

# Editorial

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## *New Translations*

'A NEW translation of scripture is always news, especially when it is the work of one man. But when that man is William Barclay . . . then publication becomes an event.' So runs the blurb on volume one of Barclay's new translation of the New Testament published by Collins at 25s. and covering the Gospels and Acts. Well perhaps, but it is relevant to ask whether we have not had rather a surfeit of new versions, and whether the real problem is not now to get the English speaking world to read the Bible in *any* version rather than churn out yet another translation. Dr. Barclay's version provides a very brief introduction of a page or so to each book in which he gives a brief summary of the content and main thrust of the book, and sometimes the date. His text is without notes except for the very occasional MS variant and without any headings or titles. Barclay uses the United Bible Societies text, and appends an interesting essay at the end, in which he gives his views of translating the NT. Few are better qualified than Dr. Barclay to write on this subject, for he has spent a lifetime making the Bible intelligible to ordinary folk, and in so doing has proved himself the possessor of that rare combination of scholarly erudition and a preacher's pastoral heart.

He begins his essay by citing F. C. Grant to the effect that translating the Bible is a never ending process. He assumes this rather than proves it, and then goes on to consider how to translate. A translation should be intelligible, idiomatic and interesting, reflect the qualities of the original, and to do this a scholar must translate the sense not the words. He is dogmatically against 'anything which makes the NT sound stately and dignified and archaic, or even beautiful in style' because it gives the wrong impression of the original. He does not like the word for word method of translation employed in the RV under the influence of great classical scholars like Lightfoot and Hort. Barclay argues instead for the method of translating the sense and shows how it has been employed by such diverse persons as Luther and Ronald Knox. He describes it as transmutation rather than translation. This involves to some extent interpretation, the necessity of paraphrase, and the risk of a translator intruding something of himself

into such an enterprise. He then goes on to look at a number of instances of the sort of problem that arises. Here he is in his element and is quite excellent, but his basic case is not nearly so convincing.

First, he dismisses literary elegance rather too easily. It is a matter of historical fact that many people have been attracted to the great translations of the Bible by their literary beauty, and have subsequently found the profound spiritual truths in the Bible. That is not in itself decisive, but a responsible scholar must consider the setting in which his translation is to be used. The writer doubts whether he is alone in experiencing a considerable jar when a modern version like the NEB is read in the midst of the formal and majestic liturgical English of a Prayer Book Service. If, for instance, Mark is really Peter's preaching written down as many in the early church thought, then it is possible to argue that to be really idiomatic and faithful to the original, we might have to drop a few 'h's to get the way the Galilean fishermen might have preached. And in any case the NT contains a considerable variety of style; not all of it is rough hewn Greek as in Mark. Is the translator to feel under such a compulsion to reflect the original stylistic differences that he must emphasise these? If he is, he will probably have to overemphasise the differences considerably to get the fact over to the ordinary reader who will not be a literary pundit. We are not arguing here that Barclay is wrong, just that he has rather underestimated the other side.

Secondly, translating the sense is undoubtedly right if the idea is to produce a readable translation, though this does not condemn the linguistic labours of the RV scholars. But it places translations in grave peril of being subject to the theological whims of the translator. This is not such a problem to a Roman like Ronald Knox since the *ecclesia docens* will give its *imprimatur*, and in any case the Roman view of the relationship between church and tradition can easily accommodate such an activity. With Protestants it is otherwise. The reason why Reformation translations were so excellent and have survived so long was among others that the Reformers were so splendidly free in their discovery of the Scriptures. They had cut adrift from the medieval ecclesiastical traditions, and spurred on the literary humanists' love of antiquity, they had discovered afresh the Greek and Hebrew texts. This freshness breathes through Tyndale's work. The Reformers were also giants in biblical and systematic theology, a field in which the church today, especially Protestantism, is lamentably weak. Because the Reformers had such a magnificent grasp of the whole Bible, probably a grasp without rival since NT times, they were able to judge the sense of Scripture even when their technical skill or knowledge was deficient by modern standards. Such majestic biblical theology simply does not exist today, though the great Karl Barth has striven without ceasing to restore it. The danger of reading current fashions into the text of Scripture is thus much greater today

than in the sixteenth century. Modern scholars seem loathe to admit this, but any church historian or historical theologian can detect that these scholars lack the sheet anchor of a solid overall systematic biblical theology to hold them fast when the winds of various currently fashionable ideologies begin to blow. That is probably why they need, as Grant says, to keep translating. They lack the fundamental theological stability of many of the great early translators.

All this is not to decry Barclay's translation at all. It is to say that his essay is a trifle one sided, but his translation lives up to his usual standards. It is readable and attractively produced, and typographically it is an improvement over the *Jerusalem Bible* which in our view remains poor in design. A reader's version of this latter Bible has appeared (Darton, Longman and Todd, 36s.) printed on a very thin yellowish paper, which lacks the necessary opacity. The line is much too long for the size and face of type which makes the text hard to read, and very poor in comparison to the beautifully clear Barclay page, though the JB text is better printed than the earlier Jerusalem Reader's NT. It is clearer and the bold cross headings have not filled in so much, but alas there are new blemishes, such as a whole section smudged with a double print image in my copy. The Chronological Table at the end has minute margins, in fact the type margins throughout are none too generous. We are afraid that by modern standards the designer of the Jerusalem Bible must be found to be markedly inferior to other recent versions, and the printers are not exactly top class either.

As we go to press the second volume of the William Barclay NT *The Letters and the Revelation* (Collins, 350 pp., 25s.) has been received. Its production continues the same high standard of printing and typography, with only a few very small lapses such as the black edging spray dripping down inside a few pages. Two appendices are added, the first of notes on various NT words, a field which is Dr. Barclay's special milieu, and a shorter one entitled *Notes on Passages*. Here a number of brief passages are singled out for expansion and short comment. Dr. Barclay concedes that this strays over into interpretation, but thinks it has to be done for the non-technical reader. No doubt the intention is good, but is there not an (unintentional of course) academic arrogance about this? Have modern scholars ceased to believe in the perspicuity of Scripture, and is twentieth century man so devoid of spiritual perception that he must now exchange reliance on an infallible teaching church for Scripture mediated by scholars? It is our conviction that a high doctrine of Scripture must mean that translation and interpretation are to be kept rigidly separate. There is all too much danger, as Charles Cranfield has recently pointed out in our columns, of the *ordinary* man whom Dr. Barclay seeks to help assuming that Dr. Barclay's interpretations are part of God's revelation. Scripture is quite capable of speaking for itself, and the Holy Spirit

has not departed. It is probably a sign of the inadequacy of so much modern systematic theology (even in Reformed Scotland) that scholars imagine ordinary readers *must* have their aids. What such a situation reveals is the inadequate doctrine of Scripture and the Spirit held by those who so imagine. But a misguided appendix should not detract from Dr. Barclay's admirable translation work.

### *Educational Advance*

WE confess that we picked up *Behold The Man* by J. N. Everett (Edward Arnold, 226 pp., 17s.) fearing it might be yet another educational book which publishers churn out to keep their assembly lines going, rather like the endlessly repetitive succession of evangelical devotional material or the recent cascade of Roman Catholic literature, in which each book claims to be more *avant garde* than any of its predecessors. We could not have been more wrong. Firstly, the standard of illustration of this textbook on the life and teaching of Jesus for O level scholars is excellent. The idea of taking the black and white illustrations from Bibles down the ages was good and the execution and selection first class. Mr. Everett, who is headmaster of Lutterworth Grammar School, continues the admirable Lollard tradition of making the Scriptures known in up to date language. What he has done is to take the RSV text, arrange it in a rough chronological framework so as to construct from the synoptic Gospels a consecutive narrative which the author intersperses with short comment and explanation. What is excellent about this book, secondly, is the author's ability to cut clear of abstruse technical and often literary questions to let the children see what Jesus was really like. Those readers who, like your editor, recall wearisome plods through obscure critical theories with little attempt to say what the Gospels meant will be grateful that a better conception of NT study has now spread out beyond Lutterworth. The third reason why this book is excellent is the way in which it handles critical and background problems. The author is fully aware of them, but he never attempts to parade his knowledge nor allow himself to get obsessed with pet theories as so many do. He presents the background evidence for NT books and Christian origins; he rescues the OT from somewhat dreary Jewish history, showing that it is a Christian book basically. Above all Mr. Everett has succeeded in that very difficult task of presenting the Gospel narrative in attractive modern garb with just enough explanation but without letting his own narrative and comment intrude. In fact he has succeeded in letting the Gospel itself speak through his text book. If we had more textbooks of this calibre, we should not have so many teachers of RI utterly perplexed, nor should we have the sort of Gadarene rush to produce vaguely ethical books which empty Christianity of its real content. Gold-manite approaches may be valuable, but not if they become an excuse for running away from teaching the Bible.

### *Reference Works*

WE doubt if we are alone in our search for something comparable to *Crockfords* to cover our Free Church brethren, comparable that is in its orderly lay out, the completeness of its information, and the accuracy of its facts. One possible contender is *Free Church Directory* edited by J. McNicol, Crown House Publications, 410 pp., no price. The book is a strange mixture of potted articles on such topics as church music and architecture, Press and TV, together with miscellaneous information varying from University degrees to income tax, a strange and brief section of book reviews and miscellaneous information on other religions. Then there is the main section on the Free Churches themselves, listing sometimes church buildings and addresses, and sometimes ministers. We checked the addresses of a few friends. One was several years out of date. Misprints are rather too common. A section on Free Church denominations in the USA is a little odd, for it is difficult to see how a church could be anything else there in the light of the constitution. The title seems to be an excuse to leave out the Episcopalians, though Lutherans who in Europe are very much established church Christians, are included. On the positive gain side the table of world religions avoids the notion that somehow Anglicans are not to be classified as Catholics or Protestants, one of a number of increasing ecumenical myths. We wish we could say that this was the Free Church Crockford. The next edition could be such, but it will need to be much more carefully produced, better arranged, and much better edited. The present volume does not inspire confidence, though the need for such a volume is apparent. Erratic and partly inaccurate reference works cannot really be commended. And such things as personal comments about the ability of particular individuals are inappropriate, especially when personal comments are classified under Colleges with which they have no connection (see p. 324)!

### *Periodicals*

THE *Methodist Magazine* under its new independent evangelical management and the editorship of Dr. Oliver Beckerlegge of Sheffield has got off its launching pad, despite the hostilities of the *Methodist Recorder* which seems to be continuing its policy of suppressing minority Methodist group advertising just as earlier with the *Voice of Methodism*. The Methodist Press Officer, Tom Goodall, on whose activities we have had occasion to comment before in these columns, has issued a statement, printed on official Methodist notepaper though its precise authority is far from clear. In it he denies what no one has ever claimed, namely that the new magazine is a continuation of the official journal of Methodism. Dr. Beckerlegge has made plain from the outset that the new magazine was independent, evangelical and Methodist. Goodall also states, 'No authority to revive the journal has been given by the Conference nor has permission been given to use the title'. It should be

stated emphatically that no authority was ever sought, and Mr. Goodall must know that none is necessary legally or morally. Official Methodism tried to run the magazine and failed; they ought to be grateful that other Methodists are seeking to help where they have failed.

We mention these matters partly to show what happens when minorities cut across the wishes of the central Methodist bureaucrats, partly to show how perilous it is for any church to allow all its major channels of communication to get into the hands of a few people at the centre, and partly to urge evangelical Churchmen to help their evangelical Methodist brethren by making the magazine widely known. It costs 1s. 4d., including postage, from 6 Merrybower Road, Salford 7, Lancs.

There is a certain irony in Wesley's own struggle with intransigent Anglican authorities and the current situation of independent Methodist enterprise being hindered by Methodism's own bureaucracy. Dr. R. Currie's *Methodism Divided* showed very clearly the authoritarian, not to say dictatorial, streak that has always been within Methodism. Colin Brown, who has Methodist family links, wrote: 'The Methodist form of government is like the Kremlin' (*The Church of England and the Methodist Church*, p. 47). It seems this was more than a colourful description.

The *Theological Students' Fellowship Bulletin* has come of age; its current number abandons the newsletter format and takes on that of a journal. TSFB (7s. from IVP) has earned its reputation.

### *This Number*

DONALD Robinson looks at an important new book illustrating some changes in the outlook of our Anglo Catholic brethren. In days when theological latitudinarianism flourishes and doctrinal indifferentism is rife in the churches, relations with these brethren who hold fast to a revealed supernatural religion and believe in the importance of doctrine are important. *The Churchman* is not abandoning or compromising its evangelical principles, nor has it ceased to be interested in evangelicals in other traditions, as a letter in an Anglican weekly implied, but we do believe in serious discussion with Anglo-Catholics. This is in keeping with a new openness towards other Anglicans reflected in invitations to them to address major evangelical gatherings.

Tony Warner casts critical glances at Series II Holy Communion, and it is imperative that this stream of evangelical Anglicanism should be heard. Most Evangelicals have felt it incumbent upon them to give Series II a try, but few have found it wholly satisfactory, and not a few totally unsatisfactory. Clearly its authors are not latter day Cranmers.

Last number we published an article by Roger Beckwith on the ministry of women. Here we continue that subject with one by Hans Cavallin written a few years ago in the aftermath of a major Swedish dispute. These articles form part of a forthcoming book and are included by arrangement with Marcham Manor Press. The book is an international symposium which originated in a joint Catholic-Evangelical exploration.