

REFLECTIONS ON BIBLICAL STUDIES IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

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This is a reflection, not an overview of what has happened in Biblical studies during the twentieth century. A reflection is as much about the one looking as about the image presented, and so this is bound to be a very personal view. But that is the only way I can approach this vast subject.

Last summer I was chatting to an ordained friend, at the end of a biblical studies summer school. 'The use of the Bible', he said, 'will be the issue which splits the church', by which I think he meant the Church of England, as he is an Anglican clergyman. 'The gay and lesbian issue is how the problem is presenting itself, but the real issue is how we are to use the Bible.' He was correct. The whole issue of the place and use of the Bible is crucial, but the way the Bible is currently being studied in universities seems not to produce what the churches need. Need, not want. A few lines from the Doctrine Commission report published in 1995 *The Mystery of Salvation*, illustrates this point. 'This message [of the atoning death of Christ] which lies at the heart of the gospel, raises numerous consequential questions. The most obvious of these is why the death of Christ should have this astonishing result' (p.97). What this is saying is that the Doctrine Commission, drawing on what is taught in the universities, could not answer the first question about the Christian faith. This concerns me.

There are so many issues here that it will not be possible to present more than a sketch.. First, we should not approach the Bible knowing already what is there, using biblical texts simply to clothe our own ideas. In this respect the Doctrine Commission is to be commended for honesty!. Second, those who work as biblical scholars with a faith commitment need to work with open hearts and minds, praying to see what is really there. I shall never forget an extraordinary experience two years ago, the first time I had been present when a bishop was celebrating the Orthodox Liturgy. I had expected it to be unfamiliar, but was surprised to discover that it was not. After many years of research into the Jerusalem temple and its rituals, the Orthodox liturgy was something I recognised at once, and this has opened up for me a whole new and exciting area of research.

The twentieth century was a time of enormous change, and much of it for good. In recent years especially there has been a growth of co-operation with Jewish scholars and, since 1965 (Dei Verbum) more Roman Catholics have moved into the mainstream of international scholarship. This has greatly enriched biblical study, even though there are certain issues which still call for great delicacy.

There are at the moment two major trends in biblical studies. First, further investigation of canonical texts using new methods such as social-scientific, rhetorical, or feminist perspectives; this study of method is an important feature in the British scene, not least, I regret to say, because it does not require any real knowledge of the ancient languages. Second, the investigation of other ancient texts such as the Pseudepigrapha, which illuminate the situation in which the canonical texts were written. This is not much done in Britain. I still meet people who have a passionate commitment to the Bible and yet refuse even to read a book from what they call the Apocrypha, let alone anything else, and yet these are people who labour diligently to learn Hebrew and Greek. The study of the Pseudepigrapha and similar texts is having an impact on biblical studies comparable to that of translating the biblical texts during the Reformation.

The literal use of biblical texts is not a responsible use of scripture, and leads to all kinds of abuse when they are used out of context. I remember seeing a text on the cover of a student's file; 'Hang all the law and the prophets'. This is a silly example, but some serious and vital debates are conducted on this level, with texts fired like weapons. We need to distinguish between the vision and the society in which that vision was first glimpsed, to recognise what is fundamental to the vision and what is not. Nobody wants a return to the society of bronze age Palestine or second temple Jerusalem. **We seek to stand where they stood, to look where they looked so as to glimpse what they saw.** There is, in my opinion, far too much concern for the 'earthly' aspects of the Bible, perhaps because they are things one can 'prove', and a great neglect of the 'vision'.

There is a major crisis in biblical studies of which the churches seem unaware, and there is need for urgent action to ensure that at least in theological colleges something is taught that does not simply rely on university departments and replicate their syllabus and interests. Theological colleges and university departments now have very different agendas. Nor

would it be wise to allow the freedom that is enjoyed by university departments with regard to syllabus etc. to be extended to theological colleges, such that what is taught reflects the interests which the staff acquired doing their Ph Ds in a university department. If time and resources are limited, one cannot justify spending several hours on the date and route of the Exodus, or the literary structure of the Book of Judges, or the naughty words in Ezekiel which feminists find offensive. These are all fascinating topics but not of first importance to ordinands. Two years ago I was chatting to some recently ordained men and I asked what they had done in Old Testament study. One said: 'I learned that it was a feminist text written in Shebrew' - he was clearly unhappy about the Old Testament teaching he had been offered. Another revealed that he had done nothing about the concept of the Messiah.

Let me quote to you from a review by Leslie Houlden in the TLS (5 Feb 1999) of the *Cambridge Companion to Biblical Interpretation*.

'You would not always think it from church pronouncements on various issues, but the interpretation (rather than the mere quoting) of the Bible, always pretty sophisticated, has in recent years become a multifaceted discipline of utmost complexity and richness. A major reason for this mushrooming of methods, approaches and techniques lies in a certain loosening of boundaries in the academy, so that, for instance, sociologists, anthropologists, and literary theorists have developed ways of cross fertilising with biblical scholars, raising questions scarcely imaginable fifty years ago, except perhaps in embryonic or naive form.' He then describes the contents of the volume, twenty chapters on various aspects of biblical studies, and reaches the following conclusion: 'Only two writers pay any notable attention to the relationship between modern biblical studies and the Bible's main home: the Christian churches. That's the measure of the enlightenment's force and of a situation that seems to be of little serious concern to most in either party.' Can we imagine such a situation in our medical schools? Research and teaching of no use or relevance to the actual practice of medicine?

Another illustration . During the 1999 summer meeting of the Society for Old Testament Study in Glasgow, the theme was looking back over the previous century and the changes in OT study. Prof. Graeme Auld from Edinburgh read a paper entitled 'Singing the Lord's song in a strange land', and Dr. Alastair Hunter from Glasgow read a paper entitled 'From Canon

to Scripture to Text. Reflections on the Faustian pact between Academy and Church'. Since the Society had a Scottish president that year, there were many contributions from Scottish scholars, and the emphasis was on their experience, but they are not alone or untypical. The general feeling was that the links between academy and church had been severely strained by modern movements in scholarship. The agreement between church and academy, made a century earlier, had indeed been a Faustian pact.

Prof. Philip Davies from Sheffield, who has a completely secular approach to Biblical studies, read a paper entitled 'Ownership? Responsibility? What is the Guild to do with the Bible?' He looked at the various disciplines which now have some sort of interest in biblical studies: cultural studies, literary theory, feminist issues, sociology and such like, and hailed this as a great liberation for biblical studies. When asked about the Church he was nonplussed. This implies that there is a need for university departments to make biblical studies relevant to all these latest trends in academe, and therefore, by implication, give it some sort of respectability, but no need to make it relevant to those who are the major users of the texts. Large numbers of books are now published, but the scale of the problem was brought home to me when I was asked to suggest some recently published books on Old Testament study which would be useful for students in Nigeria. I wondered what to recommend. When asked what products of recent American and European biblical scholarship would be useful for an Orthodox student in Moscow I had a similar problem.

Many of the new fashions in biblical studies have grown up in the USA. At the start of the twentieth century, many American scholars studied in Germany, but this ended with the first World War. Between the wars the fashion was to study in Britain, but after 1945 American scholars increasingly returned to the continental universities. In the last twenty years or so, the trend has reversed and the fashion is now for European scholars to go to America. Many specialist new approaches have been developed there, such that North America is now the trendsetter for international biblical scholarship. Some biblical scholars view these developments with apprehension, fearing that they herald the demise of traditional biblical scholarship which is of service to the churches. Let me quote from Donald McKim's recent volume *Major Biblical Interpreters* (IVP 1998), p.556: 'On the continent and in Great Britain, traditional biblical scholars view these developments with alarm, and characterize what transpires in North America as avant-garde and ephemeral. And those of a more

conservative and conventional bent, both in North America and throughout the world, lament the manner in which North American leadership of this stripe may well bring about the demise of biblical scholarship and also faith in the new century which is about to burst upon the horizon.’ The increasing number of students is marvellous, but it has resulted in increasingly specialised areas being developed in the search for new areas for theses. [I shall return to this in a moment]. All this is potentially good, but the price may well be the end of the overall view, the big picture, as they would say.

Let me quote now from John Bowden’s annual report from SCM in 1997.

‘Thirty years ago we had around 500 titles in print and of these 120 were on the NT and 75 on the OT. Today we have around 400 titles in print of which 50 are on or related to the NT, a high proportion centred on Jesus, and just over 30 on the OT [i.e. in each case about 40% of the number thirty years ago]. Even this picture is optimistic, because of the titles still in print, many are the hardy survivors of the 1950s, 1960s, 1970s and 1980s... It is not that we have decided not to publish books in this area; the fact of the matter is that the kind of books which used to appear, whether they were from popular writers like William Barclay and A.M.Hunter, major works by scholars accessible to students and clergy, or accounts of recent developments in biblical scholarship which provided a kind of map of what was going on, have simply dried up. The reasons for this are quite complicated (high among them is the demand in the university world for specialist studies which earn points in the RAE) but this is not the place to go into them. More important is the question what is going to happen to knowledge of the Bible if, as seems increasingly the case, the achievements of biblical scholarship over the last century and more are being forgotten. Are we going to be caught between the Scylla of sensationalist books like *The Bible Code* on the one hand and the Charybdis of extremely conservative approaches of the more evangelical publishers?’

What is needed is an overview of the whole field, drawing on whatever is of real value for our understanding of the Bible. In my particular field of interest, the Old Testament, this means what is useful for illuminating Christian origins. The whole question of Christian study of the OT is too great even to embark upon here, suffice it to say that it is a very real question. Many questions that fascinate OT scholars are of no relevance to Christian origins,-why should they be?- but aspects that are vital for understanding the phenomenon of Christianity are all too often neglected. My suspicion is that because OT scholars are not

dealing with them, NT scholars do not realise they are there. I am thinking of things such as the high priesthood, or atonement, or the concept of the Messiah and the Son of God. I have read far too many treatises on atonement which do not mention the OT roots, and publications on the hope for Jesus' return, the Second Coming, range far and wide and an even border on the ridiculous, without lighting upon the obvious: that it was the expected return of the great high priest as he emerged from the heavenly temple after the offering the sacrificial blood in the holy of holies.

If this seems to be a pretty bleak picture, I can only say that in many places it is. Any form of faith commitment in biblical scholarship, any attempt to work within a theological framework can be suspect. One ploy is to keep one's biblical study in a separate compartment of one's life, to pursue the most radically destructive investigations of biblical texts and then go to evensong. People of commitment often take refuge in safe areas like Hebrew, or archaeology, although that is not longer 'safe' as I shall show in a moment. Let me quote now from the introduction to Francis Watson's recent book *Text and Truth* 1997, 'It is believed that theological concerns have an inevitable tendency to distort the autonomous processes of biblical exegesis, a prejudice so strong that to identify a theological motivation underlying an exegetical position is often held to be sufficient refutation...' (p.4) 'The lines of demarcation between systematic theology and Old and New Testament scholarship represent more than mere division of labour; they are ideologically motivated. They represent a collective decision of biblical scholarship that biblical texts are to be construed as something other than Christian scripture.' (p.6).

On a practical level, in Britain the discipline has been squeezed from several sides, so to speak. There are the changes in school level education which mean that, unlike the good old days when students arrived at university with Latin and Greek at A level, one often hears the cry: 'How can I teach Hebrew to a student who has never heard of a verb?' The content of first degree courses has had to be brought to a level where the students can cope. In this last month alone, I have heard staff in the theology faculties in both Oxford and Cambridge saying that their degrees now aim to be a liberal arts degree and that most of their graduates go into Law or Finance. Very few enter the ordained ministry. And of course, as we all know, there is very little money to fund post graduate study...

Prof. Edward Ullendorff published in 1996 a very pessimistic overview of the state of Hebrew study in Britain entitled *The Demise of the Hebraist*. (Yearbook for the Israel Society for the Promotion of Classical Studies). ‘In retrospect, the period from 1946 to 1980 was perhaps the golden period of Semitic Studies in Britain... After the second World War, universities like London, Manchester, Durham etc. (as well as Oxbridge and the four ancient Scottish universities) could boast prestigious chairs in this field... Most of these had arisen from the needs of the theological faculties. All these fine developments, have been curtailed, nay murdered almost in one fell swoop, in the 1980s and early 1990s. The four Scottish chairs have disappeared, the chairs at Durham, Manchester and London are orphaned and the general trend has been from Hebrew to OT studies.’ This battle for Hebrew is one in which I became involved when one of the American dominated English universities began to press SOTS to drop knowledge of Hebrew as a requirement for membership, so that we could be more like an American Society.

In 1983 the Society for Old Testament Study conducted a survey of the state of OT teaching in Britain. Of the ‘religion’ courses in British Universities, 80% had a compulsory OT component, and 40% of their students had, on entry, done an A level with an OT component, although, as the response from King’s College London observed, the untaught were easier to teach than those who had been badly taught. Of the A level boards, the joint Oxford and Cambridge Board had the smallest number of candidates opting for an OT component (39%), whilst Wales (77%) and London Overseas (87%) had the highest proportion. Theological colleges devoted, on average, 20% of their teaching time to OT study. All Theological colleges taught the O T, with one third saying that it seen primarily as a handmaid to the New Testament and the rest that it was an independent discipline. The Society received many letters, which are now a fascinating glimpse of the fears and hopes of twenty years ago. The OT was being squeezed out of teaching time; candidates knew less when they arrived and there was less time to teach them. Some universities were named as centres of inadequate OT teaching (due to staffing cuts?), and many feared that they would not be able to find suitably qualified successors. All bewailed the decline of Hebrew study.

There is time only to mention briefly the rise of ‘feminist’ scholarship, and this is an area where knowledge of the original languages can be a major factor in the quality of what is produced. Since her programmatic article in 1973, ‘Depatriarchalising in Biblical

Interpretation' (JAAR 41, pp.30-48), Phylis Trible has drawn our attention to the fact that much of the OT is less patriarchal than traditional interpreters have told us. The OT God of Israel clearly has both male and female characteristics, although these are invariably lost in translation. Feminist scholarship that does not work from the original texts loses access to much potential material. It is a fact of history that each time Scripture has been edited/preserved or a canon defined, texts where the female figure was prominent have been excluded. I am thinking here of the work of the Deuteronomists in the transmission of the Hebrew texts and the interesting results that can come from re-pointing Hebrew texts to discover where a female figure has disappeared. Then there was the 'Council of Jamnia' in 95CE which defined the Hebrew Canon and did not include the major Wisdom texts. Then there were the Protestant reformers who chose the same Hebrew canon for the Protestant Old Testament rather than the larger collection of traditional Christian Old Testament Scriptures so that those who were at last able to read the Scriptures for themselves were not able to read about Wisdom.

Since these are my reflections on biblical studies, I should perhaps say something about my own approach. I favour the use of context materials rather than the currently fashionable approaches such as social scientific or rhetorical studies. I believe that a careful use of the historical critical method is most useful, as it enables us to stand where they stood, look where they looked and even to read what they wrote. What we find is not always expected or even welcome. There have been several times in my own research and writing when I have been forced to abandon the very position I was trying to establish, and with it a great deal of my personal baggage, but this has always led to something even more exciting.

The greatest discovery of context materials, and the greatest event for biblical studies in the twentieth century, was the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Biblical studies can never be the same again. Although the business of processing and publishing the material was a disgraceful chapter in the history of scholarship, politics, nepotism and other all too human considerations preventing the publication of the material for more than a generation, for the last ten years or so most has been available. The NT can now be set in a real context, although there are students of the NT who refuse to look at the scrolls because they are not scripture. Fragments of 1 Enoch were found, showing that it was indeed a pre-Christian book, and probably regarded as scripture. Fragments of some 20 copies have been found,

compared with 21 of Isaiah, and 30 of Deuteronomy. It was the fourth most popular text, and fragments of what may have been a commentary have been found. So what was meant by 'the Law and the Prophets' in NT times? It comes as a surprise to many to learn that there was no 'fixed canon' until the end of the first century CE, and we do know that Jude quoted from Enoch. Was Enoch in the Scriptures that Jesus knew? The Melchizedek Text from Qumran illuminates the Letter to the Hebrews and the presentation of the Messiah in the gospels, the Sabbath Songs give a context for the Book of Revelation, and the Community Rule describes a community not unlike the Jerusalem church. They greatly valued the Book of Hagu, and, unless we have it under another name, an important piece of evidence, perhaps counted as Scripture at that time, is now lost. The Damascus Document describes a community leader who was a *mbqr*, which translates as *episkopos*. Two incomplete mediaeval copies of this text had been found in the Cairo Genizah in 1896-7 and when they were first translated and presented to an astonished world, it was suggested that they described the Christians. The Damascus Document was the front page of the New York Times on Christmas Day in 1910. Here was a community which had withdrawn to a place they called 'Damascus', raising questions about the Damascus to which Saul went in pursuit of the Christians.

The presence among the Dead Sea Scrolls of mystical texts such as the Sabbath Songs increased interest in the study of the Jewish mystical texts known as merkavah texts. (Merkavah means chariot in Hebrew, and the chariot was the name for the heavenly throne which the mystics ascended to contemplate) Several features of these complex texts illuminate the Book of Revelation and the way Jesus is presented in the Gospels. They will also, I feel certain, prove important for the study of early Christian Liturgy.

Two at least of the Scrolls have important implications for understanding the wider context of materials now found in the OT. The Book of Jubilees (ch 20) previously known only as a scriptural text in the Ethiopian Church, describes Abraham's deathbed speech to all his children: Sarah's son Isaac, Hagar's son Ishmael and Keturah's six sons. They were all commanded to have the same religion, to worship God Most High, to keep the covenant, to circumcise and to shun idolatry. He sent the sons of Hagar and Keturah to live in the southern and eastern lands, where they intermarried and were known as the Ishmaelites. The Genesis Apocryphon, a longer version of Genesis, gives more detail of Abraham's travels.

He went east from the Dead Sea as far as the Persian Gulf, then back across to the Red Sea before coming north again into Canaan. There are other Jewish traditions about the people of this area, e.g. that 80,000 Jerusalem priests joined the army of Nebuchadnezzar (about 600BCE) and later settled in the lands of Ishmael (Y.Ta'anit 4.5). These and other texts are opening up a huge area for understanding the religion of Arabia before the rise of Islam.

Then there were the Nag Hammadi texts, discovered in Egypt in 1945. These have revolutionised our knowledge of early Egyptian Christianity, and shown beyond any reasonable doubt that gnosticism has Jewish roots. Among the texts discovered was the Gospel of Thomas. Greek fragments of an unidentifiable gospel had been found at Oxyrhynchus in Egypt some fifty years previously, but the Nag Hammadi find enabled them to be identified as Thomas. This is not the mediaeval gospel of Thomas but a collection of Jesus's Sayings, some parallel to the canonical texts, others completely new. Thomas's Jesus is very unlike the Jesus of the Synoptic Gospels, but close to the Jesus of the Fourth Gospel. He is a temple mystic, teaching his disciples about returning to the place of light from which they have come.

Other major discoveries were the Neofiti Targum, finally identified in 1956, and fragments of ancient Targums identified among the Cairo Genizah material and published in 1959. Neofiti was a previously unknown Aramaic version of the Pentateuch, and it showed how, for example, the opening verses of Genesis were being understood. It is not possible to date the Targum texts; they originated as an oral tradition and had a long history before achieving written form, but the Neofiti Genesis sheds new light on the prologue to the Fourth Gospel. Such discoveries gave a huge boost to Targum studies in the last generation or so, and not only on the part of Jewish scholars.

In 1963, Ernst Käsemann made his now famous statement that Apocalyptic was the mother of Christian theology. Apart from a few dedicated souls, apocalyptic had been regarded with suspicion by the mainstream of biblical scholarship. Klaus Koch published, in German [1970] and then in English [*The Rediscovery of Apocalyptic*, 1972], a slim volume tracing the fate of this mysterious revelation literature. Käsemann's statement marked a turning point, and what had been a marginalised field became centre stage. A new industry began. This was boosted in 1976 by the publication of those fragments of Enoch from Qumran [J.T.Milik

Aramaic Fragments of Qumran Cave 4], and there followed a major publication project under the editorship of James Charlesworth. The huge two volumes of OT Pseudepigrapha appeared in 1983 and 1985. When the history of biblical scholarship in our times is written, it would not surprise me if the production of these and similar volumes were deemed as significant as the translation of the scriptures at the Reformation. Although there were no new texts as such, it did mean that a vast amount of context material was made easily available. The study of these and similar texts is now the biggest area in biblical studies, but little is being done in Britain. Each year the SOTS publishes a book list with short reviews of books published in the field during the previous year, and is a good indication of what is happening. In 1963 the section covering these texts had of 4 pages of reviews, when Law, Religion and theology had 14, 28%. Comparisons in later years show that in 1980 the figures were respectively 20 pages and 25, 80%, and this year the figures are respectively 40 pages and 25 pages 160%. From 28% to 160% in one generation! and now by far the biggest area.

Another major field of new discovery has been archaeology, the original hope for context material, and the one favoured by those who are wary of using ancient texts. Unfortunately this has presented many problems, particularly for the earlier period of the OT. The archaeology of Egypt and Western Asia (the names Palestine and Israel cannot be used nowadays) has produced results that are difficult to reconcile with traditional readings of the OT. Scholars on all sides have agendas other than simply archaeology, and so some debates have been acrimonious; those who want to establish the literal truth of the bible have sometimes been selective in their presentation of the evidence, but even the tourist trade is now recognising that there is little evidence for the early history of Israel as described in the OT.

There have been marvellous discoveries, though, which have illuminated and altered our view of ancient Israel. In 1929 (we are limiting ourselves to the 20th century!) the library of ancient Ugarit was discovered which has illuminated the religion of ancient Canaan and shown similarities to that Israel. Many biblical sites have produced large numbers of female figurines, and graffiti have been found depicting the Lord and a female consort, dating perhaps to the eighth century BC. It is almost certain now that there had been a female deity in Israel and that she survived to be known as the Holy Wisdom. She was the heavenly

archetype of the high priest in Zion (Ben Sira 24), but I wonder if this will have any bearing on the debate about women bishops? .

Excavations at Jericho show that the Joshua story cannot be placed, and so far there is no archaeological evidence at all for the kingdom of David and Solomon. Even G.E.Wright, a conservative scholar and a great influence in the field, admitted in his *Biblical Archaeology* 1957 'Not a single discovery has been made in Jerusalem which can be dated with certainty to the time of David and Solomon.' The earliest firm evidence mentions Ahab the Israelite in 853 BC, the Kurkh stele. A recent major work on Hebrew Inscriptions (G.I.Davies, 1991) shows just how little does remain in comparison with, say, the quantity of material from Egypt and Mesopotamia. In 1946, after a century of serious digging, David Winton Thomas, who was to become the Regius Professor of Hebrew at Cambridge, spoke in almost ecstatic tones of the Lachish Letters, the grand name given to some sherds of pot found at Lachish on which there were a few legible letters and words, apparently the communication between a military commander and his men. 'No more valuable discovery has ever been made in the biblical archaeology of Palestine' he said. ['The Prophet in the Lachish Letters', Tyndale House Lecture 1946]. This was exactly one year before the Dead Sea Scrolls were found. Other collections of sherds have been found since that time, but there is nothing remotely comparable to the library found at Ugarit. We still like to think that Jerusalem was a comparable centre of culture and learning.

This has led to a crisis in the study of the history and historiography of Israel. What exactly do the OT 'histories' represent? The first era of history to 'go' was the era of the Patriarchs, and Moses soon followed. There is no evidence for the events described in Exodus. The dating of Jericho and the settlement patterns in the land suggest that the stories in Judges are not to be treated as history, and, as we have seen, there is no evidence for David and Solomon. So great has been the debate precipitated by this - and remember, the issues are highly political and concern the right to live in the land today - so great has been the debate that the whole of the last International OT Conference in Oslo in 1998 was devoted to this issue. When were the OT histories written and by whom and for what purpose?

In addition, there has been study of the way in which pious perceptions of the history of Israel have been used to drive the politics of the twentieth century. Assumptions that the land

had no legitimate inhabitants and appeals to the injunctions of Deuteronomy to drive out the indigenous Canaanites have all been used to devastating effect in recent years. Books have been published with titles such as *The Invention of Ancient Israel* [K. Whitelam, 1996] and *In Search of Ancient Israel* [P.R. Davies 1992]. The fundamentalist Christian support for Zionism has been called into question.

The greatest archaeological discovery was the Dead Sea Scrolls, themselves the object of enormous political intrigue. Accounts of the lengths to which various interested parties were prepared to go to gain possession of the scrolls, or to prevent rivals and enemies getting possession of them, would read like a thriller were they not, alas, true. It is hardly surprising that the tabloid press ran stories about the Pope secreting scrolls which would prove something dreadful about Christianity. The Scrolls have proved to be something of a mixed blessing. Having established that they are beyond doubt a great treasure of the Jewish heritage, it was soon recognised that the biblical texts among the scrolls were not the same as those currently found in the standard Hebrew Bible, known as the Masoretic Text. There can be no credible New Testament scholarship now which is not soundly based in a serious study of the Scrolls and even to attempt New Testament study without expert knowledge of the Hebrew and Aramaic is out of the question.

A volume has recently been published *The Dead Sea Scrolls Bible*, [M. Abegg, P. Flint, E. Ulrich 1999] which shows most of the variations, although, interestingly, the two Isaiah variants most important for Christians are not included. What is significant for Christians is that there is growing evidence for pre-Christian Hebrew texts which agree with the LXX, against the MT. Some of these texts are important for Christians, for example Deuteronomy 32.43, used as a messianic text in Hebrews 1.6 'Let all God's angels worship Him'. This line appears in the LXX but not in the MT. There is a mid-second century Christian text the *Dialogue with Trypho*, in which Justin maintains that Jewish scholars had been altering the scriptures, removing verses that were important for the Christians [Trypho 71]. The scriptures among the Dead Sea Scrolls increase the possibility that this did happen. The only evidence for the pre-Christian Hebrew of, for example, Deuteronomy supports the LXX against the MT. The initial reaction among conservative scholars was that the Dead Sea Scrolls must be a deviant or sectarian text, but there is no evidence for this. The Scrolls are the only evidence, apart from a report in Josephus of a scroll taken from the temple as booty

in 70CE and kept in Caesar's palace in Rome (War 7.152,162). The Emperor Severus (222-235CE) later gave this to a new Synagogue, and it was known to have different readings from other scrolls in use at that time . In other words, a scroll written before 70 CE *and kept in the temple* also differed from those in use by 200 CE.

Issues such as these - the lack of evidence for Israel in the land, the clear evidence for changes in the Hebrew texts around the time of Christian origins - are issues which must be handled with great care and sensitivity. But they are there, and cannot be avoided. Biblical studies at the moment could be a very exciting field. The growth is in areas where there is new evidence, but so little of this is being drawn into biblical studies in Britain, and what does not get into universities is unlikely to get into theological colleges or the churches. New trends and methods such as social scientific and literary have been adopted, but largely those that do not require the ancient languages..

Biblical studies should to serve the needs of the Churches; there are other goals, too, but if the needs of the churches are not even considered, something has to be amiss. Perhaps the time has come to break free from the Faustian pact between Church and Academy. *We are unlikely to solve the problems currently facing biblical studies using the methods which created them.* What we need is an approach, soundly based in scholarship, which enables us to stand where they stood, look where they looked, read what they wrote and glimpse what they saw. A modified history of religions approach would be the best starting point. There is so much in the Scrolls and the Targums, for example, or the Gospel of Thomas, that is important for understanding Christian origins, and the whole question of the 'history' of Israel cannot be kept quiet for ever. And yes, this approach does enable us to answer the question that the Doctrine Commission found so difficult.