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BOOK REVIEW

Rick Brannan. *The Apostolic Fathers: A New Translation*. Lexham Classics. Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2017. vi + 289 pp. Pbk. ISBN 978-1-68359-064-4. \$19.99.

Until recently, the major contemporary translations of the Apostolic Fathers were those produced by Michael W. Holmes and Bart D. Ehrman. In 1989 Holmes produced an updated version of the classic Lightfoot-Harmer translation, and in 1992 the translation was reprinted as *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Text and English Translations of Their Writings* (second edition 1999; third edition 2007). In 2006 he published an English-only version that was slightly revised from the earlier publication (this is the version referred to throughout this review). In 2003 Ehrman replaced Kirsopp Lake's Greek-and-English translation in the Loeb Classical Library, offering another modern translation of this ancient corpus. In the last number of years, Rick Brannan has established himself as a third contemporary figure in the translation of the Apostolic Fathers. In 2011 he published, in a digital format through Logos, an interactive interlinear translation. In the volume at hand he has presented a revised version of the English text of this resource and in so doing has created an alternative to Holmes' 2006 publication—a translation of the Apostolic Fathers that will appeal especially to the entry-level reader and to the academic who is not interested in the Greek.

Brannan's book includes only the works in the corpus that are extant in their entirety, resulting in the exclusion of the fragments of Papias and Quadratus and some additional passages from Irenaeus on the teachings of the "elders." In this decision Brannan follows Lake and differs from Holmes, who includes Papias and the Irenaeus passages, and Ehrman, who includes Papias and Quadratus. The obvious downside is that the reader

does not get what some consider to be the full text of the Apostolic Fathers, and the historical importance of these fragments will make some patristics enthusiasts unhappy with Brannan's decision. However, the decision to include only whole texts certainly makes the book more accessible and appealing to the average person, as reading fragmentary literature can be challenging.

Concerning the nature of the translation itself, Brannan states that his intention in making this translation was not to replace Ehrman's and Holmes' translations but to produce one that has "a tighter and more transparent relationship with the underlying Greek text" (1). He strives toward this goal largely by staying close to the actual wording of the source text, not just the thoughts and ideas expressed therein. In some cases this makes the English feel awkward, as in the first sentence of 2 Clem. 16.1: "So then, brothers, *having* received no small opportunity to repent, *having* the chance, let us turn back to the God who called us while we still have one who accepts us" (emphasis added). Here he maintains fidelity to the Greek grammar and wording but sacrifices fidelity to English style. While dated, Lake's translation is a good example of how one can stay close to the flow of the Greek without making the English feel awkward: "Seeing therefore, brethren, that we have received no small opportunity to repent; let us, now that we have time, turn to the God who call us, while we still have one who awaits us."

Brannan also attempts to create a "transparent" translation by using footnotes to give word-for-word renderings when, to make his translation intelligible, he is forced to stray from the precise wording of the original. For example, in translating Ign. *Eph.* 13.1, in the main text he translates ἐπι τὸ αὐτὸ as "together" and says in a footnote that the Greek literally says "with the same" (77 n. f). Sometimes this approach is helpful, but a great deal of the time it seems unnecessary, as in the case given above. Readers who would like to know that this "together" is more woodenly rendered as "with the same" would almost surely be interested in the Greek text and would therefore prefer a different resource.

These kinds of decisions are the main factor that distinguishes

Brannan's translation from those of Holmes and Ehrman, both of which show less concern for the exact wording of the Greek text, presumably in the interest of accurately conveying the passage's ideas in good English style. However, when compared with Ehrman's translation, a further notable difference is the use of vocabulary. Brannan, similarly to Holmes, often uses fresher and more common English language than Ehrman does. For example, in translating *παρειμένος* (1 Clem. 34.1), Brannan uses "careless," and Ehrman uses "slovenly." Brannan's word choice seems preferable, as it is accurate and, unlike "slovenly," belongs to the common vocabulary of a general readership. Another difference in vocabulary is that Brannan shows a preference for typical Christian terminology, whereas Ehrman sometimes strays from this kind of language. A good example is found in the translation of *δικαιούμεθα*, appearing in 1 Clem. 32.4. Brannan uses the typical Christian term "justified," and Ehrman uses the controversial "made upright." Brannan's choice, in addition to being more vague than Ehrman's, which many will appreciate in light of the tremendous controversy over this word in New Testament scholarship, has the advantage of creating a sense of coherence between the Apostolic Fathers and the New Testament, since modern English Bible translations usually prefer "justified" over other options like "made upright."

One admirable feature of the book is its extensive use of footnotes, which is much broader than the above-mentioned documentation of extremely rigid renderings. Like many translations of the Apostolic Fathers, this volume notes instances where Scripture is referenced, alluded to, or perhaps echoed in the text. Many other footnotes draw on the work of other scholars, such as Lightfoot, Holmes, and Ehrman, to shed light on the text or address scholarly concerns such as text-critical issues. These notes are often highly insightful, and the fact that this book builds on and makes comparisons between the existing standard translations is a good selling feature.

The text of the translation is also supplemented with introductions to the various documents (contained altogether in the introductory chapter) and section headings. Neither of these features are entirely satisfactory. The introductions are direct and concise,

but they are shorter than one might expect, being only a few paragraphs in length. Further information would be appropriate and helpful, especially since many entry-level readers will benefit from an orientation not only to the documents themselves but also to the contexts in which they emerged. Ehrman and Holmes wrote better introductions for their respective publications. The headings, while sometimes useful in locating material, are frustratingly placed at the beginning of each section rather than wherever the text seems to warrant a heading. In some cases these headings obscure the flow of thought rather than bring it into clearer focus. For example, in Ign. *Smyrn.* 6–7, Ignatius continues his extended and meandering denunciation of his opponents, in these sections highlighting their erroneous beliefs and emphasizing the corresponding true Christian doctrines. Brannan gives these sections the headings “Faith and Love Are Everything” and “The Passion Has Been Revealed.” These headings draw on some positive teaching in the text but ignore the broader concern here, which is to assault the opponents and to encourage fidelity to the episcopal church and its orthodoxy. Holmes does better in giving these two sections the singular heading “Bad Teachers and Bad Beliefs.”

Many will be interested to know that, in cases such as 1 Clem. 14.1 and 16.1, Brannan follows Ehrman but not Holmes in translating ἀδελφοί as “brothers” rather than “brothers and sisters.” Some would criticize this decision on the grounds that it obscures the author’s (or authors’) intended meaning, as women are almost certainly in view here. Without taking sides on this issue, I recognize that a counterargument may be found in Ehrman’s comment that “the patriarchal biases of the texts . . . form part of their historical interest and significance” (1:viii).

My final criticism of this book is that many of the speech-quotation breaks in the Shepherd of Hermas are very awkward. Consider the following example of dialogue between the narrator and the shepherd: “I see,’ I said, ‘sir.’ ‘These,’ he said, ‘are faithful . . . ’” (Mand. 11.1 [43.1]). The strange placement of “I said” is in poor style, especially in such close proximity to the early break in the following speech quotation, and it causes the reader to stumble. It does follow the Greek word order, but there

is no good reason for this to be a priority, as word order works differently in Greek and English and each language has different stylistic patterns and preferences. This translation would be somewhat useful if the English were aligned with the original-language text, but it does not belong in an English-only book. It would be much better to avoid splitting the speech quotation and put “I said” after it.

All things considered, Brannan has created a respectable print translation of the Apostolic Fathers that can stand alongside those of Holmes and Ehrman. Its fresh language and inclusion of only complete texts make it appropriate for a general audience, and its detailed and well-researched footnotes will make it appealing to scholars. Though some may find its concern with the Greek wording to be excessive, it is still a faithful re-communication of the source material. Even if one does not use it as one’s primary translation, it will be useful for consultation and for comparison with other translations. With all this in mind, I expect that this book will give further momentum to the contemporary patristics movement and will be appreciated by the rapidly growing number of people who want to become more connected with the early church.

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