

Theology Absolute.’ The capacity to read St Thomas as a thirteenth-century text made him able ‘to respond to what the great master offers us: an expert guidance into the inmost recesses of spiritual being’.

Kenelm dedicated his *Life of St Thomas Aquinas* to the friend we shared from those days at Hawkesyard. He has been dead for twenty years. The dedication is *spe sociae exultationis*—in the hope of shared exultation.

BEDE BAILEY OP

Editorial note:

We are planning a special commemorative issue dedicated to Kenelm Foster—it will be one of our autumn issues. More information about it will be appearing later.

J.O.M.

Reviews

THE NEW JERUSALEM BIBLE, edited by Henry Wansbrough. Darton, Longman & Todd, London, 1985. Pp. xv + 2106 incl. tables, + 7 maps with gazetteer. £25.00.

It is of course impossible to review any version of the Bible. If it is the Bible indeed it has to be lived with as the word of God. I would not be able to do that with this version even if I had two years for a review rather than a month, and a complete issue rather than a thousand words.

The Jerusalem Bible seemed to me the best of a very bad bunch of new translations. It had a better idea of what it was trying to do than, say, the New English Bible, and it was not so scandalously far from the texts translated as the Good News Bible so oddly favoured by evangelical protestants. It had some faults common to all the contemporary versions in English (notably an unnecessary departure from the syntax of the original Hebrew and Greek texts so ably imitated into English in the traditional versions, and a complete inability to rise to the parts of the Bible that are awe-inspiring or mysterious or the parts that are poetry and that therefore have to be rendered into poetry) as well as a few of its own, especially an occasional unwillingness to translate at all and an undue intrusiveness of editorial notes.

It so happens that a magazine I run, *The Gadfly*, has just accepted a detailed account of some of these shortcomings in the first Jerusalem Bible, and so perhaps the best I can do is look at whether the new version has improved on the bad things discussed by A.C. Capey in that essay. ‘Accuracy of translation has been a prime consideration. Paraphrase has been avoided more rigorously than in the first edition’, says the General Editor’s

140

Foreword (p. v). *Accuracy of translation*, as I have argued elsewhere, is a very tricky idea, not at all as straightforward as it looks, especially if it has to mean that there can be a translation in which accuracy has precedence over style, as if the two are somehow in opposition. But let us look at one or two passages.

Mr Capey objected to the first Jerusalem Bible's version of Hebrews 12:

The emphatic and emphatically placed "Wherefore seeing..." in the Greek and 1611 becomes in JB a logician's cool mid-sentence "then". The strongly verbal "compassed about" is paraphrased as an adverbial phrase—and a peculiarly inept phrase, in that "on every side of us" reads ... literally rather than metaphorically. JB, then, like NEB its ugly sister, fails to see that the emotional experience of being compassed about generates the metaphorical "cloud", and that the writer thinks through his metaphor towards the accumulated "witnesses" which only then define the cloud; and so J.B.'s witnesses, instead of constituting the encompassing cloud, are made to figure *in* the cloud, as if the cloud were merely the place where they happened, incongruously and meaninglessly, to find themselves. This is not simply silly English, it is bad translation.

In the NJB matters are no better and sometimes worse:

With so many witnesses in a great cloud around us, we too, then, should throw off everything that weighs us down and the sin that clings so closely, and with perseverance keep running in the race which lies ahead of us.

Running *in* the race (in both old and new JB) is just wrong: it must in modern English suggest competition and beating the other competitors: any struggle implied by *agon* need not be of that sort. *With perseverance* is no improvement on the old *steadily (with patience* in 1611). The difficulty here is just how to render the old idea into modern English, where it is not at home. We have no one word now for the voluntary steadfast endurance of unavoidable suffering. But the main criticism is that the syntactic pointlessness and incoherence is not abated in the new version. Nor is it at any of the other places I have sampled. The last three lines of the Magnificat are quite incomprehensible because of uncontrolled syntactic complication.

Capey's opinion was that "we should, then, take with a pinch of salt J.B.'s claim to have kept 'as close as possible to the literal meaning of the ancient texts'." One cause of the enhanced accuracy claimed for the new version is that it uses the same English word or phrase for theologically important words in the originals. (Whether this is a good idea of accuracy I will not now inquire.) The example given by the press release is *hesed*, consistently rendered as "faithful love". But isn't heaven an important theological word? Capey observes that in the account of the Ascension in Acts 1, 9–11, the Jerusalem Bible dismembers the incremental repetition of "into heaven": "The sky is substituted for the heaven they look towards, 'heaven' being retained for the Lord's destination only." The New Jerusalem Bible identically offers different renderings of the four uses of *ouranos* in this passage.

Greater dignity is another claim made by the press hand-out for the new version, and it gives as an example a passage that appears thus in the two versions:

JB

The pharisees came up and started a discussion with him; they demanded of him a sign from heaven, to test him. And with a sigh that came straight from the heart he said, 'Why does this generation demand a sign?'

NJB

The pharisees came up and started a discussion with him; they demanded of

him a sign from heaven, to put him to the test. And with a profound sigh he said, 'Why does this generation demand a sign?'

I do not know why a profound sigh is more dignified than a sigh that comes straight from the heart: the only other change is an importation from other versions of the obscure "put him to the test". The first quoted sentence of both pieces is irretrievably undignified, as well as wrong, for "have a discussion with" is only vaguely like the Greek original.

Well, perhaps the value is in the Introduction and Notes, and perhaps that is why a new edition was thought necessary and why yet another new one is hinted for about a quarter of a century hence.

The Introductions are certainly treated typographically as the main things, for they actually get bigger type than the Word of God. I am afraid the one I shall quote is just an editorial-cum-priestly defusing of the Bible. The Song of Songs, it is confessed, is no longer generally interpreted as allegory, though that interpretation is still possible. "In its own way," we are uneasily told, "it teaches the excellence and dignity of the love that draws man and woman together, it ... presents a love as free of puritanical restraint as it is of licentious excess." The book is made to sound positively cosy, a process aided by the translation. Bowels are not mentionable, we have the core of the being instead.

The new version is said to have been made necessary by new scholarship. But the new scholarship is at least incomplete. From the press handout or the editorial matter in the book itself you would never suppose that any serious public criticism of the old JB had ever been made. In fact it is very extensive and not uninfluential in the world.

I will not now repeat the arguments about the necessary difficulties facing any modern translator of the Bible: I have no reason to suppose that they would get any more attention from the ecclesiastical establishments than at any other time during the last twenty-five years. But the arguments won't go away, and this new version will make very little difference to the situation.

That situation remains as I recently described it: There is an insoluble paradox that is always offered by apologists for new translations of the Bible. On the one hand they think they are making the text available as never before. On the other we somehow need interpretation as never before. ... What has really happened is that with a superior possession of a very few of the parts we have lost the whole. The loss is seen in the need for "interpretation" of what used to be thought to speak for itself. So we have the paradox of millions of copies of new versions sold but the Bible no longer generally available because thought to be sealed in its own vanished times.

IAN ROBINSON

AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO : SELECTED WRITINGS. Trans. and ed. by Mary T. Clark. SPCK. Pp 514.

This volume, one of the newest in the series, Classics of Western Spirituality, presents the editor and translator with a problem. Unlike most of the authors who appear, Augustine, immensely prolific though he was, left no writing, with the possible exception of Letter 147 'On Seeing God', which deals specifically with 'spirituality'. It is a pity, by the way, that there is no translation of Letter 130 to Proba, on the subject of prayer. Sr. Clark was forced therefore to go through the whole corpus of Augustine's writings in order to illustrate the main traits of his understanding of the way the individual should make his way to God. Her selection includes four books of the *Confessions* (7–10), *Homilies on Psalms* (119–122), two *Homilies on the Gospel of St John* (1 and 12) books 8 and 14 of *On the Trinity* and book 19 of *The City of God*, with a few minor works. The only slight drawback in the method of presentation is that although each treatise is preceded by a short introduction there is no hint given of the date of composition or, therefore of the place occupied by the

142