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GEORGE CAMPBELL'S FOUR GOSPELS, 1789

During the eighteenth century, English-speaking Protestants made several attempts to shake the supremacy of the Authorised Version. Apart from the activity of Anglicans like Archbishop Newcome and B. Wakefield, whose versions appeared during the 1790s, there had been a constant stream of translations from non-conformists. The most interesting of these is a version of the Gospels by George Campbell, the principal of Marischal College, Aberdeen, from 1759 to 1792. It first appeared in 1789 and was reprinted steadily on both sides of the Atlantic until about 1838. The edition used in preparing this paper is the Boston edition of 1811, held in the Houghton Library, Harvard.

In the original edition, the work consists of two large volumes, the first containing twelve dissertations (sic) on biblical theology, translation, Jewish society of the time of Christ, and New Testament Greek. The second volume is the actual translation with copious marginal notes, most of them dealing with linguistic, rather than religious points. His aim in translating was, unashamedly, to replace the Authorised Version, which he infers, was in use only because it had originally been prescribed by Royal Command. For him, the only just reason for the survival of a version of the Bible is its excellence. As proof for this statement he adduces St. Jerome's Vulgate which, according to him, supplanted the Latin translations in use in the early Church because it was better, rather than because of prescription by Pope Damasus. He is careful not to impugn the good faith of other translators or translations: though he is equally impartial in criticising Father Richard Simon, the author of a standard Catholic commentary, and Théodore de Bèze, one of the evangelicals who produced a Latin Bible, for a religious bias that falsified their understanding of Scripture. At the same time in spite of admiration for the achievement of St. Jerome, Luther and the translators of the Authorised Version, he is not afraid to criticise defects in their scholarship. The breadth of his religious tolerance is shown by the catholicity of his sources, which range from the Protestant, Castalio, to the Catholic, Charles-François Houbigant, and by the dedication of his work to John Douglas, Lord Bishop of Carlisle.

Campbell is in, what many historians of Bible translation have called, the "philological tradition", which stretches back through Port-Royal, Luther, Erasmus to St. Jerome. He justifies his attitude in the Preface to the whole work:

> In what concerns revelation, reason has a two-fold province; first to
> judge whether what is presented to us a revelation from God, or,
> which is the same thing, as the divine testimony to the truth of the

things therein contained, be really such or not: secondly, to judge what is the import of the testimony given... As to the second point, the meaning of the revelation given; if God has condescended to employ any human language in revealing his will to men, he has, by employing such an instrument, given us reason to conclude that, by the established rules of interpretation in that language, his meaning must be interpreted. Otherwise the use of the language could answer no end, but either to confound or deceive. (Campbell 1789 Preface)

It is a concept that will be familiar to most modern translators: that one can afford to treat the Bible like any other document and translate it relying on an apparatus of scholarship that does not differ in kind from that applicable to other documents in ancient languages. At the beginning of his Tenth Dissertation, Campbell derives three desiderata from the above principle:

The first thing, without doubt, which claims his (i. e. the translator's) attention, is to give a just representation of the sense of the original. This, it must be acknowledged, is the most essential of all. The second thing is, to convey in his version, as much as possible, in a consistency with the genius of the language which he writes, the author's spirit and manner, and, if I may so express myself, the very character of his style. The third and last thing is, to take care, that the version have, at least, so far the quality of an original performance, as to appear natural and easy, such as give no handle to the critic to charge the translator with applying words improperly, or in a meaning not warranted by use, or combining them in a way which renders the sense obscure, and the construction ungrammatical or even harsh. (Campbell Diss. X-i 1)

Let us see how he deals with each of these problems.

On the first problem of giving the sense, Campbell starts from a uncompromising position: he states in his preface that "a translator, if he do justice to his author and his subject, can lay no claim to originality." He amplifies this further by distinguishing between the task of the translator and the commentator (Diss. XII-1, 26). In support he cites de Bèze "who was too violent a party-man to possess that impartiality without which it is impossible to succeed as an interpreter of Holy Writ" (Diss. XV 4), and Richard Simon, who in his view, was too bound by the tenets of Catholic theology to be impartial. His own version is copiously footnoted, but very few of these notes deal directly with religious doctrine: most are concerned with the social and historical background of the New Testament.

Unlike most modern translators he did not engage in textual criticism, though he has a long discussion on it which sums up the state of the art as it was at the end of the eighteenth century. He uses as his source text the New Testament of Jacob Wettstein, and corrects it occasionally by reference to that of Mill and to

Walton's polyglot. As he describes his method, he interleaved his Greek New Testament with comments, originally designed to facilitate preaching. It was only after several years of this that he decided to make an English translation. It is probable, though he nowhere states it precisely, that the large bulk of his dissertations were compiled from these comments.

Campbell was well aware that "the just sense" of his original could be determined only through two means: a close analysis of Biblical Greek and a comparative analysis of the way in which these resources could be expressed in the English of his time with its differing linguistic and social attitudes. On the first point, he is at pains to analyse the differences between Biblical and Classical Greek. Castalio and de Bèze both fall foul of him as they tended to determine word meanings by classical, rather than hellenistic authority. At the same time, he tries to ward off the prejudice of inveterate classicists who despised Scripture for its unclassical style. Appeals to classical authority will inevitably falsify meaning and atmosphere, first, because we are dealing with a type of Greek that was spoken some hundreds of years after the Classical period, second, because Biblical Greek, by reason of the nationality of the Evangelists, was strongly influenced by Hebrew. Campbell spends several of his "dissertations" speaking of what modern linguists call interference phenomena between Hebrew and Greek, and, to a certain extent, he anticipated the work of the American linguist, Uriel Weinreich, who developed the concept of interference in his *Languages in Contact* (1953). From this develops a discussion of synonymy in Greek where English disposes of only one word to render three of four in Greek.

The question of transference into English rises naturally out of these considerations. The first problem is that of cognates and derivatives. The ancient idea that words had an etymological sense from which all deviation was noxious was sufficiently alive in his time for him to fight it: he cites words like αἳρεσις, which can not be translated by *heresy*, as the English word had gained new overtones. This was a fairly simple case. The question of actual meaning transfer was more delicate. Campbell was one of the first translators to draw up a theory of what Nida and the American school of translators call *dynamic equivalence*, in other words translating according to function instead of exact equivalence of sense. Campbell divides words into three classes: those that are exactly equivalent; those which have partial equivalence, and those that have no dictionary equivalence, but equivalence of extralinguistic function (Diss. II-1, 2). The first class can be dismissed: they provide no problem. The second and third classes can be dealt with together.

The overriding criterion of a translator's success is that he should transmit the meaning of the text in a comprehensible manner, and, at the same time, avoid incongruity. At the same time, he did not treat his reader like a fool. For certain untranslateable details, like political institutions and clothing, he allows borrowing

of the classical term, citing the evangelists themselves as his authority. For other terms, especially money terms, he requires the translator to ask what the point of their use is. In some cases, a mathematical conversion into contemporary terms will suffice; in others, the point of the passage lies in the relative size of the sum or in the physical shape of the coin.

As is his custom, he labours this point with a multitude of illustrations, enjoying, it seems, the mounting absurdity of his examples. I shall quote only one of them, the passage at Matthew XXII. 19, where Christ asks the Pharisees to show him the "coin of tribute". Campbell assessed the value of the coin at sevenpence halfpenny, and noted the absurdity of this "accurate" translation, as no English coin ever had this value. The point here is the function of the coin which bore the image of the Roman Emperor, as English coins bear the image of the sovereign. In this case too much information would render the point of Christ's action obscure and somewhat ridiculous. Other examples are the parable of the talents (Matt. XXV. 14-30) and the parable of the unforgiving servant (Matt. XVIII. 22-35), where the magnitude of the sums in question is the point, rather than their exact mathematical equivalent. The point in assessing what aspect of word-meaning was to be brought across was sociological: he saw very clearly that word-meaning was far from monolithic, and that it was the translator's duty to write sense, while walking the tightrope between imposing his own interpretation and being so literal as to be obscure.

The second point in Campbell is the question of relating the characteristic style of the original to the possibilities of the target language. This aspect of his thought is very much in the eighteenth-century tradition of translation which derives ultimately from the French rhetoricians of the seventeenth century and was transmitted to England through the work of Richard Sherry. Campbell himself produced a handbook of rhetoric in this tradition in 1766. But Campbell added to this English stream direct recourse to French sources. He is heavily indebted to Charles le Cène's *Projet d'une nouvelle version française de la Bible* (1741), and Jean Leclerc's work on the interpretation of classical languages (ca. 1680-1720). He is careful not to be tainted by the Socianism of le Cène, using him only as a guide in translation technique. Likewise, he avoids the Catholic tinge of Houbigant's analysis of the Old Testament (1753), taking from it principles of philology and guide-lines on translation. Campbell's version was not the first English version of the eighteenth century to attempt to shake off the "Biblical" style of the Authorised Version; but he does seem to be the first to explain himself by appeals to a long line of respected authorities. He admires Luther for his attempt to translate in a style consonant with the normal literary manner of German (Diss. VIII. iii. § 8), and from there goes on to condemn both literal and "loose" (the words is his own) translation.

Beyond a few references to the necessity of writing in an "perspicuous" style, he has little to say about syntax. This is not untypical of the time. Where he discusses the matter of style is in his strictures on previous translators for not distinguishing between the characteristic styles of the evangelists: in this he is reminiscent of Dryden's attack on translators who gave Vergil, Ovid and Horace to the English public in the same verse-form. His own version does attempt to differentiate between the more polished Greek of Saint Luke, and the hebraic style of St. John. On the matter of vocabulary, he demands plain language: first, because it is readily understandable; and second, because it reflects the simple language of the Bible. Thus, he condemns the use of obsolete words, both because they are not readily understandable, and because they may have shifted in meaning. His attitude to words derived from Latin and Greek is neutral:

> A word is neither the better nor the worse for its being of Latin or Greek origin. But our first care ought to be, that it convey the same meaning with the original term; the second that it convey it as nearly as possible in the same manner, that is, with the same plainness, simplicity and perspicuity. (Diss. XI. i. § 31)

In a sense, this is a continuation of the sixteenth-century quarrel over "inkhorn terms" that split the world of translators, both religious and secular. Campbell's point in all this discussion is centred, not on the word itself, but on its meaning and implications in its context: if the English context is as clear and expressive as the Greek, the translator has done his job.

The third norm is one of naturalness. While adhering to a style equivalent to that of the original, the English version must not recall the syntatic make-up of the Greek. Again this is an application of eighteenth-century doctrine, but his dictums are balanced by the new respect translators were beginning to feel for the rights of the original. He uses this principle as a flail with which to beat Castalio, for whom he seems to have a deep antipathy, and as a pin to prick the Authorised Version which, to him, had already outlived its usefulness.

As a theorist of translation, Campbell can be ranked with figures like Alexander Tytler and Wilhelm von Humboldt. What in his interest in the Biblical context?

Firstly, he marks the beginning of the movement in Biblical translation that produced the Revised Version and culminated in the Jerusalem Bibles, both French and English, and the New English Bible. Like these translators, he treats the Bible as a classical text, and brings to it the apparatus of scholarship developed by eighteenth-century classicists. He allies to this an approach to translation perfected by such Augustans as Dryden and Cowley. His textual comment is studiously linguistic and ethnographic, and avoids expressing his own religious opinions. In his approach, he anticipates Eugene Nida and his colleagues in the United States; and his concern with making the Bible readable shows strong

affinities with modern translators like Moffat, Ronald Knox, *l'école biblique de Jérusalem*, and the group that produced the New English Bible. His aim, though he nowhere states it, is to produce an ecumenical Bible.

Secondly, he shows the logical conclusion of the Reformation conviction that the layman should have direct access to the Bible, and that he was capable of interpreting it as a rule of religion and life. He regards the translator as an instrument of transmission, not as an exegete. This is the point of his quarrel with Simon and de Bèze. The neutrality demanded of a translator, exemplified by his own care not to comment on religious issues, leaves it entirely up to the reader to draw doctrinal conclusions from the text. At the same time, the translation had to be clear and easily readable, so that the reader would not be distracted from the meaning by extraneous problems with the language, or by a sense of conflict between the classical milieu and the eighteenth-century reality as we have in the Augustan secular translators.

Thirdly, he summarises the New Testament criticism of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Catholic and Protestant, from both English and French sources. His reporting is fair and straight to the point.

As a linguist interested in translation, I regard Campbell as unjustly neglected: his tragedy was the worked two hundred years too soon, thereby being denied the notice he deserves.

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