

# **THE BIBLICAL STUDENT AND THE SCHOLAR IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY**

## **Issues and Challenges**

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Earlier I sought to outline the agenda for Biblical studies in the twenty first century. The focus was on those areas of study that demand attention during the early decades of the new millennium. Now I wish to direct our attention, in a more personal way, to the agenda for Biblical students and scholars in the immediate and more distant future. Earlier our concern was Biblical scholarship; now it is the Biblical student or scholar, whether young or old. But it is my hope that many of the observations that are made will be directly relevant to you all, whatever the nature of your God-given giftedness.

I must request your forgiveness, or at least your patient understanding, if throughout this lecture I speak about my own experience to illustrate various points. When one reaches retirement after 40 years of teaching, perhaps one gains the right to reminisce. (I might mention, as an aside, that my teaching career began at age 18, with a class of 32 8-year-olds! Never did I imagine, in my wildest dreams in those early

years, that I would be privileged to teach at the graduate level in New Zealand, England and the U.S.A. But our God is a God of serendipities, a God who delights to give us pleasant and unexpected surprises!) In mentioning my own experience I am certainly not claiming to be a model to follow, but over the years I *have* endeavoured to follow the principles I shall be referring to concerning the role of the Biblical student and scholar.

For too long there has been mutual suspicion, if not a cold war, between laypeople and Biblical scholars. Laypeople often look with deep distrust at those whom they see as ivory-tower academics who spend their time chasing irrelevancies or splitting theological hairs, unaware of the pressing concerns of everyday life. Biblical scholars, for their part, sometimes – sadly! – look with disdain upon simple Christians who are untutored or uninterested in the technicalities of scholarship or who seem superficial in the expressions of their faith.

That mutual suspicion must give place to mutual respect and the celebration of the varying gifts of the risen Christ to his church. Differentiation of labour is not only legitimate but also necessary within the church. Laypeople must recognise the crucial role performed by Biblical scholars as they analyse and explain the Biblical text. To such teachers has been given the inestimable privilege of understanding and teaching the Word of God – and of being paid to do so! The focus of their toil is not the captivating orations of Demosthenes or the enthralling poetry of Milton but the living oracles of God that captivate and enthrall the soul as well as the mind. This arduous toil is sometimes a lonely endeavour. Laypeople should support these toilers by prayer, perhaps forming prayer partnerships with individual scholars.

Biblical scholars, for their part, must recognise that whether they teach in a theological seminary or in a university, they are ultimately accountable to the church – both universal and local – for the exercise of their gifts. Because their work impinges directly on the life of the church, shaping its doctrine and practice, they must be submissive to local and national church leadership in their professional work. In this regard Biblical scholars are unlike Christian scientists or economists or dentists who are responsible only to their employers and ultimately to the Lord Christ for their professional research or practice.

This accountability to the church does not compromise the "academic freedom" that is so cherished by all scholars – the liberty to pursue truth, wherever it leads, and to promulgate it, whatever the consequences. But where Christian Biblical scholars differ from other researchers is their conviction that truth in the theological realm is to be defined in personal terms and is embodied in Jesus Christ, "in whom is stored up the full treasury of God's wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 2:2). So, yes, there *are* ostensible, self-imposed restrictions on their "academic freedom". Imagined "truths" that compromise the overriding or primary belief that final theological truth resides in Christ, or exegetical conclusions that overturn the historic consensus of the church on the essentials of the faith, are rejected on *a priori* grounds as "untruths". However, the theological truth that is personified in Christ and enshrined in Scripture is so expansive and comprehensive that Biblical scholars in no sense feel deprived of intellectual freedom in their pursuit of further light on the truth.

One distinctive service that the student of the Scriptures can render to the church is to offer – quite unwittingly – a personal model of humble, scholarly piety. It was to a timid, young Biblical studies graduate that Paul said, "Do not let any one look down on you because you are young, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity" (1 Tim. 4:12). "Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness" (1 Tim. 6:11). "In all respects set an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness and soundness of speech that cannot be censured, so that opponents may be put to shame because they have nothing bad to say about us" (Tit. 2:7-8). For Paul, the imitation of Christ was a mediated imitation: by patterning their lives on the model afforded by the life of a godly person, Christians imitate Christ. So upright should be the life of the Biblical teacher that he or she should be able to say, like Paul, "Imitate me, as I myself imitate Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1). Since people observe the conduct as well as the teaching of the teacher (2 Tim. 3:10-11) and example is more potent than precept, it is probably true that others learn as much, if not more, from the kind of people we are as from what we teach. Timothy was called upon to watch closely both his teaching and himself (1 Tim. 4:16). Teachers of the Scriptures are more than mouthpieces through which the truth is transmitted; we are persons in whose lives the truth is to be enshrined. The call to Bible teachers is to embody the Christian ideal, to show all the contours of a

mature Christian life. And never let us forget that as those entrusted with greater knowledge of the Scriptures and with the task of communicating them, teachers will be judged more strictly (Jas. 3:1).

Humility has always been the hallmark of true scholarship, especially in the church. Learning is not to be paraded on the sleeve, but kept "up one's sleeve" in the sense of being concealed but ready for use. A delightful story is told concerning the foremost evangelical Biblical scholar of this century, F.F. Bruce. A workman began attending Brinnington Chapel (near Stockport in Manchester, England), the church that Professor Bruce attended. This workman, a recent convert, so impressed his workmates with his convincing answers to their probing questions that they asked him, "Where did you learn all this?" "O well," came the answer, "there's an old fellow in our church called Fred. He seems to know all about these things."<sup>1</sup>

In addition to their basic task of analysing and explaining the Biblical text and their obligation to be responsible servants of the church, Biblical scholars should be apologists in the negative sense of defending the accuracy and trustworthiness of the Bible where the text intersects with secular learning, and in the positive sense of expounding the sense of Scripture against the backdrop of widely publicised aberrant views.

Let me illustrate how the student of Scripture may assume the mantle of the apologist. In 1978, one week before Christmas, a spokesman for the New Zealand Rationalist Association through the national press and on radio offered five hundred dollars to anyone who could prove that Jesus was an historical person and that the Gospels were accurate historical records. I immediately penned a detailed response, indicating that I was not interested in the five hundred dollars but was interested in demonstrating the existence of Jesus and the reliability of the Gospel records. My letter was published in the *Sunday Times* on December 24 on the other side of an enormous one-page crossword. It would seem that the evil one had overplayed his hand! Considerable correspondence followed, with an opportunity to debate the matter on national radio some months later. Then this last Christmas a professor of religious studies at a New Zealand university wrote an article in the *New Zealand Herald*, alleging that the Christmas story as recorded in the Gospels is

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<sup>1</sup> This story is related by I. H. Marshall in "Frederick Fyvie Bruce 1910-1990," *Proceedings of the British Academy* 80 (1993), 260.

simply a gripping fairy tale, a mesmerising myth with magic all of its own, and proposing that Christ's wisdom, buried for centuries in the pageantry of the Bethlehem fairy tale, needed to be rescued from "Santa". My published rejoinder focused on Luke's demonstrable reliability as an ancient historian and pointed out that "the heart of the Christian faith is not the Sermon on the Mount but the Cross on the Hill, not Jesus as a teacher of wisdom who simply gives us good advice but Jesus as the Saviour of humankind who himself provides us with a way to be reconciled to God." I concluded the article with these words. "There is a real sense in which Jesus does not need to be 'rescued' by anyone or from anything. He is well able to care for himself, as he has been for 2000 years. Sceptics come and go but he goes on for ever. At present they grapple with his living Spirit but they do not face him in person – yet." As always, such material prompts letters to the editor, pro and con. But one prays that the Spirit may providentially use the written word – a phrase here, a thought there – to achieve his saving purposes in people's lives.

And now some examples of *apologia* in the positive sense of explaining aspects of Christian truth in the face of widely publicised deviations. In 1980 the film, *Monty Python's Life of Brian*, was first screened in New Zealand. It is a sophisticated parody of the life of Jesus, a full-scale assault on Christian sensibilities. Vigorous opposition had been voiced by various Christian and community groups prior to its release but to no avail. I realised that many Christians planned to demonstrate outside the theatres where the film was being shown, so I viewed the film several times (taking notes in the dark!) and with the help of an artist I prepared a tract that interacted with the content of the film, offered a free copy of the Gospel of Luke, and gave a telephone number for any enquires. With the cooperation of many local churches, this tract was distributed in several cities to thousands of theatre patrons after they had seen the film. Instead of negative demonstrations that would merely have increased gate takings, there were multitudes of positive discussions about the true "Brian of Nazareth". Apologetics and evangelism were blended.

A major controversy arose in Britain in July 1984 in connection with the installation of Dr. David E. Jenkins as the new Bishop of Durham. Dr. Jenkins had scandalised multitudes of people both inside and outside the church during previous months by his offhand comments, often made into a journalist's microphone or before a TV camera, that

seemed to call into question the Virgin Birth and the Resurrection of Christ. Some months later, after I had participated in a BBC radio programme with the bishop and others, I became convinced that his views were being unfairly represented in the press but also that his views did not conform to the testimony of the New Testament. Thus was born a thirty-two page booklet, *Easter in Durham*,<sup>2</sup> that summarizes the bishop's views in detail, quoting extensively from his own writings, and that undertakes an appraisal of his views in the light of New Testament teaching. Copies were sent to all Church of England bishops and suffragan bishops (the Bishop of London had contributed the Preface). This is probably the most widely read document I have ever written; it was reviewed in dozens of publications in several countries. Here was a student of the Scriptures quietly seeking "to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints" (Jude 3).

My last example is much more recent and was my (rather unnerving) TV debut. Last August Professor Robert W. Funk, creator of the *Jesus Seminar*, visited New Zealand, promulgating his controversial views about the sayings and deeds of Jesus. I was privileged to represent "informed orthodoxy" in a brief live debate.

From all these experiences I have learned several important things about the role of the Biblical student as an apologist.

1. You often must act quickly, grasping an opportunity as soon as it arises. That is, one must use "the psychological moment" (cf. Col. 3:5), even though it involves the temporary suspension of a current project.
2. One apologetic encounter almost invariably leads to additional opportunities to speak or write, opportunities for oneself and for others.
3. You must carefully examine and master the views of your "opponents", so that there can never be the charge that you have demolished a "straw man".

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<sup>2</sup> *Easter in Durham: Bishop Jenkins and the Resurrection of Jesus* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1985).

4. Whenever possible, solicit your colleagues' evaluation of any written piece before it is published and of any oral communication after it is given.
5. The act of "fronting up" publicly for the sake of Christ and his Word strengthens other Christians in their assurance of the validity of their faith and encourages them in their own witness.
6. You should speak or write with graciousness and humility, recalling Paul's words in Col. 4:6, which may be paraphrased thus: "Let your conversation always be graciously winsome and seasoned with the salt of wit and pungency, so that you may know how you should give an answer suitable for each occasion and each need to each individual."
7. Remember that our aim is not to win arguments but to win people. It is perilously easy to win the argument but to "lose" the person. On the other hand, you may sometimes lose the argument but win over the person, because of your gracious, humble demeanour.
8. In public dialogue or debate, whether face-to-face or on radio or TV, your focus should be on the wider audience, not your immediate "opponent", and you should prepare memorable "one-liners".
9. Decide what is appropriate to say and not to say in the particular situation. Avoid the temptation of saying too much too soon. A full declaration of the gospel or of "the whole will of God" (Acts 20:27) is not called for on each occasion! It is significant that when Paul was formally charged by Tertullus in his trial before the governor Felix at Caesarea, he answered the charges against him point by point (Acts 24:1-21). Only afterwards, when invited by Felix, did Paul speak about "faith in Christ Jesus... righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come" (Acts 24:24-25).
10. All apologetic efforts should be bathed in corporate prayer.

Thus far I have dealt with the Biblical student or scholar as expounder of the text, servant of the church, and apologist for the faith. It remains to discuss the academic training and the professional development of

the younger scholar, and the distinctive challenges and opportunities confronting the older scholar.

Most students who undertake serious training in the field of Biblical studies have already received training in some other field, whether in the sciences or in the humanities. One of the attractions of Biblical studies is that any specialised background can be profitably pressed into their service. With a specialist's gaze, the botanist can study the flora of the Bible; the sociologist can investigate the social cohesion of the early church; the statistician can assess the validity of the arguments for or against the authorship of a Biblical book that are based on statistics; the teacher can analyse the techniques of Jesus as a communicator; and the lawyer can classify the apodeictic laws of the Old Testament. If one *must* make a choice between the sciences and the humanities as a preparation for a career in Biblical studies, preference should be given, I believe, to the humanities, given the simple fact that Biblical studies relate to a written text. An acquaintance with any language and its literature, or with philosophy, history and psychology, will pay handsome dividends in studying the Bible. There is something to be said for the study of the Biblical languages at the undergraduate level, especially if it involves Semitic languages other than Hebrew and Classical as well as Hellenistic Greek. On the other hand, there is a certain advantage in coming to Biblical studies fresh, after immersion in subjects you are unlikely to be able to study in depth once you embark on Biblical studies. Our lecturer tomorrow is a splendid example of this. Dr. McGrath completed an Oxford doctorate in molecular biology before turning to Biblical and theological study.

What should the student's formal professional training for Biblical studies involve? First and foremost, language training – Hebrew and Greek, and, if possible, Aramaic (which is necessary for small parts of the Old Testament and for research in the Gospels). What distinguishes the first-rate from the second-rate Biblical scholar is linguistic competence, the mastery of either classical Hebrew or Biblical Greek, or both. In gaining a "feel" for these languages, there is special value in learning Modern Hebrew or Classical and Modern Greek. As far as the ability to handle secondary literature on the Biblical text is concerned, the most relevant languages are English, German and French (in that order). Apart from this rigorous linguistic training the would-be Biblical scholar should study the perennial critical issues in the Old and New Testaments, with careful attention to the history of scholarship with



regard to each issue, so that errors of the past are avoided and a sensitivity to the heart of each issue is developed. In addition to this exclusive focus on the Biblical text, attention must be given to systematic and historical theology, church history, and pastoral theology (which includes subjects such as homiletics, Christian education and counselling). Most of the subjects I have mentioned thus far are included in the traditional BD or MDiv degree.

However, for most academic posts in Biblical studies today, whether in a university or in a theological college, whether in the East or in the West, the PhD is a "union ticket", a prerequisite for admission into the unofficial guild of Biblical scholars. While there is distinctive value in the North American type of doctoral programme of two years of further coursework followed by a dissertation, there is even greater value, I believe, in the British or European doctoral model of three or more years of research in a particular field, with the researcher picking up en route any necessary adjunct subjects, such as Rabbinics or Latin or Second Temple Judaism or Ugaritic, as he or she advances in research and writing. Why my preference for the European model over the North American? First, because after six or more years of preliminary study (say, MSc and BD, or MA and MDiv), the "coursework fatigue syndrome" often sets in, and this is avoided if one advances directly to independent research; and second, because during BD or MDiv studies the basic tools for independent research are forged, and it seems natural to use those tools immediately, rather than adding more weapons to one's armoury. After all, the European model more closely corresponds to the situation one faces in ongoing research and writing when formal doctoral study is over.

So much for the nature of academic training appropriate for the budding Biblical scholar. As for the standard of training, the aim must be for excellence. Now I realise that many external factors impinge on the achievement of excellence in any field, factors such as financial support or prior family obligations that are outside our control.

But in the service of God, our goal must always be excellence, irrespective of circumstance. Let me develop this matter in more detail.

In every area of our lives, we all face the temptation to say or to think about our work, "That's good enough!", when we should be saying or thinking, "Only the best will do!" The good is often the enemy of the

best. For the Christian, including the Christian scholar, satisfaction with mediocrity must give place to a passion for excellence. Shoddy scholarship must be shunned as absolutely as moral evil. And in the sphere of scholarship, what separates excellence from mediocrity is attention to accuracy of detail: "close enough" is simply not good enough. The point became emblazoned on my memory during a visit to Professor Bruce's home shortly after the birth of one of his grandchildren. I vividly recall his disquiet at not being able to remember the precise length of the new infant; he remedied the situation immediately by fetching his daughter's letter and checking the details.

Such a pursuit of excellence is a costly endeavour. It requires, first of all, *singlemindedness*. Every person who is marked by excellence is partially blind – blind to what is "the good" or even "the better" when it compromises "the best"; blind to the option of mediocrity over a wide range of areas at the expense of first-rate quality in one area. Better to achieve excellence in one field than mediocrity in several. Second, achieving excellence demands the *sacrifice* of time and effort. Biblical scholars, no less than Olympic medal winners, must dedicate their most productive years to the rigorous development of their natural talents. Mastery of the Biblical languages and proficiency in English, German and French, do not result from auto-suggestion! Third, to be excellent is to be *persistent*. Olympic runners labour assiduously to reduce their time for the race and field stars work patiently to increase the distance of their throw or the height or length of their jump. Excellence exacts an awesome price in the area of perseverance. I have always believed that one of the principal virtues of the Christian is to be like a postage stamp-sticking to one thing until you get there!

In no aspect of academic life is mentoring more important than in the pursuit of excellence. When a young scholar is regularly in the presence of a seasoned scholar, whether in person or via the printed page, the desire to pursue excellence is intensified and becomes overpowering. And although, ideally, that mentoring takes place person-to-person as the veteran openly shares with the novice, it can also take place at a distance via the printed page as the neophyte immerses himself or herself in the writings of the master. Of course this is the only way that any of us can learn from the giants of the past, be it Plato, Calvin, Jonathan Edwards, or F.F. Bruce. When we catch that vision of greatness, we also gain a permanent unease and even active

discontent with all that is second-rate. We are unlikely to be satisfied with mediocrity once we have confronted excellence.

I turn now to the stages in the professional development of the younger scholar. The choice of a research topic at the doctoral level is of fundamental importance – not because one is locked into specialising in this topic for ever, as though operating under a "life sentence," but because the direction of one's research and writing and the nature of the editorial invitations received are usually closely related to one's dissertation topic. For the first few years after the doctoral thesis is completed, the papers that one presents at local, national, or international conferences generally arise directly from one's research topic, or indeed are sections of the thesis if it has not already been published. Speaking of the publication of theses, let me observe that it is not always the wisest procedure to seek immediate publication. Five or ten years of further reflection on the topic, away from the artificial pressure of thesis completion, can often afford important new perspectives and correct imbalance. True, with each passing year there are additional works to be consulted and interacted with, but delayed publication often means an improvement in what is published. And let us never forget that most PhD theses – at least in the English-speaking world – are never published. Should we not regard a PhD thesis as a preliminary academic exercise necessary for the emerging scholar and as a sophisticated "union ticket"? Here the old adage, "Publish or perish!", should never be regulative.

When a young scholar begins to become known as a specialist in a particular area of study, invitations will follow to contribute articles to dictionaries, or later, chapters to symposia or *Festschriften*. The only drawback in this is that sometimes young scholars are left with the less stimulating and less attractive topics. One of my colleagues was once invited to write articles on drunkenness, gluttony, immorality and lying for a dictionary of Christian ethics. He agreed to do so somewhat reluctantly and his appreciation for the invitation to contribute to the dictionary was lessened when he read in the editors' foreword, "Each contributor was chosen for his expertise in the field"! And certainly some topics in Biblical dictionaries, while necessary for the sake of completeness, are decidedly unexciting. For example, who is interested in the location of Geder (Jos. 12:13), or whether or not *zilla spinosa* ("brier," Ezk. 28:24; cf. Gen. 4:23) is a perennial herb of the mustard

family? As one editor puts it, the author of such articles is simply removing bones from one grave to another!<sup>3</sup>

Scholars, young and old, must be careful not to equate with divine guidance an editorial invitation to write this or that article or book. Behind editors' requests are usually publishers' wishes and often publishers' wishes are governed by monetary concerns. Early in his or her career the Biblical scholar – and the Christian scholar working in any field – must learn to say with graciousness but firmness, "Thank you for the invitation, but no." I can recall having to decline invitations to write a commentary for a prestigious series and to contribute articles for *Festschriften* in honour of close friends. You agonise over such decisions. But I have found again and again that one particular principle helps me to discern God's will. It is this: "Avoid taking on any new commitment that compromises the fulfilment of existing obligations." Many of life's difficult decisions can be settled on this principle. True, it assumes that standing obligations are part of God's will; but it does guard against "overloading", a perennial evangelical temptation, and "burn-out", an all too frequent evangelical malady. An editor's request, flattering as it may be, cannot be identified straightforwardly as divine guidance. In fact, the more senior the scholar, the greater the obligation to identify "gaps" in the literature and to fill those gaps rather than merely responding to others' pressing requests.

This latter observation forms a natural transition to the last section of this address – the special role and obligations of the older Biblical scholar. As I see it, they are basically three: creating a scholarly succession, cultivating key friendships, and identifying research needs.

There are four main Biblical instances of calculated efforts to create a spiritual and pedagogical succession. Joshua the son of Nun is described as the "young aide" of Moses (Ex. 33:11), that is, his personal assistant. He was constantly in Moses' shadow (e.g., Ex. 17:14; 24:13; Nu. 11:28) until he was formally consecrated as Moses' successor (Nu. 27:18-23). Then we think of Elisha, who after being ordained as Elijah's ultimate successor (1 Ki. 19:19), became his attendant until Elijah's translation to heaven (1 Ki. 19:21), or as the Hebrew idiom expresses it, "He used to pour water on the hands of Elijah" (2 Ki. 3:11). We

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<sup>3</sup> Oral tradition credits J.D. Douglas, organizing editor of the *New Bible Dictionary* (Leicester: IVP/ Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1982, second edition), with this observation.

would say he was Elijah's "under-study" or apprentice. In New Testament times we have the supreme example of Jesus, who, after a night of prayer (Lk. 6:12), appointed the Twelve as his apostles, "that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons" (Mk. 3:14-15). Here are the two basic ingredients of mentoring – the disciples are "with" the master, listening and watching; the disciples are entrusted with tasks comparable to those of the master. First, fellowship and observation; then, commission and practice. Finally, there is Paul and his two deputies, Timothy and Titus. It is especially fascinating to trace the development of Titus's gifts under Paul's supervision – from being a financial adviser, to being a pastoral "trouble-shooter", to being an evangelism associate, to being a pastor, to being a pioneer evangelist.

In each of these four examples, we find an older mentor deliberately choosing and training a limited number – be it one or two or twelve – of disciples or apprentices or deputies who were being prepared to assume the spiritual and pedagogical mantle of the mentor. Senior scholars have no higher calling than this. How could we possibly improve on the technique of Moses and Elijah, Jesus and Paul?

Permit me to mention one of my own experiences in this area. After our first return to New Zealand in 1978 following a period of teaching in the USA, I began a weekly study in our home for about ten young men of special potential. At their request they met for three hours "just to listen and to learn", as they put it. For two years we met each Wednesday evening and of course I involved them in Socratic-type dialogue as we worked our way through the Gospel of Matthew and the book of Acts, discussing the text and the theological issues arising. Two of the men were natural humorists, so at regular intervals our home would vibrate with our uncontrollable laughter. Deep friendships were formed and appetites were whetted for more systematic Biblical and theological study. As a result, in 1980 I created Tyndale College, a part-time theological institution for university graduates who remain in their professions but undertake study for the Melbourne College of Divinity BD degree. The College continues to flourish twenty years later with about twenty students enrolled. When I think of that original group of about ten men and their present roles, I am reminded of the strategic importance of mentoring – a TV "anchorman", several businessmen, a high school principal, a judge, and three university professors.

In speaking of the senior scholar's need to cultivate key friendships, I am not thinking primarily of the obligation to initiate and cultivate friendships with younger scholars. I have already spoken of the way in which a budding scholar falls in love with excellence through close association with a mature scholar. I am thinking now of a mutually enriching friendship that an established Biblical scholar can cultivate with a Christian who is a successful business person and whose priorities lie with the Kingdom of God. It is not immediately obvious to the non-academic person whose expertise lies in the practical world of business or finance that as it goes in the seminary and university divinity school, so it goes in the church. One of the perennial needs of the church is for wealthy Christian men and women to catch the vision of what can be achieved in and through the church when substantial funding is given to Biblical and theological scholarship. No person is better equipped to communicate that vision to the Christian philanthropist than the Christian scholar.

I know of no better example of the influence of such a liaison in recent times than the case of Sir John W. Laing and Dr. W.J. Martin in England. When you travel in the UK and look up at the skyline, you will often see an impressive yellow and black rectangular sign, LAING. Laing Construction Company is one of the largest companies of its kind in Europe. Sir John was a world-renowned builder who transformed a small Carlisle business into a multi-national construction and civil engineering corporation. From a material point of view his crowning achievement was the building of the magnificent Coventry Cathedral that replaced an edifice that had been destroyed during wartime air raids. It was typical of Sir John's philanthropic spirit that at the end of the job John Laing and Son Limited gave back to the Cathedral all of their profit from the enterprise. And it was typical of Sir John's Christian perspective that he observed that whereas he had knelt on one knee before the Queen to receive his knighthood (for his contribution to the construction industry), he would one day kneel on both knees before his God. In Laing we see not only a philanthropist who gave away his fortune but also a Christian who radiated an "immense impression of peaceful happiness, simplicity and contentment."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Peter Cousins, as cited in R. Coad, *Laing. The Biography of Sir John W. Laing, C. B. E. (1879-1978)* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1979), 10. See also G. Harrison, *Life and Belief in the Experience of John W. Laing, C. B. E.* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1954).

Two of the Christian causes that benefited from Sir John's generosity in the early 1940's were London Bible College and Tyndale House. London Bible College has been at the forefront of evangelical academic training for Christian service during the last fifty years. But my theme of a close liaison between a scholar and a philanthropist relates to Tyndale House, a Biblical research library in Cambridge, England, which is the headquarters of the Tyndale Fellowship for Biblical and Theological Research, and international association of 360 evangelical scholars. When one remembers that evangelical literature such as the *Tyndale Commentaries*, the *New Bible Dictionary*, the *New Bible Commentary* and hundreds of other scholarly books emanate from Tyndale House, one can gauge the immense worldwide influence of these Tyndale twins. And in the last two decades Tyndale House itself has produced two illustrious series – six volumes on the four Gospels entitled *Gospel Perspectives*<sup>5</sup> and six volumes on *The Book of Acts in its First Century Setting*.<sup>6</sup> The remarkable renaissance of evangelical Biblical scholarship worldwide during the last four decades is, to a large extent, attributable to the influence of Tyndale House and the Tyndale Fellowship.

Sir John Laing captured the vision for an influential centre for evangelical Biblical research from Dr. W.J. Martin, Rankin Senior Lecturer in Hebrew and Ancient Semitic Languages in the University of Liverpool, and later, Professor Emeritus of Regent College, Vancouver. Expressed in its simplest form, behind the creation of Tyndale House lay the money of Laing; behind this strategically important giving of Laing lay a vision communicated to Laing by Martin. In March 1958 Laing expressed his sentiments to Martin in the following way.

I had meant to say in my letter of yesterday how much we owe to you in two things (and lots of other things): you inspired me with the thought of Tyndale House, and the great value it might be for Evangelical Bible Scholarship, and second, Donald Wiseman [who was to become Professor, first of Egyptology then of Assyriology in the University of London] always points out that it was you who inspired him to go in for scholarship.<sup>7</sup>

Here we have a Biblical scholar, the late W.J. Martin, communicating a vision (Martin to Laing) and creating a succession (Martin to Wiseman).

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<sup>5</sup> Sheffield: JSOT, 1980-86.

<sup>6</sup> Grand Rapids: Eerdmans/Carlisle: Paternoster, 1993-99.

<sup>7</sup> Coad, *Laing*, 190-191.

What a superlative contribution Martin made to the Kingdom of God in just these two ways!

And so to the last area I shall mention in which senior scholars may make a distinctive contribution to the Christian cause. In physical terms, clear vision is dependent on height, witness the role of satellites in modern weather forecasting. In academic and spiritual terms, clarity of vision results from experience and maturity. No one is better equipped to identify gaps in research and to assess future needs than the scholar who for two or three decades has witnessed the ebb and flow of scholarly tides or the rise and fall of literary fads or the church's neglect of Biblical emphases.

My strong impression is that for too long evangelical scholars have had their writing projects dictated by editorial invitation. An evangelical publishing house decides that the time has come for a new commentary series designed for a particular audience. An editor is appointed and invitations go out to evangelical Biblical scholars throughout the world, soliciting their participation and holding out the irresistible carrot of an advance on royalties. Another evangelical publisher senses the need for a new multi-volume Bible dictionary, and many of the same scholars receive yet another invitation to contribute – of course within a time limit determined by the publisher. I have known not a few evangelical scholars who in their writing ministry simply bounce – or lurch – from one deadline to another. Now I am certainly not against Biblical literature geared for specialist audiences and written by evangelicals, although I confess that a moratorium on new commentary series in the West – if such were possible – would be a splendid way of celebrating the arrival of the new millennium. Given the impossibility of this ideal – publishing houses must publish new volumes to keep in business! – one must settle for a more realistic goal. Societies of evangelical Biblical scholars, or even small local or national groups of senior scholars, should make a concerted effort to identify the issues in Biblical studies that demand special attention in coming decades, given the neglect of these issues in contemporary Christianity or the presence of erroneous teaching about them in the church or attacks on the validity of the Scriptural witness about these issues. The suggested areas needing research that I mentioned earlier were the product of one person's limited vision. What I am suggesting here is a cooperative enterprise – local, national, or if possible international – that would bring leading evangelical Biblical scholars together for brainstorming and planning sessions that



would not only set up an agenda for the next decade or two but also allocate projects to qualified individuals and arrange for the translation of the resulting volumes into key languages. We can rest assured that publishing houses would line up for the rights to such series! The two series of volumes emanating from Tyndale house that I referred to earlier are prime examples of such strategic planning.

But once again allow me to mention my own puny efforts to identify and "plug" some gaps in the field of New Testament studies. Indeed it will become apparent that most of my writing falls under this rubric.

My doctoral thesis on the interpretation of 2 Cor. 5:1-10 introduced me to the central issues of New Testament eschatology. When I read Oscar Cullmann's book *Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead?*<sup>8</sup> and the lively and sometimes acrimonious debate that it prompted, it became apparent that some people see the concepts of resurrection and immortality as mutually exclusive. Those who are convinced by the philosophical and theological arguments for the immortality of the soul sometimes have a strong antipathy to the Biblical idea of resurrection, imagining that resurrection means nothing more than reanimation. On the other hand, many view any talk of immortality as a threat to Biblical faith, the term symbolising for them the difference between Greek philosophy and Biblical revelation: whereas Plato argued for immortality, Paul preached resurrection. It became clear to me that in this resurrection–immortality debate the losing partner had generally been immortality, yet the New Testament uses terms denoting immortality some eleven times in reference to the final destiny of human beings. There was no full-length book in existence that dealt exegetically with the relation between resurrection and immortality in the New Testament. Thus was born my book *Raised Immortal. Resurrection and Immortality in the New Testament*<sup>9</sup> which endeavours to show that "immortality" is no less a Biblical term and concept than "resurrection" and therefore should be retained in the vocabulary of Biblical and systematic theology, and that these two concepts, so far from being incompatible, are in fact inseparable and complementary. Hence the title of my book, *Raised Immortal*, which is drawn from 1 Cor. 15:52.

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<sup>8</sup> (English translation) London: Epworth, 1958.

<sup>9</sup> London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1983/Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985.

English-speaking readers are aware of the three-volume *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*,<sup>10</sup> edited by Colin Brown, which is a translation, with additions and revisions, of a German work, *Theologisches Begriffslexikon zum Neuen Testament*. As the English translation and expansion was progressing, a significant gap was identified: there was no treatment of those small but significant words we call prepositions. The solution proposed was the provision of a lengthy appendix to Volume 3, entitled "Prepositions and Theology in the Greek New Testament". I agreed to write this, recognising that apart from the relatively brief treatment of prepositions in the grammars (where the emphasis was grammatical) and a somewhat dated work in French (1919), there was no work where the theological significance of New Testament prepositions was discussed in one place. This was a case of an editorial invitation to fill a real gap in the literature!

With regard to these last four decades, it may fittingly be said: "Of the making of new commentary series, there is no end". As pastors consult one commentary after another in the preparation of their sermons, they usually find a great deal of overlap between the commentaries. Moreover, if they are seeking help with the details and nuances of the Greek text, often both the commentaries and the grammars are too brief. Nor do they aid in the crucial transition from text to sermon. My *Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament*<sup>11</sup> is not a new commentary series. It aims to provide in a single volume for each New Testament book all the necessary information for the understanding of the Greek text, ranging from parsing of verbs and lexical details, through analysis of exegetical options, to more advanced discussions of syntax. Then follows a translation and an expanded paraphrase of each paragraph, incorporating the exegetical preferences expressed, a bibliography relating to the theological issues of each paragraph, and finally some "homiletical suggestions" or sermon outlines based on the discussion of the paragraph's structure. My concern is to build for the pastor a convenient bridge between the study and the pulpit and to encourage the systematic exposition of the text of Scripture as the staple diet of Christian congregations. Hopefully, too, students will find the *Guide* helpful as they prepare for examinations in New Testament studies, and teachers will appreciate having an aid for their students that frees them

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<sup>10</sup> Exeter: Paternoster/Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975-1978.

<sup>11</sup> Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991.

to concentrate on the wider issues of background, criticism or Biblical theology raised by the text. At present only one volume in the *EGGNT* series has been completed (*Colossians & Philemon*), but it is my hope to work my way through the whole New Testament in 20 volumes during the next two decades.

My interest, as a student of the New Testament, is not only with Greek grammar as the handmaid of exegesis but also with New Testament theology, especially Christology. The first substantial paper I ever wrote, some 35 years ago, was on the meaning of John 1:1, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God". As my fascination with this topic of the deity of Christ developed, I began to gather bibliographic data. I eventually concluded, to my great surprise, that (as far as I could ascertain) there had never been in the history of the church, in any language, a detailed exegetical study of those New Testament verses in which Jesus Christ is called or might be called "God" (θεός). What an enormous gap! Let me assure you that there are very few significant gaps of this size left in New Testament studies. True, there had been general treatments of these data, and even monographs on particular verses where Jesus is called *theos*, but no full-scale discussion existed, which gave attention to all the textual and syntactical issues. So for some twenty years this was my chief writing project, leading to the publication in 1992 of *Jesus as God. The New Testament Use of θεός in Reference to Jesus*.<sup>12</sup>

And finally, my most recent attempt to fill a gap. In the course of the ongoing review of the New International Version conducted by the NIV Committee on Bible Translation, I raised the issue of how the Greek word δοῦλος should be translated. Most English versions, following the lead of the King James Version, render it by "servant", although δοῦλος is the most distinctive Greek word for "slave", there being at least six other New Testament Greek words that may appropriately be rendered "servant". This led me to examine the use of δοῦλος in the Greek Old Testament (LXX) as well as the New Testament, and more generally the use of the metaphor of slavery, not only in Pauline Christianity, as Dale B. Martin had recently done (1990),<sup>13</sup> but in all of the New Testament. So there will shortly appear in the *New*

<sup>12</sup> Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992 (paperback edition, 1998).

<sup>13</sup> *Slavery as Salvation. The Metaphor of Slavery in Pauline Christianity* (New Haven and London: Yale University, 1990).

*Studies in Biblical Theology* series edited by D.A. Carson, my monograph entitled *Slave of Christ: A New Testament Metaphor for Total Devotion to Christ*.<sup>14</sup>

To sum up, it is the privilege of the Biblical student or scholar to expound the text, to serve the church, and to defend the faith. Younger scholars must pursue excellence in their academic training and solicit mentoring as they progress through their professional careers, while more senior scholars should be devoted to creating a scholarly sucessions, forming crucial friendships, and filling pressing research needs.

Let me conclude this lecture by reading some paragraphs from my forthcoming book on slavery to Christ, which will fittingly direct our focus to our common Lord, Jesus Christ, and to life's top priority – our relationship to him.

A slave is someone whose person and service belong wholly to another. As Christ's purchased possession, the Christian is wholly devoted to the person of the Master (Rom. 14:8). As Christ's "movable property", the Christian is totally available for the Master's use (2 Tim. 2:21). This complete devotion to Christ includes three elements.

1. Humble submission to the person of Christ. This involves an acknowledgment that, as supreme Lord, he has absolute and exclusive rights to our will and affections and energy, now and for ever. It is a case of the devotion of the whole person for the whole of life.

2. Unquestioning obedience to the Master's will. Slavery involves subjection to another's will, whether voluntarily or involuntarily. The faithful slave is basically the obedient slave, just as the first requirement for commendable military service is compliance with commands.

3. An exclusive preoccupation with pleasing Christ. Believers give satisfaction to their Master not only by obeying him, but also by devising innovative ways of pleasing him. "We make it our ambition", says Paul, "to be constantly pleasing to him" (2 Cor. 5:9). This was Paul's magnificent obsession, an obsession that had the effect of expelling inferior – albeit legitimate – pursuits.

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<sup>14</sup> Leicester: IVP/ Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999.

It is one thing for us to follow a grand custom and stand during the singing of the Hallelujah Chorus at the unforgettable climax of Part II of Handel's Messiah and so celebrate the ultimate victory of Christ. It is quite another thing for us to bow the knee before the crucified and exalted Lord of the universe and receive the metaphorical piercing of the ear (cf. Ex. 21:5-6) as a sign and pledge of our joyful and willing slavery to him as long as we live. If we do this, then when we do stand in his presence at the conclusion of our lives, and ourselves sing the song of the Lamb, we shall hear those unforgettable words from our Master's lips, "Congratulations, good and faithful slave!" (Mt. 25:21, 23).

## ABSTRACT

The biblical student or scholar has the responsibility and the privilege of modeling Christian piety, of analyzing and explaining the biblical text, and of defending the Christian faith. Younger scholars must pursue excellence in their academic training and should solicit a mentoring relationship with a seasoned scholar as they make progress in their professional careers. More senior scholars have the distinctive role and obligation of creating a spiritual and pedagogical succession, of transmitting a vision for Christian scholarship to Christian philanthropists, and of identifying and filling gaps or perennial needs in biblical and theological research.

## 撮 要

本文指出，聖經研究者須向信仰群體負責，並肩負辯明真道的重任。作者認為，聖經研究者的首要條件是對聖經語文有卓越的認識。他在本文中亦勸勉後學要確立研究的路向，避免被出版壓力主導研究課題；至於資深的學者，作者希望他們能擔演推動信徒支持學術研究、培養後學，及填補研究課題的空白部分之角色。