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A valued inheritance of New Testament scholarship

I am honoured to have been invited to contribute to this *Festschrift* for my good friend, Professor Zsolt Geréb. He was not the first scholar from Cluj that I met, for early in 1984 Professor Árpád Péntek, the then Rector of the Protestant Institute in Cluj, visited me at my office in Geneva, where I was Theological Secretary of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (Presbyterian and Congregational). We had a good conversation, and I was invited to visit Cluj at the earliest opportunity. So it was that on 4 October 1984 I saw Cluj for the first time. Professor János Pásztor had driven me from Debrecen to Oradea – a journey made longer by a delay of two-and-a-half hours at the border – and from there Professor Péntek took me to Cluj. It was a memorable visit in political circumstances very different from those of today. I gave a lecture to all the students and professors, and on that occasion I met Zsolt Geréb for the first time. I also visited the widow of Professor Juhász. On 6 October I enjoyed a conversation with all the professors, at the end of which the Rector said that we were in such accord that it was as if I were one of their own! Later that day I was taken to the home of the renowned artist, Béla Szabo, who gave me a book about his work, and a signed print of his etching of the crucifixion, which hangs on the wall in front of me as I write. On Sunday 7 October I had the great privilege of preaching to the students, professors and guests. I was told that this was the first time that someone from the West had preached there since 1978. After a farewell lunch the Rector presented me with a copy of *An Analytical Concordance to the Revised Standard Version of the New Testament*. I often consult it to this day.

In the years following I visited Cluj whenever I was able to do so, though there was an unavoidable gap during my sojourn in Canada. My wife and I kept in touch with Zsolt and Elisabeth by letter, and we were delighted when they were able to visit us in our home. My most staggering memory of Cluj concerns 8 November 2003. To my very great surprise I had been invited to accept the Honorary Doctorate of the Protestant Institute, and on that day the ceremony took place. Among others honoured were Professors Ferenc Szűcs of Budapest and Frank Sawyer of Sárospatak, both of whom I had known for a number of years. Our wives also had kindly been invited to attend this most memorable occasion, with students in traditional

Transylvanian dress, wonderful choral singing, and appropriate speeches. I received my certificate from the Rector, Professor Tamás Juhász, and who should read a most gracious citation regarding myself but Zsolt Geréb!

How, then, could I refuse to contribute to this book? But what can a mere philosopher-theologian write that will be of interest to a New Testament scholar? Just as many scholars and ministers have benefited greatly from Zsolt Geréb's teaching and writing, so I am deeply indebted to those whose New Testament classes I attended in Manchester. I have therefore decided to devote the rest of this paper to a recollection of T. W. Manson, Owen E. Evans, W. Gordon Robinson and J. H. Eric Hull.

I

In 1836 Harry Longueville Jones published *A Plan for a University of Manchester*, but the time was not ripe for its implementation. The seed had been sown, however, and in 1851 Owens College, named in memory of its principal benefactor, John Owens (1790–1846), was founded, the idea being that students would read for external degrees of London University.¹ Similar colleges were established in Liverpool and Leeds, and from 1880 to 1903 the three colleges comprised The Victoria University, a federal body. Thus far Theology was not included in the curriculum, and some were determined to hold it at bay either because it was deemed to foment sectarian strife (to which Liverpool was no stranger), or because it was not respectably “scientific” (a view advanced in hostile manner by some in Leeds and elsewhere). There was a more favourable reception to the idea in Manchester, partly because the Trustees of Owens College were all members of one church or another, and partly because of the good reputation of the theological colleges that had already gathered in the town,² of which the oldest were Didsbury Wesleyan College (1834) and Lancashire Independent [Congregational] College (1843). They were joined by the Unitarian College (1854), Victoria Park United Methodist Free Church College (1871), the Moravian Theological College (1877), Hartley Primitive Methodist College (1881), Manchester Baptist College, which transferred from Bury to the city in 1887, and the Anglican Clergy Training College established at Ordsall Hall in 1889, whence it removed in 1908 to Egerton Hall as Manchester Theological College. It closed in 1944.

In 1903 the federal university was dissolved and the Victoria University of Manchester was constituted. On 5 May 1904 the decision was taken to

¹ See Thompson, Joseph.: *The Owens College: its Foundation and Growth; and its Connection with the Victoria University of Manchester*. J. E. Cornish, Manchester 1886; Fiddes, Edward.: *Chapters in the History of Owens College and of the Manchester University, 1851–1914*. Manchester University Press, Manchester 1937.

² Manchester became the world's first industrial city in 1853.

establish a Faculty of Theology, and its first session was held from 1904-1905.³ From the outset the professors and lecturers in the theological colleges were involved in the work of the Faculty, and some of them served terms as Dean and/or Secretary. The founding of the Faculty was marked by the publication of a series of twelve *Theological Lectures* edited by A. S. Peake. It is noteworthy that of the twelve lectures, seven were delivered by staff of the theological colleges: Principals J. T. Marshall (Baptist), L. Hasse (Moravian), Alexander Gordon (Unitarian), W. F. Adeney (Congregational) and H. D. Lockett (Anglican); Professor Robert Mackintosh of Lancashire Independent College and J. H. Moulton of Didsbury Wesleyan College.

Among the distinguished biblical scholars contributed by the colleges to the Faculty in its early years were J. H. Moulton (Wesleyan), Walter F. Adeney and W. H. Bennett (Congregationalists), and Arthur Samuel Peake (Primitive Methodist).⁴ Of these the last, while continuing to teach at Hartley College, became the first Dean of the Faculty and the first holder of the Rylands Chair of Biblical Criticism and Exegesis – an endowment by the Congregationalist Mrs. Enriqueta Rylands,⁵ who also founded the Rylands Library in memory of her husband, John. In addition to Peake's Chair, the University contributed Chairs of Semitic Languages and Comparative Religion – a subject pioneered at Manchester – to the new Faculty. Thus opened the first free-standing, non-sectarian, theological faculty in the country. Lectures were given on the University campus and also in the colleges – notably the History of Christian Doctrine in the latter; but all recognized lectures, wheresoever held, were open to all students registered in the Faculty. A further pioneering decision taken at the outset was that all theological degrees should be open to women as well as to men, although it was not until 1931 that Dorothy Murray became Manchester's first female Bachelor of Divinity.

³ For the history of the Faculty see Burkitt, F. C.: *Twenty-Five Years of Theological Study*. John Rylands Library and Manchester University Press, Manchester 1929. *Theological Essays in Commemoration of the Jubilee*. John Rylands Library and Manchester University Press, Manchester 1954. Pailin, David A. (ed.): *University of Manchester Faculty of Theology Seventy-Fifth Anniversary Papers*, published by the Faculty, Manchester 1980.

⁴ For Moulton (1863–1917), Bennett (1855–1920) and Peake (1865–1929) see *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (hereinafter ODNB). For Adeney (1849–1920) see Sell, Alan P. F.: *Hinterland Theology. A Stimulus to Theological Construction*. Pater-noster, Milton Keynes 2008, ch. 9 and *passim*. Bennett was an alumnus of Lancashire Independent College, of which he later became Principal. He also studied at St. John's College, Cambridge, and was the first Nonconformist to be elected Fellow of a Cambridge College. He was a LittD of Cambridge, and the first President of the Society for Old Testament Study (1917–1920). As if this were not enough, he had earlier graduated MA in Mathematics in the University of London. For Mackintosh (1858–1933) see ODNB; Sell, Alan P. F.: *Robert Mackintosh: Theologian of Integrity*. Peter Lang, Bern 1977.

⁵ For whom see ODNB.

The Manchester Degree of Bachelor of Divinity was regarded as a degree of Master's status, for either a first degree or one year of successful study in the Faculty of Arts was required for admission to the courses. The degree was awarded on the successful completion of fifteen examined year-long courses, together with a paper on the English Bible, and one essay on an unseen subject written within three hours under examination conditions. The subjects were divided into three divisions: Philosophy and Doctrine, Comparative Religion and Ecclesiastical History, and Old and New Testaments. Candidates were required to choose one division and take all of the subjects within it; and to select some subjects from the other two divisions, with the proviso that Comparative Religion and biblical texts in Hebrew and Greek were compulsory. Context questions in Greek, Latin, French German and English were introduced into historical and doctrinal examination papers as appropriate. Candidates were required to pass a minimum of three papers at one examination session. Failed papers had to be re-taken the following year. All papers had to be successfully completed within seven years. It was a tough regime. Much higher still was the standard required for the Degree of Doctor of Divinity, the University's senior theological doctorate, earned by published works deemed to be of distinction. First awarded in 1920, there have been fewer than ten successful supplicants since 1904. The New Testament scholars, H. G. Meecham, H. G. Marsh and A. J. B. Higgins were among those who gained this prestigious degree.

A. S. Peake was succeeded in the Rylands Chair by the distinguished Congregational scholar, Charles Harold Dodd (1884–1973), who served from 1930 to 1935, when he removed to Cambridge. He was followed by the Presbyterian, Thomas Walter Manson (1893–1958), with whom my personal acquaintance with Manchester's New Testament scholars began.⁶

II

T. W. Manson was born in North Shields, Northumberland. He graduated with honours in logic and moral philosophy in the University of Glasgow, notwithstanding that his course had been interrupted by service in the Royal Field Artillery during World War I. He trained for the ministry of the Presbyterian Church of England at Westminster College, Cambridge, and concurrently studied at Christ's College. He won prizes and scholarships,

⁶ For all of the Rylands professors to date see the volume celebratory of the centenary of the Faculty of Theology: Larsen, Timothy (ed.): *Biblical Scholarship in the Twentieth Century: the Rylands Chair of Biblical Criticism and Exegesis at the University of Manchester, 1904–2004*, being the *Bulletin of the John Rylands University library of Manchester*, LXXXVI no. 3, Autumn, Manchester 2004. Larsen writes on Peake, James G. D. Dunn on Dodd, and Morna D. Hooker on Manson. For further assessments of the work of Peake, Dodd and Manson by New Testament specialists see McKim, Donald K. (ed.): *Dictionary of Major Biblical Interpreters*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2007.

and graduated with first class honours in Hebrew and Aramaic. He subsequently mastered Coptic. Following a three-year period as tutor at Westminster College, he was ordained in 1925 and, after a year with the Jewish Mission Institute in Bethnal Green, London, he became minister of the church at Falstone, Northumberland. Whilst there he published his first book, *The Teaching of Jesus* (1931), which earned him the degree of Doctor of Letters of Glasgow University. In 1932, on his appointment to the Rylands Chair at Manchester, C. H. Dodd vacated the Yates Chair of New Testament Greek at Mansfield (Congregational) College, Oxford, and Manson took his place. Then in 1936, when Dodd removed from Manchester to Cambridge, Manson again replaced him. Manson was the recipient of six honorary doctorates, and was elected a Fellow of the British Academy.

Armed with my Bachelor of Arts degree, I entered Manson's class in 1957, by which time his health was already causing concern, though from the cheerfulness of his disposition and the liveliness of his kindly wit, one would hardly have suspected this. His lectures were orderly, he breathed life into exegesis, and his expositions not only engaged the attention, but provided food for many a sermon thereafter. Above all, his were the lectures of one whose research instinct was undimmed, and who took delight in sharing his latest discoveries with his students. All of which is to say that far from reading the same lectures year after year, Manson's motivation in University teaching was "Come and see what I have found!" In this way he modelled the rigorous yet joyful life of scholarship to us, and this is what I have always sought to do in my own teaching. Manson certainly would not have understood the concept of "the text book for the course"; nor did he feel under any obligation to scamper through the set syllabus because of our forthcoming examination. The set New Testament Texts in my year were Luke, Romans and I John in Greek. Manson gave his lectures; we were examined on the syllabus! His manner was not dogmatic: he was not in the business of creating clones of himself, and he wanted us to reach our own conclusions. Thus, when discussing knotty problems of interpretation he would often present a variety of alternative views with great care and without bias, and then say, "You pay your money and you take your choice." Sadly, his illness progressed, he became more regularly absent from class, and he died, greatly mourned, on 1 May 1958, before the academic year was over.

Those who never had the privilege of sitting under him, should find no difficulty in detecting his enthusiasm for the subject, the depth of his scholarship, and the warmth of his humanity, from his writings, some of which contain material that he presented to us in class. The following are among the many themes that have remained with me from Manson's teaching and writings.

Given his thorough grasp of oriental languages, it is not surprising that Manson emphasised the importance of exploring the Jewish background to

the New Testament. We must, he thought, “use every resource we possess of knowledge, of historical imagination, and of religious insight to the one end of transporting ourselves back into the centre of the greatest crisis of the world’s history, to look as it were through the eyes of Jesus and to see God and man, heaven and earth, life and death, as he saw them [...]”⁷

He was persuaded that while the gospels do not give us material for a full biography of Jesus – the objective of the evangelists is, after all, to tell good news – we can nevertheless reconstruct a sufficiently reliable account of his life, ministry and teaching. Indeed, with an enthusiasm that some subsequent scholars have questioned, he contended for the priority of Mark’s gospel, and believed that it gave a reliable historical chronology of Jesus’s ministry, the focal point of which was Peter’s confession at Caesarea Philippi. He maintained this position in face of those form critics who emphasized the use of the history by the early church. He declared: “It is not higher criticism, but the higher credulity that boggles at a verse of Mark and swallows without a qualm pages of pure conjecture about the primitive Christians’ psychology and its workings on the pre-literary tradition.”⁸ Not the least important aspect of Manson’s teaching regarding the Jewish context of Jesus’s life, teaching and work, was his demonstration that, notwithstanding the ‘bad press’ given to the scribes and Pharisees, there were in fact some good Jewish rabbis: a revelation indeed to any students who had been reared on sermons of the more indiscriminating type.

Manson devoted much thought to the question of the Son of Man, and especially to the relation of that term to the idea of the kingdom of God. He understood the kingdom in terms of God’s reign, and of the faithful remnant who acknowledge it. The “Son of Man is, like the Servant of Jehovah, an ideal figure and stands for the manifestation of the Kingdom of God on earth in a people wholly devoted to their heavenly King.”⁹ That is to say, there is a collective dimension to the term. However, as a result of Jesus’s prophetic ministry, “Son of Man” comes to designate Jesus himself: “His mission is to create the Son of Man, the Kingdom of the saints of the Most High, to realise in Israel the ideal contained in the term.”¹⁰ But “when it becomes apparent that not even the disciples are ready to rise to the demands of the ideal, he stands alone, embodying in his own person the perfect response to the regal claims of God.”¹¹ It will be noted that the running theme in all of this is the way in which Jesus understood his

⁷ Manson, T. W.: *The Teaching of Jesus. Studies in its Form and Content*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2nd edn 1955, 5.

⁸ Idem: Is it possible to write a life of Christ? In: *The Expository Times* 53 (1942), 249.

⁹ Manson, T. W.: *The Teaching of Jesus* 227.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid. 228.

mission; Manson was not given to speculative musings on the Messianic consciousness of Jesus. He was a “feet on the ground” kind of scholar.

Manson’s enquiry into the ministry of John the Baptist is of particular interest. He argues that John’s

very sharp and stinging point [...] is that he deliberately invites the children of Abraham to submit to a rite which had been devised for the benefit of pagans. He says in effect [...]. You have only one chance. You must begin where the unclean Gentile begins – at the bottom. You must rediscover, and re-learn your Judaism from the beginning. Only so can you hope to have any part in the good time coming.¹²

John is presented as a stern, uncompromising prophet in the mould of Amos. His baptism is not “the preliminary to something better, [...] it is the last chance of escaping something very much worse, namely the coming judgement. [...] John’s positive teaching serves to mitigate the worst evils of an evil system; but it does not and cannot transform the system. It could relieve the sickness of society; but it was not the radical cure.”¹³ “In reality”, as Manson puts it elsewhere, “it was the last effort of the traditional Jewish legal religion to vindicate itself by producing changed lives. It failed, and where it had failed the gospel succeeded and took its place.”¹⁴

In his scholarly enquiries into the sayings of Jesus, Manson delighted to bring out the heart of the Christian gospel. I give two examples. The first concerns the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10: 29–37), in which Jesus responds to a lawyer’s question, What must I do to inherit eternal life? The response is part of what Manson call’s Luke’s “Gospel for the Outcast”. He first notes that some have objected that Jesus fails to provide a definition of “neighbour”. To Manson this is a “shallow criticism”: “The question is unanswerable, and ought not to be asked. For love does not begin by defining its objects: it discovers them.”¹⁵ The priest and the Levite represent the national aristocracy, and they pass by the wounded man: “Their callousness stands in sharp contrast to the ideal of which they were the official guardians [Leviticus 19: 18].”¹⁶ The Samaritan helps the victim, leaves the equivalent of two days’ wages with the owner of the caravan-serai, and promises to make good any deficit on his return. On the supposition that the victim was a Jew, he was, technically, a neighbour of the priest and the Levite, but not of the Samaritan; yet it was the last who acted in love: “Love created neighbourliness” and “it is ‘love’ that is fundamental,

¹² Idem: *The Servant Messiah. A Study in the Public Ministry of Jesus*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1953, 44–45.

¹³ Manson, T. W.: *The Sayings of Jesus*. SCM Press, London 1949, 41, 254.

¹⁴ Idem: *The Servant Messiah* 49.

¹⁵ Idem: *The Sayings of Jesus* 261.

¹⁶ Ibid. 262.

not neighbourhood."¹⁷ When the lawyer correctly specifies the true neighbour, Jesus's injunction, "Go, and do thou likewise", is the answer to the original question he asked.

For the second example I turn to the parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard (Matthew 20: 1–18). In my mind this story functions as a standing rebuke to "Pelagians" in whatsoever guise they come, who think that their many years of good Christian works will earn them extra favour over any "Johnny-come-lately" who makes a death-bed repentance. In a nutshell, those who came to work last, and worked for one hour only, were paid twelve denarii – the same as those who had worked for twelve hours through the heat of the day. At the end of the day (= the end of the age) comes the reckoning. Those who worked all day long are aggrieved, and protest on grounds of human justice. The householder appeals to his generosity and implicitly rebukes the workers' covetousness: they have received what was agreed. Manson comments:

it is fortunate for most of us that God does not deal with us on the basis of strict justice and sound economics. [...] [T]he rewards of such poor service as men can give to the Kingdom are not an exact *quid pro quo*. They are an expression of love towards His servants [...] There is such a thing as a twelfth part of a denar. It was called a *pondion*. But there is no such thing as a twelfth part of the love of God.¹⁸

Already we begin to detect the strong ethical thrust in Manson's expositions. Did he not say of Jesus's words, "why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say", that "There are few sadder words in the New Testament than Luke 6: 46"?¹⁹ Not, indeed, that he regarded Jesus as prescribing a collection of ethical prescriptions to be read straight off the page and obeyed. On the contrary, to identify one's will with God's will is to move towards a goal, and "for the purposes of that pilgrimage the teaching of Jesus is a compass rather than an ordnance map. He who grasps it in its wholeness and simplicity is sure of his direction: he must pick his own steps."²⁰ Thus, "In place of a rule of conduct to obey", the lawyer who was answered by the parable of the Good Samaritan "is given a type of character to imitate [...] [Jesus] refuses to legislate, because he is concerned with the springs of conduct rather than with the outward acts."²¹ In my

¹⁷ Manson, T. W.: *The Sayings of Jesus* 263.

¹⁸ Ibid. 220. The last sentence here calls to mind the remark of the Congregational Cambridge historian, Bernard Lord Manning, who rebuked those who thought in terms of degrees of sacramental "validity" thus: "We do not deal in percentages with the grace of God." See *Essays in Orthodox Dissent*. Independent Press, London (1939), 1953, 116.

¹⁹ Manson, T. W.: *The Sayings of Jesus* 60.

²⁰ Ibid. 37.

²¹ Idem: *The Teaching of Jesus* 301.

opinion, Manson's convictions on this matter are nowhere more clearly expressed than when, in a posthumous work, *Ethics and the Gospel* (1960), he contrasts the quintessence of the Jewish ethic with that of the Christian. He reflects upon Mark 12: 28–34, where a scribe asks Jesus which is the first commandment, to which Jesus replies that the first is love God, the second is love your neighbour as yourself. This, Manson declares, is the quintessence of Jewish ethics. The quintessence of Christian ethics is to be found in John 14: 12, "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you." This, Manson insists, is not an ideal, it is an act and deed; it does not abrogate the old law, but fulfils it: "Jesus shows what is really involved in love of neighbour; and shows it in thought, word and deed. [...] To love as Christ loves means to put so high a valuation on your neighbour that it will be as impossible for you to harbour evil thoughts about him as to do him a physical injury."²² Such love may be a matter of action rather than an ideal, but Manson is not unaware of the challenge involved. We are therefore relieved when he adds,

The living Christ is there to lead the way for all who are prepared to follow him.

More than that, the strength to follow is there too. The living Christ still has two hands, one to point the way, and the other held out to help us along. So the Christian ideal lies before us, not as a remote and austere mountain peak, an ethical Everest which we must scale by our own skill and endurance; but as a road on which we may walk with Christ as guide and friend. And we are assured, as we set out on the journey, that he is with us always, 'even unto the end of the world' (Matthew 28: 20).²³

There speaks Manson the preacher and pastor; and we should not forget that he fulfilled both of those roles with conspicuous success. As he well knew,

Historic Christianity is first and foremost a Gospel, the proclamation to the world of Jesus Christ and Him crucified. For the primitive Church the central thing is the Cross on the Hill rather than the Sermon on the Mount. [...] [Hence] the chief motive for the preservation and collection of the sayings of Jesus: they were needed in the pastoral work, which followed necessarily on any successful missionary effort.²⁴

If Manson's major way of ministering was through his scholarship, he by no means neglected the life of the Church around him. During World

²² Manson, T. W.: *Ethics and the Gospel*. SCM Press, London 1960, 63, 64. The lectures in this book were assembled and seen through the press by Manson's colleague, Ronald Preston (1913–2001), who pioneered the teaching of Christian Ethics at Manchester. For Preston see ODNB.

²³ Ibid. 68.

²⁴ Idem: *The Sayings of Jesus* 9.

War II he assumed pastoral charge of St. Aidan's Presbyterian Church, Withington, Manchester; he was faithful at Presbytery meetings, served his church on numerous committees, and was called to be Moderator of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of England in 1953. He was a leader in the Manchester Free Church Council, and in the Manchester and Salford Council of Churches, and when he died the Anglican Bishop of Manchester, William D. L. Greer, delivered the address at a memorial service in Manchester Cathedral.

Manson did not merely practise ministry, he wrote about it too. The heart of his position emerges in a discussion of the views of the Anglo-Catholic Bishop Kenneth Kirk, in which he demolishes Kirk's argument that, like the *shaliach*, the apostles were charged with transmitting their office and authority to their successors. Again,

When Dr. Kirk says that "our Lord endowed his Church with two great gifts: the means of grace (the word and sacraments), and the ministry of grace (the apostles and their fellow-labourers)",²⁵ my complaint is not that this doctrine is too high, but that it is not high enough. Our Lord did better than that: He gave the Church Himself. His real and abiding presence in the Church is the supreme "means of grace" and the supreme "ministry of grace."²⁶

More succinctly: "There is only one 'essential ministry' in the Church, the perpetual ministry of the Risen and Ever-Present Lord Himself."²⁷ This ministry has the power "to create and comprehend in itself a true priesthood of believers, whose priestly service is taken up into and made part of his supreme sacrifice."²⁸ Where the Lord's Supper is concerned,

The function of the minister who celebrates is to be the representative and spokesman of God through Christ to the congregation and of the congregation to God through Christ. [...] A worthy minister is one who is so far identified with Christ by his calling and by his constantly renewed dedication of himself to God in Christ that the love of God is not only offered to the faithful but is also seen to be offered. A worthy minister is one who is so far identified with his people by sympathy and understanding that they can truly participate in the thanksgiving and self-oblation which he makes on their behalf as on his own.²⁹

Thomas Walter Manson was such a minister.

²⁵ Manson quotes from Kirk's paper in *The Apostolic Ministry. Essays on the History and Doctrine of Episcopacy*. Hodder and Stoughton, London 1946, 8.

²⁶ Manson, T. W.: *The Church's Ministry*. Hodder and Stoughton, London 1948, 21.

²⁷ *Ibid.* 100.

²⁸ *Idem: Ministry and Priesthood: Christ's and Ours*. Epworth Press, London 1958, 63.

²⁹ *Ibid.* 71.

III

During Professor Manson's absences through illness, the Reverend (now Doctor) Owen Ellis Evans, Lecturer in New Testament at Hartley Victoria College,³⁰ was drafted in to teach in his place. It was no easy task to pick up the threads of the course on more than one occasion. Indeed, Dr. Evans, who at the age of ninety is my sole surviving New Testament teacher, has referred in conversation to the experience as his "baptism of fire." It was not exactly plain-sailing for the students either, for Manson had set an unusually stiff examination paper on New Testament Texts, the contents of which were unknown to Evans. The entire class failed! We were required to take the course again, albeit with the texts prescribed for the following academic session, 1958–1959: John, I Corinthians and I Peter. They were taught by Evans, whose health, mercifully, remained intact throughout. The upshot was that I, who specialized in the Philosophy and Doctrine set of courses, in the end was examined on as many New Testament texts in Greek as those students who had opted for the Old and New Testament group of subjects. I do not regret this uncovenanted mercy, though at the time it was something of an imposition, not least because, for a reason to be given shortly, I was bent on completing the Bachelor of Divinity course in two years, the minimum time permitted.

Owen Evans was born at Barmouth, Wales, in 1920. From 1945 to 1946 he served as a probationary minister in the Llanfair Caereinion circuit of the Methodist Church, and then trained for the ministry at Wesley College, Headingley, Leeds, where the distinguished New Testament scholar, Vincent Taylor, was Principal.³¹ In 1949 he graduated Bachelor of Divinity (London) with First Class Honours. He was immediately appointed Assistant Tutor at Headingley, and in 1951 he was awarded the degree of Master of Arts (Leeds) with Distinction. He was ordained in the same year, and appointed to the Pwllheli circuit of the Methodist Church. From 1953–1969 he was Tutor in New Testament Language and Literature at Hartley Victoria College, combining this post from 1955 with that of Lecturer in New Testament at Manchester University. It was here that he worked initially under the direction of T. W. Manson, and he later published an account of this experience in the context of a comparison of Taylor, who had taught him, with Manson, whose lecturing apprentice he became.³²

³⁰ Victoria and Hartley Colleges were united in 1934, consequent upon the Methodist union of 1932.

³¹ For Taylor (1887–1968) see ODNB; McKim, Donald K.: *Dictionary of Major Biblical Interpreters*. Evans, Owen E.: Theologians of our Time: Vincent Taylor. In: *The Expository Times* 75 (1964–1965), 164–168.

³² Evans, Owen E.: On serving two masters. In: Sell, Alan P. F. (ed.): *The Bible in Church, Academy and Culture. Essays in Honour of the Reverend Dr. John Tudno Williams*. Wipf and Stock, Eugene, OR, 2011, 124–141; cf. 16.

From 1969 until his retirement in 1988 Evans taught at the University of Wales Bangor, where he became Senior Lecturer, and served as Dean of the Faculty of Theology from 1983 to 1986. Before he left Manchester in 1969 he was already involved in the new Welsh translation of the Bible. From 1963 to 1988 he chaired the New Testament and Apocrypha Translation Panel, and in 1974 he became Director of the project as a whole. After the new version of the Bible, complete with Apocrypha, appeared in 1988 as part of the celebration of the 400th Anniversary of the publication of the original Welsh Bible (the work of Bishop William Morgan) in 1588, Evans, who in 1986 had been appointed Eilian Owen Fellow at the National Library of Wales with such a project in view, spent the first ten years of his "retirement" preparing a comprehensive Concordance – a massive volume of 1180 pages – of the whole of the *New Welsh Bible*.³³ Without question Evans's work on the Welsh Bible will be his lasting memorial, and it is entirely fitting that, in recognition of his scholarly work, he was awarded the Honorary Degree of Doctor of Divinity (Wales) in 1989.

Evans has published a number of books and articles in Welsh. His English works include *The Gospel according to St. John* (1965) in the Epworth Preacher's Commentaries series, and the A. S. Peake Memorial Lecture for 1975, entitled *On Translating the Bible* – a lecture that he was very well placed to give. He edited Vincent Taylor's posthumous work, *The Passion Narrative of St. Luke: A Critical and Historical Investigation* (1972), and delivered a lecture at Wrexham on the occasion of the centenary of C. H. Dodd's birth in that town.³⁴

It is the expanded version of his 1970 Pantyfedwen Trust Lecture that best shows Evans utilizing his linguistic skill and scholarly discrimination in order to develop an argument which has implications for Christian living. The book is entitled, *Saints in Christ Jesus* (1975). He sets out from an account of the Jewish background to the usage of "saints" as applied to Christians. We learn that lying behind the Christian use of the term is the Old Testament idea of Israel as God's holy, or separated, people; and that in this status both religious and ethical obligations are involved. He finds that from the final recension of Daniel 7, through the Similitudes of Enoch, the apocalyptic seventeenth Psalm of Solomon, and the Qumran writings, a development can be traced "in which the designation 'the holy ones', originally applied to heavenly beings close to God, came to be applied to the faithful, righteous remnant of Israel, the elect who were to inherit the eschatological Kingdom when the Messiah came."³⁵

³³ *Mynegair i'r Beibl Cyumraeg Newydd*. University of Wales Press, Cardiff, 1998.

³⁴ See *The C. H. Dodd Centenary Lectures*. Gwasanaeth Llyfrgelloedd ac Amgueddfeydd, Mold 1984.

³⁵ Evans, Owen E.: *Saints in Christ Jesus. A Study of the Christian Life in the New Testament*. John Penry Press, Swansea 1975, 27.

Turning to the New Testament, Evans shows that “the saints” is used of Christians on sixty occasions, “those who are sanctified” on eight occasions; and that of the former, thirty-nine occurrences are in the Pauline epistles, thirteen in Revelation and two in Hebrews. He finds it most surprising that “the saints” is used on four occasions only in the Book of Acts, and “the sanctified” twice; moreover, “it is Palestinian Christians in and around Jerusalem that are designated ‘saints’ in each of the occurrences of *hoi hagioi*”³⁶ in Acts. In Paul’s letters the predominant idea is that Christians are already saints by calling – sainthood is not a future status to be aspired to – and their status has not been earned by them; it is God’s free, unmerited, gift. Instead of being slaves to sin, Christians are now slaves of God. They are possessed by the Holy Spirit, who aids them in all aspects of their Christian life, not least in their prayers. While individual Christians are challenged to be holy, the overriding idea is that Christians belong to a fellowship of saints; indeed “almost invariably [...] this designation for Christians is used in the plural.”³⁷ Their worship is not a matter of outward ritual but of inward disposition. Membership of this corporate body has ethical implications, especially *vis à vis* those who belong to the household of faith. Furthermore, “There is [...] an intimate connection between the concept of Christians as *hoi hagioi* and the Pauline concept of *en Christo*”,³⁸ for the saints [it]are incorporated ‘in Christ’ through baptism [...] What God effects in the believer at baptism [...] is grounded in what he did for him in the life and death and resurrection of Christ [...] to be baptized means to be united with Christ in his death and resurrection.”³⁹ Mutual familial duties and ministry in the sense of service to those of the community and beyond are reviewed; the fact is recognized that the saints are also sinners; and the cautionary word is noted, namely, that the believer’s “consecration is not an irrevocable and automatic guarantee of his final salvation (cf. I Cor. 3. 7) [...] [it] depends upon his perseverance in faith.”⁴⁰

In his concluding chapter Evans draws out the implications of his analysis for Christian living. He reminds us that we are concerned with a community of saints; “the Christian life is not a private affair of the individual believer.”⁴¹ People become saints as Christ unites them with himself and imparts to them his life and character. Saints have been chosen and called by God – chosen (predestined) from the beginning, yet the call is not irrevocable. The saints “form the eschatological community to which belongs

³⁶ Evans, Owen E.: *Saints in Christ Jesus* 41.

³⁷ *Ibid.* 84.

³⁸ *Ibid.* 57.

³⁹ *Ibid.* 58–59.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* 103. Presumably this is an enabled perseverance of the ‘I, yet not I but Christ’ variety.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* 125.

the inheritance of the Kingdom of God,"⁴² and they are endowed with the gift of the Holy Spirit. They are a separated community, in the world, but not of it. While they have "a special degree of loyalty and of obligation to one another," they also have a relationship to non-Christians "which also involves love and obligation."⁴³ They are a universal and a witnessing community; they are also a militant community in the sense that although Christ has won the decisive battle in the cosmic war between God and his enemies, the struggle continues for the time being. Again, the saints are a worshipping community distinguished by moral purity and goodness. At this point Evans adds the important proviso:

Moral purity and goodness are not the *precondition* of sainthood in the New Testament sense; a person does not become a saint in virtue of the proved moral excellence of his character. But moral purity and goodness are the proper and necessary *consequence* of sainthood in the New Testament sense; a person who is a saint by virtue of God's call [...] and incorporation in Christ [...] is expected henceforth to display in his character the highest moral excellence. And to the fulfilment of this obligation the New Testament constantly calls him.⁴⁴

By the power of the Holy Spirit those who are saints by calling may become what they are.

I said that this fine study has implications for Christian living; its implications for ecclesiology and ecumenical theology are no less significant.

IV

As a candidate for the Congregational ministry,⁴⁵ I was able to live in Lancashire Independent College for six years. The idea was that I should spend three years on my BA and a further three on the BD. However, I fell foul of Manchester's matriculation regulations, owing to the policy at my school, which was that students who were destined to take advanced level examinations in particular subjects could skip the ordinary level papers in those subjects. Among my advanced level subjects was English Language and Literature, and the examining board used by my school was the University of London Matriculation Board. I successfully matriculated in that University. Manchester University, however, could not accept this, because the Northern Joint Matriculation Board required a pass in English

⁴² Evans, Owen E.: *Saints in Christ Jesus* 130.

⁴³ *Ibid.* 135.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* 143.

⁴⁵ Together with the majority of the English and English-speaking Welsh Congregationalists I (like Gordon Robinson and Eric Hull) went into the 1972 union of the Congregational Church in England and Wales with the Presbyterian Church of England which yielded the United Reformed Church.

Language at the ordinary level. Thus although I had passed English at the advanced level, I was required to delay my start on the BA degree until the following academic year so that I could, in late November, sit the Northern Board examination paper at the ordinary level. In this I succeeded, and I vowed that I would win back my “lost” year in due course by completing the formidable BD in the minimum period of two years – which I did.

Not all was lost, however, because I spent the bulk of the academic year 1953–1954 studying for the University’s Certificate in Biblical Knowledge, the courses for which I found enjoyable and beneficial. The New Testament papers were taught by my College Principal, William Gordon Robinson (1903–1977).⁴⁶ He was born in Liverpool, graduated in philosophy at the University there, and won the Edward Rathbone Philosophy prize. He proceeded to Lancashire Independent College with a view to the Congregational ministry, and gained his BD at Manchester University. He then went, armed with scholarships, to Mansfield College Oxford, where he graduated in theology again. He later earned Manchester’s degree of Doctor of Philosophy for a thesis on the history of Dissent in the North of England. At once we see that he was a man of parts: philosopher, New Testament scholar, historian. He was also a very lucid and orderly teacher; a thoughtful preacher, a master of the art and craft of free, or conceived, prayer;⁴⁷ a writer and broadcaster able to engage with a variety of audiences from the scholarly to the youthful; and a diligent administrator who liked to reply to correspondence before the first lecture of the day.⁴⁸ He was possessed of a keen sense of humour, and more than competent in carrying on the College’s tradition in those days of puncturing pretentiousness (especially of the ecclesiastical sort) with teasing witticisms. He believed in having things done decently and in order, as students who attended College prayers in carpet slippers swiftly discovered. Failure in such matters was more than a failure in etiquette, it was a poor witness. But any peevishness was more than compensated for by his kindness: quietly passing his preaching fee to the wife of the manse in which he had spent the weekend; travelling the length of the country to offer a prayer at the Valedictory Service held at my small home church prior to my ordination; and later

⁴⁶ For whom see ODNB.

⁴⁷ He published, anonymously, *Our Heritage of Free Prayer*. Independent Press, London n.d.

⁴⁸ I possess a letter of Robinson’s written to a Mr. and Mrs. Doman on 15 June 1964. It reveals his graciousness, his administrative punctuality and his generosity (my italics): “I want to write this brief but very cordial note, *first thing on Monday morning*, to say how happy a time I had in your home yesterday and how grateful I am to you for all your kindness to me. It was a real pleasure to spend the day with you and to be made so welcome by you both Thank you very much indeed. *I hope you will accept the enclosed book as a little memento of my visit*. Warmest good wishes and regards, Yours sincerely, Gordon Robinson.”

conducting the Church Anniversary Services at Sedbergh, one of the two churches in my first pastorate. For reasons incomprehensible to some, he was a keen supporter of Manchester City Football Club.

Ordained in 1929, Robinson served the churches at Gatley (1929–1932) and Union Street, Oldham (1932–1941), and was then Principal until his retirement in 1968. He lectured in the University in New Testament from 1943 to 1951, and in the history of Dissent from 1951 to 1970.⁴⁹ He was secretary to the Faculty of Theology from 1948 to 1958. He was twice called to the chair of the Lancashire Congregational Union (1946, 1956); and, having been installed as Chairman of the Congregational Union of England and Wales (1955–1956), he returned to the College to be greeted by jubilant students, who had suspended across the entrance hall a large banner bearing the text “Of sinners I am chief.”

Robinson taught courses in New Testament Introduction, Mark and I Corinthians. He published *An Introduction to the New Testament* (1949) which was twice reprinted within a year. This book was for the use of pupils and teachers in secondary schools. It is engagingly written and suitably stretching. It includes some illustrations, a table of dates, guidance on the pronunciation of difficult names, and questions and subjects for discussion. The themes include the world into which Jesus came, the life and teaching of Jesus, the early missions and letters, and the life of the early Christians. In a chapter entitled “How the gospels were written” he does not hesitate to introduce the children to the synoptic problem, providing a diagram for good measure; and when introducing I and II Corinthians he elucidates the four letters embedded within the latter. Robinson contributed *The Literature of the New Testament* (1971) to a series entitled *Understanding the Bible*, which was edited by his Old Testament colleague and successor as Principal, Edgar Jones.⁵⁰ The envisaged readership is senior school students and junior students in higher education. The kinds of literature are introduced: historical, theological, practical, gospels, general letters, and apocalyptic; the forming of the New Testament canon is discussed, and the apocryphal writings are introduced. Lest it be thought that Robinson was reluctant to stray from the New

⁴⁹ Students who took the Reformation option in Ecclesiastical History, as I did, were well served by Gordon Rupp (the Continental Reformation), C. W. Dugmore (the English Reformation: Church of England), and Gordon Robinson (the English Reformation: Dissent). Although they are outside the purview of this paper, we should note that in the field of Dissenting history Robinson published *William Roby (1766–1830) and the Revival of Independency in the North*. Independent Press, London 1954 (a work derived from his doctoral thesis); *A History of the Lancashire Congregational Union 1806–1856*. Lancashire Congregational Union, Manchester 1955; brief biographies of *Benjamin Waugh* and *Jonathan Scott* (1961); and articles in the *Transactions of the Congregational Historical Society* and *The Congregational Quarterly*.

⁵⁰ For Jones (1912–1991) see *Year Book of the United Reformed Church*, 1991–1992, 229.

Testament, mention may be made of his lucid and thorough study of the *Historians of Israel (I) 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings* (1962), which appeared in the series of *Bible Guides* edited by William Barclay and F. F. Bruce (Manson's successor in the Rylands Chair).

Robinson's most substantial study of a single New Testament book is found in *The Gospel and the Church in a Pagan World. A Study in I Corinthians* (1958). The basic material echoes his class lectures on the book, but here, with a wider adult readership in mind, it is illuminated by paraphrases of sections of the letter(s), and enlivened with exposition. The material is treated under the following headings: The Gospel for Corinth and the world; The Church and its fellowship; The Church and its problems; The Church and its worship; and Life in the setting of eternity. Each theme is appropriately sub-divided: the second, for example, concerns The nature of the fellowship; The enemies of the fellowship; and Recall to fellowship. Robinson's approach may be illustrated by his introduction to the section headed, The nature of the fellowship:

It is said that there was once a Member of Parliament who in a speech in the House of Commons defined the Christian Church as "a voluntary association for providing religious services on Sunday for that section of the population which chooses to take advantage of them." Apart from the glaringly false presuppositions that the Church works only on Sundays and is concerned only with "religious services" it is difficult to imagine anything further removed from the truth. [...] At the very beginning of his letter, Paul stresses three phrases which are fundamental to his thinking. They are: "The Church of God", "sanctified", and "called saints" (*i.e.* "saints who are called").⁵¹

It will be appreciated that Robinson the historian was no less interested in the "saints", for the concept of visible sainthood is at the heart of Congregational ecclesiology and polity.⁵²

Gordon Robinson's writings were by no means directed to students only. He had a strong conception of the ministry of all the saints. Indeed, his address from the Chair of the Congregational Union is entitled, *Let us Give Ourselves to our Ministry*.⁵³ He took every opportunity of communicating with people of all kinds, mostly by writing, sometimes by broadcasting. Whether or not he learned the importance of deadlines from his father Frederick, who was chief

⁵¹ Robinson, W. Gordon.: *The Gospel and the Church in a Pagan World. A Study in I Corinthians*. Independent Press, London 1958, 41–2.

⁵² See Sell, Alan P. F.: *Saints: Visible, Orderly and Catholic. The Congregational Idea of the Church*. World Alliance of Reformed Churches and Pickwick Publications, Geneva and Allison Park, PA 1986.

⁵³ The motto on the crest of Lancashire Independent College was "*eis ergon diakonias*" (Ephesians 4: 12), which the Principal would sometimes intentionally mis-translate, "Leave the work to the deacons!"

reporter and assistant editor of the *Widnes Weekly News*, I do not know; but Robinson could certainly maintain the pace of the regular columnist. His weekly contributions to *The Christian World* were gathered in *New Testament Treasure* (1954), and for ten years he wrote articles for the wide readership of *The Daily Dispatch*, which achieved more permanent form in *Catchwords, Character and the Calendar* (1957). In the first section of the latter he found his point of departure in such catchwords as “I couldn’t care less”, “Which way is the wind blowing?”, and so forth. He dealt with moral issues under “Character”, and with the Christian year under “Calendar”. His investigation of numerous by-ways in the New Testament which illuminate the text appeared under the title, *New Testament Detection* (1964). *Living Words and their Meaning* (1968) is a most useful glossary of biblical terms concisely defined, while *Deliverance, Challenge Victory* (1954) drives to the heart of the Gospel message. Among his broadcast talks are *Perplexing Parables* (1955), and “*You’re the Man I’m Getting at*” (1956) – David and Nathan, and others. I refer finally to Robinson’s short book in the series, *Basics of the Christian Faith* (1975). Entitled, *Jesus, Lord and Saviour*,⁵⁴ it is a masterly account of Christ’s person and work, with reference to Jesus’s life, miracles, creeds and atonement theories, and more – all in just fifty-five pages. It ends thus:

Salvation comes “by faith alone”, not by man’s striving to “get right” with God but by his response to the love of God who first loved us. [...] Because our deepest feelings are reflected in the exultant hymns of the Church our final thoughts about who Christ is and what he does can be looked for in the hymnaries of Christendom. Meditate then on these and let questing end in wonder and in praise.⁵⁵

V

John Howarth Eric Hull (1923–1977), known as Eric, was my fourth teacher of New Testament: in particular, of New Testament Greek.⁵⁶ In my day he was a part-time tutor, who cycled to the College weekly to take his classes. A Lancastrian through and through, he was born at Penwortham, Preston, and was himself an alumnus of Lancashire Independent College. He graduated BA and BD of the University of Manchester, and was awarded the Bishop Lee Prize in New Testament Greek. He was ordained at Oakvale, Liverpool, where he served from 1946 to 1951. He removed to Timperley, where he remained until 1958, when he accepted the call to Chorlton-cum-Hardy, Manchester. His

⁵⁴ Robinson’s favoured way of concluding prayers was, “through Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour.”

⁵⁵ Robinson, W. Gordon.: *Jesus, Lord and Saviour*. Denholme House Press, Nutfield 1975, 59.

⁵⁶ See the *Year Book* of the United Reformed Church in England and Wales, 1979, 260.

work in the churches was characterized by biblically-based preaching, energetic service, and assiduous pastoral care. He had something of the north-country directness about him (some “soft” southerners like myself might be tempted on occasion to think it bluntness) as when, on his own account, he asked the deacons on his arrival at Timperley, “What night is [Masonic] Lodge night – there’s no point planning church activities then!” But he was of the “salt of the earth”, and very kind to me, not least when, in 1963, he accepted the invitation to preach at Sedbergh for the Church Anniversary, and baptized our second daughter during one of the services. His kindness did not in any way inhibit his slave-driving zeal in demanding a considerable number of Greek-English and English-Greek translations per week, or his determination to demolish us at table tennis after class.

In 1961 Hull was appointed to the Chair of New Testament Studies in the College, and from that time onwards he was able to devote himself more consistently to scholarly work. In 1967 his first, well-received, book, *The Holy Spirit in the Acts of the Apostles* was published. This was based on the thesis he successfully submitted for Manchester’s degree of Master of Arts.⁵⁷ While not endorsing the sharp distinction that some scholars drew between history and theology, Hull argued that the theology of Acts is a developing theology, but theology is there. He grants that the relation of the Spirit to Christ is not consistently defined; he observes that although the work of the Spirit is diverse, little is said of the Spirit’s work “in producing repentance and faith in Jesus; though, clearly, when men are led to Christ through preaching, for instance, the prior operation of the Spirit is envisaged.”⁵⁸ He concludes that while the theology in Acts is by no means unimportant, Luke’s primary objective was to show how the mission of the Church grew out of the labours of previously disillusioned disciples of Jesus, and how the Gospel spread far and wide. Indeed, “Perhaps [Luke’s] greatest theological contribution was his understanding of why the Church is here, what its purpose is and how that purpose can be achieved. The Church is here to allow Christ to continue His ministry through it.”⁵⁹

In 1969 Hull was appointed part-time Lecturer in the University, and two years later he published *The Message of the New Testament* – a contribution to the series *Understanding the Bible*, edited by his colleague, Edgar Jones. He discusses the living God who rules, cares, judges and saves; the ministry, teaching and risen life of the Son of God; the person, work and

⁵⁷ In those days the MA was a research degree, the product of which was expected to be publishable in whole or in part. Entry to it was on the basis of the combination BA, BD, or BA with first or upper second class honours. In more recent time MAs have been achievable by course work, and the M. Phil. has, in a number of universities, become the first research degree.

⁵⁸ Hull, J. H. E.: *The Holy Spirit in the Acts of the Apostles*. Lutterworth Press, London 1967, 176.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* 178.

gift of the Holy Spirit; and the Christian community, its nature, worship and sacraments. It is an admirable conspectus of great themes, which does not shirk the difficult textual and theological issues. Nothing but good would come if it were to be reprinted for the benefit of those church members who still engage in Bible *study*.

Who can say what more might have flowed from Eric Hull's pen? To great rejoicing he was installed as Principal of Lancashire Independent College in succession to Edgar Jones in July 1977. To the deep sorrow of many, and to the great loss of the Church below, he died before his first term as Principal was ended, on 29 November 1977.

VI

In addition to the University courses, students at Lancashire College were required to attend courses on Pastoral Theology, Worship, and other topics; they were despatched to conduct services far and wide on most Sundays; the life of the College was sustained by morning and evening prayers; and on the first and last Saturday morning of every term they had to sit an examination on the English Bible. The scheme of these examinations had been devised by Gordon Robinson's predecessor, Principal A. J. Grieve.⁶⁰ The idea was that a student who completed the full six years of training would have been examined on the English text of every book in the Bible, and would therefore not enter the ministry having studied only the set texts required for University examinations. At the time it sometimes seemed to be a chore (and it is hard to see how it could be replicated today, when fewer ministerial candidates are in residence); but it was an invaluable discipline and I am grateful for it. When to this is added the benefits received from the teaching and writings of Manson, Evans, Robinson and Hull, I cannot but conclude that my inheritance of New Testament scholarship is a valuable one indeed, and that I was privileged to be a student in the University of Manchester's Faculty of Theology during a vintage period in its life.

⁶⁰ For Grieve see Surman, Charles E.: *Alexander James Grieve, 1874–1952*, Lancashire Independent College, Manchester 1954.