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A table of contents for *Irish Biblical Studies* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_ibs-01.php

The New Jerusalem Bible and Modern Translations

E.A. Russell

An oft-quoted Italian proverb has it: traduttori traditori, "translators are traitors." The proverb to be sure has lost any indictment that it was intended to have. Today it only underlines the problems and dangers that face the would-be translator. Think of the numerous translations of the Bible into English done by individual or major groups of scholars over the past fifty years or so: The RSV (1952), NEB (1961), "Good News for Modern Man" (1966) and the German translation made from it "Güte Nachricht für sie"(1969), La Bible de Jérusalem (1973; revised 1984), the Jerusalem Bible (1966) and the New Jerusalem Bible (1985); Traduction Oecumenique de la Bible (1975), J.B. Phillips (1958) and Wm Barclay (1968). That revisions are taking place of recognized translations only underlines the elusive nature of the ancient texts as well as the progress in understanding.

This widespread activity of translators gives rise from time to time to the query as to whether there will ever be a time when the Church as a whole will agree on one single translation for use in worship and in religious education. (The RSV has come near to being this but such a position is constantly being challenged). The King James Version still continues to dominate in Irish Presbyterian congregations but, again, this too is being challenged by the New International Version (NIV). In a limited number of congregations, pulpit and pew bibles have been installed (RSV;NEB;TEV or GNMM). The New Jerusalem Bible (NJB) with the imprimatur of Cardinal Basil Hume (as also the JB) has met with wide acceptance in liturgical usage in Roman Catholic circles and has generally commended itself to the Church at large.

The NJB revision, as with other revisions, takes notice of the progress in scholarship since the JB was published eg linguistic, archaeological or theological (Introd. p.v). One of the charges levelled against the JB that it was too dependent on the original French translation. The NJB translates generally direct from the original Hebrew or Greek. Stress (as in the JB) is on the need to provide a study Bible, hence the useful updated introductions, subjected headings and excellent footnotes,

usually models of precision, and translated straight from the original French.

It will not be possible of course to cover all the interesting aspects of the NJB translation. What we propose to do is to make a selection and set them in comparison from time to time with other recent translations.

We begin with the problem of sexist language

The NJB mentions the "considerable efforts.....made...to soften or avoid the inbuilt preference of the English language.....for the masculine" (Introd., p.v.) The NJB is not the first or only translation to do this. The Quaker and Classicist, Mr Norman Marrow /1 makes a determined effort to get rid of chauvinistic language in his translation, "The Four Gospels". He is well aware of the problems of getting a translation that can communicate in modern English without being too crippled by its social, cultural and religious context. The orthodox Jewish people, for example, were strict in their view of the inferior position of women. Such a tradition may lie behind the story of the creation of woman from the rib of a man.

A familiar King James translation is "I will make you fishers of men" (Mk 1.17). Both Marrow and the NJB change "men" into "people". The Greek word anthropoi has a generic sense, hence "people" and equally "human beings". Compare the translation "In the same way your light must shine before people" (Mt. 5.16 TEV). Sometimes the attempt to avoid sexist language can make for a turgid or heavy style. We may illustrate this from Mt.5.22-23 where the word adelphos occurs on four occasions. Mr Marrow's translation runs:

All who harbour violent feelings against their fellow human beings will come up for judgment, anyone who calls a fellow human-being an idle fool will come before the judgment seat, and any who calls a fellow-being a reprobate will be heading for Gehenna and its fires. So if you're bringing your offering to the altar and remember, when you get there, that a fellow human-being bears you a grudge.....

Such a laborious effort has not been followed by the NJB or others. Adelphoi is used frequently in the NT epistles. In Paul's epistle to the Romans, the translations "brothers" and "friends" vie with each other (cf 1.13;7.1;

8.12;10.1;12.1;15.14; 16.17). While there is evidence in Classical writings that adelphoi can be used to include "sisters", /2 the evidence hardly supports that Jesus used adelphoi in this way. Unless we are to insist that adelphoi be used for "fellow-Christians", then we have to admit that the Church reflects the male-orientated expressions of Judaism.

The NJB, however, is prepared to take the risk of a translation that is non-sexist even if in this it does not follow La Bible de Jérusalem and may embark on a less felicitous style. Take, for example, a passage in the Book of Wisdom (7.22f):

JB

For within her is a spirit
intelligent, holy,
unique, manifold, subtle,
active, incisive, unsullied,
lucid, invulnerable, sharp,
irresistible, beneficent,
loving to man

LBJ

En elle, est, en effet, un esprit
intelligent, ~~saint~~,
unique, multiple, subtil,
mobile, pénétrant, sans souillure,
clair, impassible, ami du bien, prompt,
irrésistible, bienfaisant, ami des
hommes

NJB

For within her is a spirit, intelligent, holy,
unique, manifold, subtle,
mobile, incisive, unsullied,
lucid, invulnerable, benevolent, shrewd,
irresistible, beneficent, friendly to human beings

The Greek behind the translations underlined is phil-anthropos with the literal meaning "loving mankind" (Cf RSV "humane") or "benevolent". If we take anthropos as above in the generic sense ie as "mankind", there is scarcely any problem here, it would appear. We may note how lengthy is the paraphrase "friendly to human beings".

Other familiar masculine expressions are altered eg tasteless salt, trodden underfoot of men, becomes "under people's feet" (NJB) or, simply, "trodden underfoot" (NEB) or "par les gens" (LBJ) The KJV "Let your light so shine before men" (Mt.5.16) becomes "Your light must shine in people's sight" (NJB) or "among your fellows" (NEB) or "before all mankind" (Marrow)

We turn now to look at what proves to be a difficult word to translate in a modern setting, the Greek word idou,

which itself is the LXX translation of the Hebrew word הִנֵּה (= "Behold") The difficulty is well-known.

Some scholars have an original approach in their attempt to deal with the problem. Ronald Knox has given us some notable examples:

RSV	Knox
Behold I have given you every plant (Gen 1.29)	Here are all the herbs God told him
Behold an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream (Mt 1.20)	But hardly had the thought come to his mind when the angel of the Lord appeared
Behold, wise men came from the East (Mt 2.1)	And thereupon certain wise men came out of the East
Lo, the star which they had seen in the East (Mt 2.9)	All at once the star which they had seen in the East

But Norman Marrow is equally imaginative eg "Who should appear to him in a dream but a messenger of the Lord" (Mt 1.20); "Who should arrive in Jerusalem from somewhere in the East" (Mt 2.1); "And, would you believe it, the star which they had seen in the East" (Mt 2.9) (Cf also Mt 2.13,19)

La Bible de Jérusalem sticks regularly to the original text, translating voilà (or voici) que, though sometimes it will omit the הִנֵּה (cf Gen 2.29; 3.22; 9.9)

Knox, in his translation, suggests the suddenness of what took place eg "hardly had the thought come"; or "All at once the star". Marrow, on the other hand, emphasizes the incredibility of what had happened and the element of surprise eg "who should appear", who should arrive" and "would you believe it?) [For the variety of uses of "idou" (hineh), it is worth looking at Arndt & Gingrich, Greek-English Lexicon of the NT, Cambridge, 1957⁴]

The NJB takes a quite unusual, if not unique, approach to idou. In the nativity chapters of Matthew, we find the word "suddenly" is used for idou "Suddenly the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream" (ie Joseph) (1.20) "Suddenly some wise men came to Jerusalem from the East" (Mt 2.2). Thus idou gives life and interest to the narrative. It introduces something new, a supernatural event, and stresses it is out of the ordinary run of things. /3

The NJB translation "suddenly" does not represent the LBJ where in Mt 1 and 2 it is consistently voici que. Nor is it always the translation of idou. In Lk 1.48 the RSV translation is familiar: "Behold, henceforth all generations shall called me blessed". Obviously the translation "suddenly" is impossible. Thus NJB has "Yes, from now onwards." A similar problem arises in 1.31: "Behold, you will conceive in your womb", where NJB has "Look! you are to conceive in the womb. We need hardly explore the usage in the epistles, but one fine translation may be mentioned. In 2 Cor.6.9 the RSV has "dying and behold we live". The NJB render the paradox: "dying, yet here we are, alive."

An interesting feature of Mark's Gospel is the frequency with which he uses the adverb euthus, "immediately" something which has proved difficult for many translators. If it does impart an urgency to the style, for example, how are we to explain this urgency?

The NEB handles the problem skilfully. We may place its renderings (or omissions) alongside those of the RSV, the LBJ and the NJB.

NEB	RSV	LBJ	NJB	MK
At the moment when	immediately	aussitot	at once	1.10
thereupon	"	"	"	1.12
at once	"	"	"	1.18
(omits)	"	"	"	1.20
now there was	"	"	"	1.23
a man	"	"	"	1.28
The news spread rapidly	"	"	"	
immediately	at once	"	"	1.42

It must be confessed that there is a great improvement in style achieved by the NEB and the repetitiveness and even Mk's redundancy (something generally characteristic of Mk) eased. But if Mk has a "rough homespun" Greek, are we being true to him to look for polish and not plainness or ordinariness or colloquialism in his speech. For the student without Greek, the adherence to a fixed translation for the same Greek word can be an advantage but only, it would seem to me, if like the RV it is adhered to consistently. H.F.D. Sparks, in his pamphlet, "On Translations of the Bible", argues that the bible student should stick to the RV text, not that of the RSV or the NEB. (He does not discuss the NJB) /4 Perhaps

the only satisfactory solution is to be found in a knowledge of the original Greek, on the basis of which the variations in the translations would be understood and a much greater appreciation of the expertise of the translators. /5

Dom Henry Wansbrough, the General Editor of the NJB, /6 stresses the nature of the NJB as a study Bible. Thus, as we have already seen, accuracy of translation has been a main consideration and the avoidance of paraphrase. Key theological concepts have where possible been rendered by the same English word. One striking example of this is worth discussing. This is the Greek word dikaiosunē in Mt, usually rendered "righteousness". The NJB makes it "uprightness". It is perhaps hardly necessary to point out that dikaios and dikaiosunē are terms that often occur in Mt's special source and help the identification of redactional elements in the Gospel. The NEB recognizes that, in different contexts, the terms can have a different shade of meaning eg Joseph is described as "a man of principle" (dikaios: 1.19); God sends rain on the "honest" (5.45); Jesus invited sinners not the virtuous (9.13). The JB does not avoid variety and a comparison of the JB with the NEB suggests that the former is influenced on a number of occasions by the NEB.

JB	NEB
thirst for what is right in the cause of right	to see right prevail (5.6) for the cause of right (5.10)
a man of honour honest	a man of principle (1.19) honest (5.45)
virtuous	virtuous (9.13)
fair	fair (20.4)
innocent	innocent (27.4)

The translation of the LBJ is consistently juste, justice. On the only three occasions when it deviates from this we have équitable (20.4), innocent (23.35; 27.4). It is interesting that the NJB differs from "uprightness" at precisely the same three points: fair (20.4), holy (23.35) and innocent (27.4). The translation "upright" or "uprightness" is not a new translation. As far back as 1923 Edgar Goodspeed used it in his translation of Matthew /7 with few variations. Similarly, the description of Joseph as "a man of principle" occurred in the Penguin

translation of E.V. Rieu. /8

What impression in a modern setting does the word "upright" makes on us? Are we wrong in thinking of it as associated with a milieu of pride, of moral achievement, striven for and obtained? Does it in fact fit in easily with the terminology of today? It does to be sure have an appropriate element of "right" in it with a phrase like "thirst for what is right" or, with a nuance of vindication in it, be persecuted "for the cause of right". (5.10). If however we accept the TEV thought of "conforming to what God requires" and keep in mind a relationship with God through whose grace such an uprightness is achieved it becomes meaningful. The NJB however does with this translation appear to be exceptional among the translations of more recent times.

When the JB first appeared, one striking variation in translation related to John 1.13 which runs as follows:

JB	LBJ
he gave power to become children of God	a <u>ceux qui croient en son nom</u> <u>lui</u> qui ne fut engendré ni du sang
to all who believe <u>in the name of</u> <u>him</u>	ni d'un vouloir de chair ni d'un vouloir d'homme
<u>who was born</u> not out of human stock or of the urge of the flesh or will of man but of God himself.	mais de Dieu

The JB note at this point indicates that here there is an allusion to the eternal generation of Jesus and his virginal birth. The LBJ has to admit that such a reading is not generally accepted. /9 It is not found in Greek manuscripts but in Latin in particular though some scholars including Blass, Burney, Boismard and F.M. Braun are attracted to it. It is, however, generally agreed, on the basis of textual evidence, the reading must be rejected. Dogmatic tendencies to shape the text to the singular to support the virgin birth would be strong. The NJB, in spite of the LBJ, does not accept the singular reading.

Some will be surprised to note that the longer ending of Mk (16.9-20) is not separated from the text as non-

Marcan. This is true equally of the pericope adulterae (John 7.53-8.11). The basic reason for such an action is that both passages are part of the "canonically accepted body of inspired scripture" and this in spite of the textual evidence or the differences in style, eg the style of the pericope adulterae is recognized as Lucan and written possibly by him. Again, it is also agreed that Mk probably intended to end at 16.8 but "the first Christian generation felt the ending was incomplete...and added the longer ending."

While the NJB (and JB) has the biblical student in mind, there is no mention, as in the NEB, of aiming at the man in the street. The NEB was courageous and adventurous in reaching for the unchurched, and, although sensitive to the need for a good style, left itself open to charges of colloquialism and infelicity. For the sake of comparison, we set out the NEB, RSV and NJB side by side:

NEB	RSV	NJB
"Let us toss for it", said the soldiers (Jn 19.24)	"cast lots for it" (So AV)	"Let us throw dice to decide who is to have it"
"I sponged on no one" (2 Cor.11.9)	"I did not burden anyone"	"I was no burden to anyone"
"They left me in the lurch" (2 Tim.4.16)	"All deserted me" (All...forsook me"AV)	"Everyone of them desert- ed me"
"This is more than we can stomach" (Jn 6.40=	"who can listen to it?"	"How could anyone accept it?"
"I may dole out all I possess" (1 Cor. 13.3)	"If I give away all I have"	"give away to the poor all I possess"
"They got wind of it" (Acts 14.6)	"They learned of it"	"They came to hear of this"

Has the NEB paid too heavy a price for vivid arresting metaphor? All the translations can hardly be misunderstood but the less adventurous expression of the RSV and NJB are more stylistic. But is it really possible to produce a really up-to-date translation of an ancient book? It has been given expression thus:

In the modern world the fundamental ideas of the NT are as antiquated, alien, and 'irrelevant', as is the language of the AV. Yet these are the ideas into which the Church is commissioned to baptize the world in every age. And there

are no adequate grounds for thinking that the mere modernization of the language in which they are expressed will make them either more up-to-date essentially or more acceptable universally." /10

One of the most familiar texts in Genesis is chapter three, verse 15, the so-called proto-evangelium.

I shall put enmity between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and hers;
It will bruise your head
and you will strike its heel (NJB)

The RSV translation of Gen 3.15 has been criticized on the grounds that it imported into the text a dogmatic point of view that was not originally there. /11 Its translation runs:

I will put enmity between you and the woman
and between your seed and her seed;
he shall bruise your head
but you shall bruise his heel.

Professor Hans Peter Rüger writes: "The RSV...not only replaces 'descendants', the normal equivalent of the Hebrew שָׂרָף by 'seed', but also violates the rules of English grammar according to which the personal pronoun corresponding to 'seed', is 'it' not 'he'". /12 He dismisses any suggestion of a proto-evangelium in the Hebrew on the basis 1. that 'seed' is evidently a collective noun, which as such cannot have any direct or indirect reference to Christ and/or Mary; and 2. that Gen. 3.15 forms part of a curse, and therefore cannot be a promise or a prophecy by implication. Thus in Rüger's literal translation, we have the verbs interpreted as iterative imperfects, "I put", "it bruises...you bruise" and the enmity spoken of here as permanent.

Professor Rüger commends the NJB for its clarifying note on the verse (so also LBJ) /13. The note is as follows:

The Greek version has a masculine pronoun ("he"not"it" will bruise...), thus ascribing the victory not to the woman's descendants in general but to one of her sons in particular, and thus providing the basis for the messianic interpretation given by many of the Fathers. The Latin version has a feminine pronoun ("she" will bruise...) and since, in the messianic interpretation of our text, the Messiah and his mother appear together, the pronoun has been taken to refer to Mary.

It has perhaps been noticed that the NJB feels free to take an independent line on a number of occasions from the LBJ eg idou as "suddenly" or on non-sexist language. One of the crucial verses in Pauline writings is Romans 3.25:

LBJ

Dieu l'a exposé, instrument
de propitiation par son
propre sang, moyennant la
foi

NJB

God appointed him as a
sacrifice for reconciliation
through faith by the shedding
of his blood

The Greek term, proetheto can mean either "set forth" and in a context where the thought of manifestation is present is preferred by a number of scholars, including the LBJ. On the other hand, it can mean "appointed" with the thought of God's purpose behind. Again, the Greek nominal adjective hilasterion strictly means "mercy-seat" and is interpreted either as "propitiation" or "expiation". The former has the thought of appeasement of God who manifests his anger as a holy God against sin. "Expiation" can have the meaning of wiping away of offence without necessarily stressing God as angry. /17 The form of expression of the NJB recalls the Day of Atonement when the wrath of God was taken away and reconciliation achieved through the sacrificial blood sprinkled on the altar. The LBJ prefers to hold on to the more traditional or "primitive" expression.

We have another example in Ephesians 1.7:

LBJ

En lui nous trouvons la
rédemption par son sang,
la rémission des fautes

NJB

In whom through his blood
we gain our freedom, the
forgiveness of our sins

Here again the LBJ uses the traditional term while the NJB uses "freedom", crystallizing the significance of apolutrōsis.

Recent NT discussion is reflected in the NJB's translation of peirazomai. It prefers "test", not "tempt," eg Jesus is led into the wilderness to be "put to the test" by the devil where the LBJ prefers "tenté" (Mk 4.1); the "tester" comes to him; Jesus replies: "Do not put the Lord your God to the test" (Mt 4.3,7; cf Jas 1.13-15)

It is notable that the French and British scholars reject the view that at creation, the "Spirit of God"

moved over the waters. The NJB translates "with a divine wind sweeping over the waters". In a note on בָּרָא (bara, create) the LBJ dismisses the interpretation of creatio ex nihilo as a metaphysical notion that did not appear before 2 Maccabees 7.28, "God made them out of what did not exist."

Among the many excellent features of the NJB, one stands out above all others, and that is the quality of the appended notes, eg that on "Son of God" (Mt 4.3) and that on sovereignty (Mt 4.17) et alii. The maps to help the student at the back of the NJB are a great advance on those in the LBJ and the JB as any comparison will indicate. The publishers, Darton Longman & Todd Ltd, are to be warmly congratulated on a superb volume that will give pleasure to all who are privileged to handle it and the General Editor, Dom Henry Wansbrough of Ampleforth Abbey, on what, I am sure, has been a real labour of love.

NOTES

1. Norman Marrow, The Four Gospels, Luton 1977
2. Cf Arndt & Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the NT, Cambridge University Press 1967: Art: adelphos
3. ibid. on idou
4. Ethel Wood Lecture, London 1973
5. It is remarkable how this point is stressed in D.E. Nineham, (Ed) The New English Bible, London 1965, pp34,58,61
6. NJB, p.v
7. Edgar Goodspeed, The New Testament. An American Translation, University of Chicago 1923
8. E.V. Rieu. The Four Gospels, Penguin Press Ltd 1953
9. See ad loc.
10. See Nineham, op.cit for the Times Literary Supp. review, 73
11. H.P. Rüger, The Bible Translator, Vol.27, No 1, Jan 1976, 105-110
12. op.cit
13. op.cit