may take the heading for Matt. 5: 17-20, 'The old Law and the law of Jesus'. To this it may be objected that the idea of a 'law of Jesus' is being read into this passage, and that it is doubtful whether in the Sermon on the Mount as a whole there is any really solid support for the idea of a law of Jesus to be contrasted with 'The old Law'.

In connexion with the heading for Matt. 21: 1 ff. and parallels, I have already referred in the Winter 1968 issue, p. 295, to the questionableness of the use of the word 'triumphal' of Jesus's entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday in the United Bible Societies' Greek Testament.

With regard to the heading for Matt. 26: 14 ff. ('The treachery of Judas') I must confess to having used the phrase myself as a heading in the Cambridge Greek Testament Commentary on St. Mark; but further reflection has led me to doubt whether it is altogether satisfactory. It is a striking fact that the New Testament only once uses the ordinary Greek word for 'traitor' of Judas and the ordinary verb for 'betray' not at all. Instead it uses again and again the neutral verb which means 'to deliver up'—the verb which is also used of God's delivering up his Son. The New Testament, in fact, seems to avoid

focusing attention on the treachery of Judas as such, and it is likely that this fact is not without theological significance. On a practical level it is perhaps true that the labelling of Judas as a traitor (like the representation of him in Christian art as specially ugly) can serve as a way of disguising from ourselves our own likeness to him.

To turn now to the Epistles—the heading of Rom. 7: 14-25 ('Man's double nature') strikes me as controversial. These verses are, of course, notoriously difficult and have been interpreted in very different ways. It is difficult to see how a heading could be devised for them which would not involve taking sides. The BFBS heading seems to rule out the interpretation of John Calvin, who after all was one of the greatest of biblical commentators; for, according to him, the conflict is not between two parts of man's nature but between man's nature and the indwelling Spirit of God.

I referred in the Winter 1968 issue to the headings of the UBS Greek Testament for Rom. 13: 1-7 and 8-10; the BFBS headings are similar and open to the same objections.

For 1 Cor. 13 the section heading is 'Love is the greatest gift', which seems to take a side in the controversy as to whether Paul thought of love as one of the *charismata* or not. Some scholars would, of course, argue that it is characteristic of the 'gifts' which Paul refers to in chapters 12 to 14 of 1 Corinthians that different ones are given to different people, while love is the necessary mark of *every* true Christian.

With regard to the heading given to 2 Cor. 3: 7 ff., 'The glory of the gospel contrasted with the glory of the Law', it may be said that it has been maintained that Paul is here contrasting not the two covenants but two ministries, that of Moses at the giving of the law and that of the Christian minister. The BFBS is again giving one interpretation, which is not the only possible one.

I have already referred (Spring 1969, p. 29) to three headings in Galatians which seem to me particularly partisan.

It would be tedious to go on in this way; but there is one other heading which I cannot resist mentioning—that for 2 Tim. 2: 14 ff., 'Warning against controversy'. This heading surely reflects the distaste felt by ecclesiastical bureaucrats for any questioning of their plans and methods more than it reflects the contents of the section. There is indeed a warning here against controversy of a particular sort, but not a warning against controversy in general. Those who read the New Testament can scarcely be ignorant of the fact that neither our Lord nor the apostle Paul thought it in all circumstances wrong to engage in controversy.

The BFBS Secretary for South Australia in a recent article in *The Australian Church Record* quotes the Society's General Committee as saying in 1939: 'We believe the object of the founders of the Society . . . will be carried out, provided that the holy scriptures circulated by the Society neither contain nor have bound with them any matter of any description which either in any way interprets, or attempts to interpret, the Inspired Word. . . .' This would seem to imply the recognition that the inclusion of any interpretative material would be definitely contrary to the founders' intention. But the examples which I have given above are surely enough to demonstrate beyond

the possibility of doubt that section headings involve interpretation and the taking of sides in controversial matters, and to underline the rightness of the Revisers' judgment (already quoted) that headings belong to the province of the commentator.

In conclusion I can only plead with the present officers and General Committee of the BFBS to see that, if they are to be worthy of the very great trust which a very great number of their fellow Christians have placed in them, they really must, first, make a much more serious effort than they have so far made to understand the objections to their present policy which have been expressed and to do justice to them, and, secondly, either answer them frankly and cogently or else accept them and act accordingly.