Given by Inspiration by Dr. William P. Grady

Book reviewed by David Pennant, with additional comment on translating the Bible by Andrew Phillips

My first reaction on opening the book was to wince, because of the multiple typefaces used. What I want from 'a multifaceted study' is a calm presentation which I can assess for myself, much as Paul encouraged hearers of prophecy to do, to weigh what was said. Extensive use of words in capitals and in italics and in bold, often in combination, feels like an attempt to persuade me by force of personality. Frankly, scam artists and conspiracy theorists use such methods.

I guess that the material was originally delivered from the pulpit, and the speaker's emphasis has been preserved by the print used. Understandable, but I don't think it works in a printed format. Note that scripture itself does not contain any exclamation marks (with the possible exception of Paul's phrase God Forbid in Romans). Even the accounts of the crucifixion are calmly stated in a straightforward manner (1).

No matter. I persevered, and spent an hour looking at the material.

The value of the book is that it raises important questions. Determining the meaning of a word in Scripture by looking at its use throughout seems wise to me, but personally, I did not share the author's view that the first use of a word sets the tone for all subsequent uses. I would prefer to look at all the uses of a word, and decide its meaning from that. I would also want to do it in the original language, and I have copies of Bagster's Hebrew concordance for the Englishman and Greek concordance for the Englishman for that purpose. Valuable tools.

The point I liked best in the book was the assertion that the Authorised Version was a word for word translation - each word in the original being renderd by one word in the English. I pricked up my ears at this. Its's a great idea. I have wanted such a translation for a while, especially if it is at pains to render the original into English without trying to 'clarify' difficult passages.

Let me give an example. On one occasion, Jesus said to his opponents, "if by the finger of God I cast out demons..." It is easy to do away with this metaphor in translation, but if you do so, you lose the reference to the magicians in Exodus. As the plagues mounted up and they could no longer copy what was happening, they told Pharaoh, "This is the finger of God." Jesus' opponents would have recognised his allusion to Exodus, and grasped his meaning: if you want to understand what is going on when I cast out demons, then read about the deliverance of the people in the book of Exodus. They would have been well aware that, as has been wisely observed, it was easier to get the people out of Egypt than to get Egypt out of the people.

But to return to the AV, is it a word by word translation? Not throughout. We read that when there was verbal abuse directed at Jesus on the cross by the passers by, the two criminals hanging there with him "cast the same in his teeth." A fine phrase, and many would say a good translation, but there is no reference to teeth in the Greek. A straightforward word for word translation would have "reproached him" (2)

Never mind. Let's have a go, with Genesis chapter one verse one.

The end of the verse is easy: "the heavens and the earth." But the starting word is harder. *breshith* consists of b, which means "in" joined to *rosh* which means "head" followed by *ish* which adds the idea of "-ness" as used in English, e.g good and goodness. So "In headness" might render it, but it's hardly good English, and readers might not even persevere to the next word.

The traditional translation of "In the beginning" treats the idea as one of time, but one could perhaps argue for "As a matter of first importance." What about "First up" which attempts to catch both ideas?

Now for the next words. *bara elohim* is "he created God", but we cannot leave it like that, as in Hebrew word order, the subject follows the verb, so we need to put "God created" instead. While necessary, and clearly the right thing to do, we are subtly departing from the notion of a word for word translation by adopting English word order.

Let me be clear. A stubbornly wooden translation of Genesis 1:1 would read "In headness he created God the heavens and the earth." This is hopeless, because even if you can cope with in headness, you are then confronted by some mysterious unidentified being who created God as well as the heavens as the earth. Gnosticism writ large! Please let's not go there.

So although attractive, the idea of a word by word translation seems elusive, if you want something readable, but it could be valuable if you wanted a study version alongside a readable text. I suspect the translators of the AV wanted something that would be read and will have made efforts to make it so, with the necessary departures from a word by word translation that would be needed. Others might care to enquire: i am happy with my modern translation into today's English for most purposes. Anything I want to examine, I look at in the Greek and Hebrew.

But how do we establish the original text? That is for another review. Watch this space...

David Pennant, Woking

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Thanks for this David – finally got round to reading it!

In my opinion, the idea of a "word for word" translation is just misleading, because it's impossible! Languages are different, and the semantic range of vocabulary differs from one language to another. The translators of the KJV of course recognised this. For example, Hebrew ruach is translated as "spirit" in Genesis 1:2, but as "wind" in Genesis 8:1. This is obviously the right thing to do – but it isn't a "word for word" translation.

Similarly the KJV adds words to the end of Genesis 1:16 "he made the stars also". The Hebrew just has "and the stars", with the definite object marker (et) signalling that it is a direct object. Again, this is just a difference between Hebrew and English – a translation inevitably is different to the original, because it's in a different language.

I think it is better to think of a spectrum of translation philosophies. On one end, there is a translation such as the KJV or NASB, which in general seeks to stick closely to the syntax and grammar of the original. On the other, there are paraphrases like the Message, which

'translate' the ideas in the text, but often not the individual words. In the middle are translations which generally translate the words of the original, but sometimes make changes, to grammatical structure especially – these are translations such as the NIV.

There is of course the separate issue of updating translations to reflect modern English usage. A good example is Exodus 18:3 (Moses speaking):

I have been an alien in a strange land (KJV)
I have been a sojourner in a foreign land (ESV)
I have become a foreigner in a foreign land (NIV)

This reflects a change in English. The word "alien" now has as its primary meaning "extra-terrestrial being". The KJV translators did not have that kind of "alien" in mind! The ESV chooses the unusual word "sojourner" – this is rare in modern English, but clearly much better than "alien". The NIV chooses "foreigner", which is the easiest to understand – although the English doublet "foreigner" and "foreign" doesn't reflect the Hebrew (which has two unconnected words).

C. S. Lewis has a nice quote on this point, by the way: "The ideal of 'timeless English' is sheer nonsense. No living language can be timeless. You might as well ask for a motionless river." (Prayer: Letters to Malcolm, p. 7)

Finally we could also add a few occasions when the KJV translators made questionable decisions. For example, "Praise him with the timbrel and dance: praise him with stringed instruments and organs." (Psalm 150:4) The obvious issue here is that there weren't many organs in ancient Israel! So most modern translations have "pipe" instead of "organs".

Similarly it isn't obvious to me why the KJV translates the Hebrew word *umil'u* differently in Genesis 1:22 and 1:28. In v. 22 the translators chose "fill", but then chose "replenish" for v. 28. Do you have any idea why? Modern translations (e.g. NIV) have "fill" both times. There doesn't seem to me an obvious reason to vary the translation here.

Andrew Phillips, Poole


Notes

1. NIV has some exclamation marks in the opening chapters of Zechariah. I am not sure why, as biblical Hebrew does not have an exclamation mark.
2. Matthew 27:44.