

Johannes P. Louw (ed.) *Meaningful Translation*. Its Implications for the Reader (UBS Monograph Series 5; Reading 1991) vii. 3 pp. ISBN: 0-8267-04-55-7

For books to emerge from seminars and congresses has become a constant tradition. So this volume is no isolated exception; rather it fits perfectly the tradition behind this monograph series of the United Bible Societies. In the Introduction (p. vii) the editor informs us that what prompted this anthology of essays on problems of Bible translation was a convention of translators held in 1985 in Pretoria and organised by the Bible Society of South Africa. The aim of the gathering, convened under the auspices of the Institute for Interlingual Communication at the University of Pretoria, was to focus on problems receptors often have in understanding a translated text. "The chapters of this book have been written by the lecturers at this convention on the basis of the joint discussion with the various participating translation teams during both the theoretical and practical sessions, and contain the results of research and experience in Bible translation in Africa over a number of years" (p. vii).

The review of this volume in *Melita Theologica* comes rather late with the publication of the monograph in 1991. But with the republication of two

versions of the Bible in Maltese during 1995-1996, the issue of functional translation of Scripture becomes topical. One of these Scriptures follows the literary principle and attempts to reproduce the Biblical text in the literary Maltese of the first half of this century; its new edition in 1995 attempts to adjourn the language by severely changing its vocabulary. Whether this has been a service or a disservice to the original translator and his opus magnum and to the general public remains to be seen. Surely, classics are not normally treated in this manner.

To return to our volume, we find in it five studies, the first two offer theoretical considerations, the last three describe practical exercises, carried out during the convention, on how to tackle particular texts of the Bible in the light of the theoretical apparatus offered in the first part of the book.

The editor himself opens the discussion with a short paper entitled "Bible Translation and Receptor Response" (pp. 1-7). He situates the agenda of the convention, and of the book, within the current debate about the preferability of literal over against dynamic or functional translations of Holy Scripture. Professor Louw himself and his team mince no words as to their option of functional translations. But in this paper he expresses criticism of those Bible translators who in their work "have taken meaning seriously", but failed "to avoid misunderstandings on

the part of the receptor" whether he be reader or listener of the Scriptural text (p. 2). He forcefully reminds us that whoever approaches a text is *de facto* a translator, and this should open the eyes of any potential translator, that he/she ensures that the receptor would not mistranslate the translator's own text. Louw provides a list of factors that may lead to such mistranslations (pp. 2-4) and ends the discussion of this point by stating that "meaningful translation has to take cognisance of the response of the the receptors" (p. 4). This principle of course encounters resistance from readers who are after literal renderings of texts such as Scripture (pp. 4-6).

The second theoretical essay in this collection is that of Ernst R. Wendland, a UBS translation consultant serving Africa. His contribution entitled "Culture and Form/Function Dichotomy in the Evaluation of Translation Acceptability" (pp. 8-40) is the book's principal essay. Four are the main criteria on "mutually interdependent factors" that have been identified for judging whether a translation has been successful or not: fidelity, intelligibility, proximity and idiomaticity (pp. 8-9). In his paper Wendland focuses on intelligibility "which concentrates on the comprehensibility of the message in the receptor language" (p. 9). His understanding of intelligibility had to operate within the parameters set down by the general editor in the previous paper: "Translation should not aim at

producing a rendering that people can understand, but rather producing a rendering that will cause people not to misunderstand the message" (p. 7). It is within this narrow framework that Wendland starts by weaving first a short grammar of what constitutes meaning on the lexical and social level (pp. 8-11), and defines his option of concentrating on two of the four "variables" mentioned above, proximity and idiomaticity. Here the cultural element in translation is more directly involved. In his discussion Wendland cites examples from two languages/cultures of Central Africa, the Chichewa and the Chitonga, in order to "illustrate a number of factors which can help one to measure the amount of distortion in form and/or function that results from a literal rendering as compared with a cultural adaptation in specific biblical contexts" (p. 9). Eugene Nida's theories of componential analysis developed in his book *Componential Analysis of Meaning* (Mouton; The Hague 1975) and the essays in J.P. Louw (ed.), *Lexicography and Translation* (Bible Society; Cape Town 1985), provide Wendland with the tools for his analysis of the cultural set up into which the receptor language operates; this compositional analysis breaks down discrete aspects of social life and behaviour into various components of meaning in order to compare them to counter parts in the culture of the source language, the biblical text in this case,

and to monitor their equivalence or otherwise with regard to form or/and function. On pp. 11-15 Wendland cites examples from the entire form/function continuum in order to illustrate the range of difficulties the translator meets as he/she seeks to transfer cultural components of the Source language (or culture) into that of the Receptor Language (or culture). The writer next focuses on translation difficulties that result from the presence of some element of inequivalence between Source and Receptor languages/cultures; these difficulties may be overcome through the introduction of "cultural substitutes", though Wendland cautions would-be translators that a cultural substitute "always involves divergence", whether major or minor, from the original form or function: the translator should aim to keep similar deviations to a minimum with respect to the central aspects of meaning of the original.

The most useful part of Wendland's discussion is his tackling an inventory of eight "components" of equivalence offering biblical examples for each component. The eight components are *form* (pp. 18-20), *meaning* (pp. 20-21) [These two are regarded as the "most general categories that apply to cultural substitutes"], *impact* (pp. 21-23), *connotation* (pp. 23-25), *naturalness* (pp. 25-27), *history* (pp. 27-28), *lifestyle* (29-30), and *world-view* (pp. 30-35). The last three components are linked

rather to the original text, and their translation through cultural substitutes may prove to be difficult; the penultimate triad on the other hand "require a local adaption (of the original message) in order to be reproduced in the reception language," otherwise they get normally lost if translator resorts to a literal rendering". "Any translational solution, from the most literal correspondence to the free type of cultural substitute, may be evaluated with respect to these eight semantic features and then compared with any other available option in the Receptor Language. The results would then have to be related to a similar componential profile of the source language expression under consideration. Both the textual as well as the extra textual contents need to be taken into account in order to get a more complete picture of the difficult factors of form, function, association and usage involved. The goal, as always, is to determine in the Receptor Language, the closest, natural communication equivalent of the Source Language message" (pp. 33-34).

Louw's and Wendland's contributions so far reviewed offer very interesting reading, useful not only to translators, current or would-be, of the Biblical text, but also to exegetes and the biblical scholars in general. The present reviewer recommends the perusal of the ensuing three practical exercises, involving two narrative texts, one from the Old Testament [Genesis

15, 1-21, work on which was directed by Theo R. Schneider (pp. 41-67)], one from the New Testament [Luke 1, 1-25] and another from the NT but of different genre, "reasoned discourse" [Romans 8, 1-17]. The last two studies were directed by the general editor of the monograph,

Johannes P. Louw who also penned their description for this monograph.

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Carlo Buzzetti, *4x1 Un Unico Brano Biblico e Vari 'Fare'*. Guida pratica di ermeneutica e pastorale biblica (Edizioni Paoline; Milano 1994) 7-287 pp

An extremely practical manual for exegesis and pastoral biblical theology. This volume which we owe to CB's long experience in teaching and study, is not what we usually term an 'introduction' to either the OT or the NT. It's rather an introduction into method, the method of approaching the text of the Bible. And yet the word 'method' needs qualifying since what we are offered are not the standard ingredients we encounter in methodology manuals. These manuals normally address would be exegetes and biblical scholars, whether professional or simply general practitioners like preachers. But these manuals never take for their readers *the general reader*, the reader without professional training; they never consider the performer of the interpretation of Scripture as being himself the would-be addressee of the book he wants to interpret. The model presumed to be operative for exegetes and Scriptural interpreters is that of the objective researcher in the fields of nature sciences. It has served no purpose to insist that this model illfits humanities where biblical reading and interpretation belong.

Besides being professor of introductory subjects in more than one teaching institution, CB is also

Translation Consultant for the United Bible Societies. So he no mere *dilectant*, non-professional writer of general books. He is an expert in the field of hermeneutics and is conscious of the rigors of biblical sciences. The perusal of this monograph addressed for a wide audience will convince of this. His addressees are supposed to live within a believing Roman Catholic context where this act of communication which is Scripture is read as inspired literature. And to such readership CB offers an all-inclusive approach to Scripture reading and interpretation.

This monograph consists of four parts. In the first part or introduction (pp 9-38) CB addresses the issue of the relationship between plurality of approaches in Scripture study and the need, strongly felt, of unity. Scripture after all appears as a unity from three perspectives: historical-literary, theological and pastoral (cfr. pp. 28-38). Here comes a methodological option: "Il messaggio della Bibbia può essere realmente ricevuto da loro soltanto a condizione che esso sia formulato in maniera notevolmente unitaria, cioè mediante una lingua e uno stile che siano per loro di fatto accessibili e rettamant comprensibili" (p. 37). "...Chi presenta la Bibbia (a se o ad altri)... costui non può non tener conto della sua unità" (p. 38).

In the second part (pp. 39-60) CB examines "a great paradigm of the past", that is the theory of the four senses

developed by patristic and medieval hermeneutics. The author offers first a short presentation of each of the four senses and then examines their interconnections and mutual dependence. These senses *concatenati sunt ad invicem* (pp.54-57). For this part one can feel the influence of Henri de Lubac's monumental work *Exegese Medieval. Les quatres sens de l'Ecriture*, 1& 2 (Aubier; Paris 1959-61) upon CB.

Our author's own contribution is to be found in part three entitled "Un quadro, pratico, per oggi". Here he offers his paradigm of an interdisciplinary, integrative approach to Bible reading and interpretation. His model encroaches upon the hermeneutical as well as the pastoral fields, not to speak of the spiritual / mystical area.

CB consciously addresses the non-professionals but not sheer beginners. The writer distinguishes four 'levels' within this hermeneutical exercise he terms "guida, quadro, schema, esercizio" or less technically four "fare", ways of doing, operating with the text (pp. 63). To each level he assigns a letter of the alphabet. In each level he identifies ten "tappe" or stages although he insists that this number is not exhaustive of all possibilities; none of the ten stages is to be considered in absolute isolation. The same holds for the levels. These four "doings" are those of exegesis, theology, meditation, and catechesis/homiletics. The ten stages

identified for the exegesis level touch upon the following aspects: 1) the text, 2) context, 3) the literary genre, 4) philology, 5) structure and movement, 6) close parallels, 7) distant parallels, 8) primary meaning, 9) redactional significance, 10) biblical significance (cfr. pp. 67-81). In discussing the level of the theology CB distinguishes between "biblical theology" and "systematic theology". The first four stages concern situating the text under study within the wider biblical context, the remaining six within a church tradition, the Roman Catholic. Stage 1 examines the relationship between the primary meaning of the text and the significance given to it by the redactional activity; stage 2 situates the pericope within either the Old Testament or the New Testament context while the third stage sets it within the continuum of salvation history. Stage 4 focuses on the text in itself: the reader is supposed to make explicit what in the text is still implicit. Stage 5 invites the interpreter to rehearse his "preconceptions" while stages 6 asks him/her to compare or contrast the text under study with other non-biblical texts in order to situate it within a wider human and cultural context. It is in stage 7 that the reader fits the text within his Church tradition: does the text feature in any Church document and how? In stage 8 instead the reader is questioned about the possibility that the text would be beneficial to some traditional theological tractate. This is perhaps

asking the normal practitioner too much, but at least it constitutes a plea to be creative in one's own exercise with the text. The ecumenical dimension of the whole approach appears in stage 9 while establishing the possible relevance of the text to the reader's life context is the content of the 10th stage.

Professional exegetes and teachers would tend to stop with these two levels of the hermeneutical cycle; CB's paradigm has another two levels before it comes to a complete round. The third level CB terms "fare meditazione" and explores how the text may solicit a response from the performer himself of the interpretation exercise. For the first five stages of this level the performer is seen as a single individual while for the next five he is perceived as a collective (CB experiments with a group of young people). The ten stages on this level address the issues of: identification of the original addressees of the text (1), possible parallels between this situation and that of the present reader-performer (2), possible integration of the text's message with modern life experience (3), tracing ways the text may solicit *metanoia* in the reader's ways of thinking (4) and actual living (5). The remaining stages of this level deal with identical aspects but the subject is a "we" who are asked to try and draw parallels between their situation and that of the original community who may have been the first target audience of the text (5), to situate the text's message within the

life of the group who does or for whom the interpretation exercise is being done (6), to identify concrete intellectual and practical responses to the text's provocation (7-10).

The fourth level is more complicated. CB touches upon a number of theoretical issues he chooses not to discuss in depth as for instances the passage from the third level to the fourth: is this passage *sine qua non*? In other words, can one help others to grasp the full meaning of the text without being himself personally involved by its message prior to the application of this level? CB calls this level "fare catechesi" but is conscious of how complex such term "catechesis" is (cfr. pp. 120-124 for the discussion of these issues). For CB only after one passes through the first three levels which he describes as "l'area della conoscenza del testo in se stesso", "l'area dell'organizzazione e della sintesi", "l'area del coinvolgimento personale", respectively may be able "prolungare l'esperienza della lettura di un brano biblico per comunicarlo anche ad altri" (p. 121). CB understands catechesis in a very wide sense: "Indica il fenomeno del far comprendere ad altri, dopo aver compreso" (p. 122). Here he distinguishes between a 'general' application and a 'specialised' one. The first three stages address a general situation of application: the original pastoral situation for which the text was written (1), the ways this Word of God

approached this original situation (2), parallels between that situation and ours (3), manners this Word may address our own situation, in general and in particular if the addressees are a well defined community (4); in stage 4 CB chooses for his target audience a community of youngsters, in stage 5 he tried to identify the concrete situation of this community to which this Word would be addressed, while in stage 6 the performer will be asked to crystallize the message contained in the text and which is relevant to the target community and how to ask this community to apply this content to their life situation; stages 7 & 8 repeat the previous two stages but the target audience is a group of beginners in Christian living. This means that although a 'decalogue' of stages is quoted for this level there are in fact only six different stages.

The fourth part of the book CB dedicates it to offering samples of application of the method on a number of biblical texts. Naturally the entire method is applied to each text; this may sound boring to professionals, but it is useful and enlightening for readers who may be concerned as to how they would teach Scripture to others in an effective manner. The texts CB applies his approach upon are varied: Genesis 45, 1-15 (pp. 141-161); Isaiah 5, 1-7 (pp. 162-183); Psalm 130 (pp. 184-201); Galatians 4, 1-11 (pp. 202-223); Matthew 18, 10-14 (pp. 224-241);

Revelation 3, 1-6 (pp. 243-260). As appendix we have the four 'decalogues' printed together to facilitate their use (pp. 261-264); indexes come next (pp 265-271). One may be tempted to leave out reading CB's application of his method on these texts which are well known to the average user of the Bible; the present reviewer considers reading this part as a useful exercise.

The publishers of this book have set it together with a number of their publications they dub "un ponte per" because it helps bridging the gap between the Word of God which is Scripture and the expectations of modern man. And this classification suffices to describe the service rendered by CB to any reader of Scripture. Of course one may pinpoint weak spots in his method as stages 9 (exegesis level), 6 and 7 (theology level) are not so easy to be applied by the average performer as CB envisages him/her; likewise the distinction between stages 4 and 5, 9 and 10 (meditation level) may be infinitesimal and too intellectualistic. But CB is aware that what he offers is a tool. And this tool may operate wonders in the hands of a master workman.

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