

Schmidt, Daryl D 1990 — The Gospel of Mark, with introduction, notes, and original text featuring the new Scholars Version translation: The Scholars Bible

Polebridge Press. 168 pages. Price: Unknown

Reviewer: Dr E van Eck

The Scholars Version (SV) is a new translation of the Bible — starting out with a translation of all the known gospels — with its major goal to find fresh language that will make biblical narratives come to life for the modern reader (or the reading public, according to the preface). More specifically, the SV tries to translate the text in a style similar to that of the original language, while also incorporating the best scholarly insights about the content of the text.

Aimed at the modern reading public, the introduction is written in a popular style. Mark's gospel is introduced as a 'war-time gospel', written between 66-70 CE. A further point of departure of the SV is that the material Mark used in his gospel was probably already circulating in longer units before the story was first written down. These longer units probably included testimonies from scripture (e g Mk 1:2-3), controversy stories (e g Mk 2:1-3:6), anecdotes (e g Mk 3:20-35), parables (e g Mk 4:2-32), miracles (e g Mk 6:47-52), one-liners (e g Mk 3:28-29), discourse (Mk 13:3-37), a passion narrative (e g Mk 14:2-15:47), other narrative sequences like Mark 1:21-39, and insertions and framing devices (e g Mk 6:7-13/14-29/30-34). The writer Mark is thus seen as not just a preserver of tradition, but also as a shaper and even originator of some traditions. Mark is therefore a story, that should be appreciated like a work of art.

In regard to style, the Markan style suggests 'the vitality and immediacy of an oral setting' (page 11). This is accomplished by Mark through a number of stylistic and rhetorical devices such as orality (the frequent use of *καὶ εὐθὺς* and the narrating of past events by using present tense verbs), repetition (the frequent use of *πάλιν*, doublets and the use of a three-fold pattern), framing devices (e.g. Mk 8:22-26 and Mk 10:46-52 as framing device for Mk 8:27-10:45), the use of prediction and suspense, irony, explanatory asides (such as the translation of foreign terms and unfamiliar customs, e.g. Mk 7:3-4), and other rhetorical features such as generalizations and unanswerable questions.

As major Markan themes or motifs Schmidt identifies the following: the way, symbolic geography, God's domain (the term *βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ*), riddles and secrecy, obstinacy (misunderstanding), opposition, fear *vis-a-vis* trust, Jesus as teaching miracle worker with a lifestyle of table fellowship with common folk, and a passion apologetic.

In regard to the translation itself, Schmidt opted for an approach that is known as a dynamic-equivalent translation, that is, the meaning of the text in the original language is translated into an equivalent vernacular of another language. Alongside the translation, the Greek text is given for those who know Greek, and both the Greek text and the SV translation are accompanied by a set of notes to help the reader more fully explore the meaning of Mark's narrative. The Greek text used is based on 'a new edition of the Greek text that represents a scholarly 'first edition' on Mark's gospel' (p. 37).

In their quest for fresh language that will do justice to Mark's oral style, the translation panel (see p. iv) avoid traditional biblical terms and expressions. The traditional translation of the verb *believe* (*πιστεύω*), for example, is replaced by words such as trust and confidence (depending on the context in which the verbs is used), and the verb *repent* (*μετανοεῶ*) is translated in the sense of 'being prepared to change old ways'. Traditional idioms such as 'lo' and 'behold' were also avoided. In their search to use vernacular American English in a style that sounds like the way it is used, the translators decided also to use inclusive language (e.g. the traditional Son of Man is translated with persons, people and mortals depending on the context), and tried to avoid the repetition of the same ordinary verbs. The term *βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ* is also translated differently according to its narrative context: the terms domain, imperial rule, government, kingdom or empire is used, depending on the context. The same goes for the titles used in Mark for Jesus, in that Son of Man — when it is used as a title — is translated by 'Son of Adam', making clear the title's biblical roots in the creation story, as well as the fact that Mark uses this title to symbolize the figure described by Daniel.

When one reads through the translated text, it immediately becomes clear that the SV succeeds in its first goal, that is, to find fresh language that will make the narrative of Mark come to life for the modern reader. The text is alive, full of vitality, easy to follow and to understand. The text also impresses on the reader a kind of 'wholeness', it is experienced as one cohesive narrative, and not as a work consisting of a number of smaller narratives. It should, however, be noted that this kind of translation is not a first (see Waetjen, H. C., *A reordering of power: A socio-political reading of Mark's gospel*, 1989).

In regard to the second goal of the SV, that is to incorporate the best scholarly insights about the content of Mark into the translation, the book is somewhat less of a success. In posing a possible time of composition for Mark, Schmidt, for example, gives a well-balanced discussion of the most important scholarly opinions in regard to the date of Mark. However, the discussion of important motifs in Mark such as the way, God's domain and Mark's geography as being symbolic, does not reflect all the important scholarly insight in regard to these motifs. For Schmidt the way in Mark, as well as geographical references like the sea, the wilderness and the mountain, speaks the language of the exodus in the Old Testament. Nothing, however, is said about important work done on Mark's geography by, for example, Van Iersel and Kelber (whose works are recommended at the end of the SV), Malbon and Rhoads & Michie. Another example: for Schmidt God's domain in Mark refers to something secret, something that is near and still has to come, something that is not yet a reality. In other well known works on this

Boekbesprekings / Book Reviews

topic, like those of Bultmann, Perrin, Theissen, and especially Chilton, however, one finds a different interpretation of this topic in Mark. Finally, Schmidt's presentation of the traditions used by Mark, in terms of pre-Markan material, is not critical enough.

To conclude: As translation, using fresh language to make the narrative of Mark come to life for the modern reader, the SV is a success. In incorporating the best scholarly insights about the content of Mark into the translation, however, the SV is less of a success. Furthermore, if one knows the Greek text, the translation sometimes become highly debatable, demonstrating again that all translation is interpretation. The book is recommended to scholars who are interested in the translation of Biblical texts and in the Gospel of Mark.