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New Testament Studies: 1954–2004

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It is not easy to review 49 volumes of a periodical, amounting to 196 numbers, each number containing, on average, at least six pieces. I cannot claim to have read all the articles when they first appeared; I have read only two in preparation for this celebratory note. I have known *NTS* from the day of its birth, and indeed (in a sense to be explained) from before its birth. No praise from me could enhance its reputation. Of course, it does not maintain an unvarying excellence, but its best contributions are among the best pieces of New Testament study to be found anywhere, and a great deal is written that falls below its lowest level.

The cover of *NTS* indicates that it is published 'in association with' (in the earlier numbers, 'under the auspices of') Studiorum Novi Testamenti Societas. Journal and Society have been linked from the beginning, and it is impossible to deal with the origin of the one without considering also that of the other. Both are mentioned in the earliest documentary evidence we have. At the Faith and Order Conference held in Edinburgh in 1937, and under the prompting of J. de Zwaan, a small group of New Testament scholars met. The meeting was reported to a larger number in a letter dated 8 March 1938. This spoke of the desirability of a New Testament Society and of the value of a new quarterly devoted to work on the New Testament. Plans to put these proposals into effect were made, and were sadly interrupted in 1939. The first general meeting of the Society was held in 1947; since then meetings have been held annually, with one additional meeting.

The journal is not quite so old, nor is it the first publication of the Society. An annual Book List was contemplated, but little came of this. In 1950 however it was resolved to issue a Bulletin, containing the papers given at the meeting of that year. These were given by H. Clavier (Presidential paper), J. Munck, E. G. Selwyn, and M. Black. R. H. Lightfoot undertook publication – a generous act on his part, for he was already editor of the *Journal of Theological Studies* and probably was somewhat fearful (unnecessarily, as it proved) of the effect the new publication might have on the older journal. Bulletins II and III followed in 1951 and 1952. A further publication preceded *NTS* as we know it today as a consequence of the only extraordinary meeting held by the Society. This, like the Bulletin, was hoped to encourage the

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growth of the membership outside the British Isles. It was held at Bern at Easter 1952, when four papers were given under the general title 'Man in God's Design according to the New Testament'. In September of the same year these were published as a booklet. This was edited and publication arranged by H. Clavier.

After these preliminary steps the Society was ready to publish its own quarterly journal. This was done, and has continued to be done, through the Cambridge University Press, which has been in many ways helpful to the Society. The first copies were distributed at the first ordinary meeting of the Society held outside Britain, at Marburg in September 1954. The first editor was Matthew Black, assisted by an editorial committee elected by the Society. Publication took place at dates in line with the familiar academic year, in October, January, April, and July, until Volume 27, in which there were five numbers, permitting publication thereafter to be regulated by the calendar year.

One further step in the development of publication by S.N.T.S. is to be recorded. It was decided to initiate 'a series of monograph supplements to the journal *New Testament Studies*. The main purpose of the series is to make publication possible of work which is too long for inclusion in the journal.' I quote from the dust cover on the first monograph publication, Bertil Gärtner's *The Temple and the Community in Qumran and the New Testament*, published in 1965. Since then more than 100 monographs have been published.

So much for the history of *NTS*. I have remarked on the difficulty – I should have said, the impossibility – of reviewing 49 volumes. I shall not attempt the impossible, but as a reader of S.N.T.S. publications since 1950 I shall allow myself to put down a few thoughts that have occurred to me. They are not a systematic assessment.

My first observation, however, is of the extraordinarily high level of scholarship that the journal has maintained. Of course the level has not been uniform, but some (myself included) would say that the note was pitched in the first two numbers, each of which began with an article by Rudolf Bultmann, whose learning, depth, and originality cannot fail to command the admiration of every Neutestamentler even when his conclusions fail to command their agreement.

From the beginning there have been contributions dealing with many of the standard themes of New Testament study; there are exegetical studies, and essays in literary and historical criticism. These continue to provide a substantial proportion. Thus in Volume 1, Number 1, we find 'Principalities and Powers: the Cosmic Background of St Paul's Thought'; ' "Those whom Jesus loved"; St John xi.5'; 'Le Plan des Actes des Apôtres'; 'A Medieval Dutch Text of Acts'. Volume 49, Number 1, contains (with other pieces), 'Bitten und Beten im Neuen Testament und seiner Umwelt'; 'L'anamnèse: structure fondamentale de la lettre paulinienne'; 'Angels and the Eschatology of Heb 1–2'.

Articles such as these form a solid basis; it is interesting to trace the introduc-

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tion of more recent themes. The 'Dead Sea Scrolls' were still a fairly recent discover when *NTS* began publication, and reference to them appeared quickly – first in an article by K. G. Kuhn on 'Die beiden Messias Aarons und Israels'. After this such articles appear fairly frequently until the middle teens (of volume numbers). There is a little group in the late twenties, and another in the forties. Nag Hammadi made a somewhat later appearance but has lasted better. Here it is often difficult, if one can read (or re-read) little beyond the title, to distinguish between articles that are simply on gnosticism as a possible influence on or constituent of New Testament thought and the specific texts discovered at Nag Hammadi. The texts appear as early as Volume 3; they continue but there seems to have been some falling off in direct discussion.

It is interesting also to trace the rise of new methods, or emphases, in literary and historical criticism. Sociology first appears (appropriately in an article by G. Theissen) in Volume 26, Number 2. There are two more sociology articles in this volume. In the thirties I have counted 10; in the forties, 9. Rhetoric begins a little later, but once started it outpaces everything else. In the thirties it appears 17 times, in the forties, 20 times.

One of the reasons given for founding a quarterly to accompany the Society was the hope that it would increase the influence of and the participation in the Society's work outside the British Isles. The goal has been achieved. There are many members in Continental Europe, and membership in the U.S.A. probably exceeds that in any other country. Australia, New Zealand, India, Japan, and many other lands are represented. The huge increase in membership is certainly due in part to a desire to read the Journal, and where possible to possess one's own copy, as well as to have the possibility of attending the annual meeting. Has a desire to contribute to the Journal contributed to this result? Here the answer must be much more doubtful. It was laid down from the beginning that the Journal would publish articles written in English, French, or German. In the first eight volumes, out of a total of 248 articles and Short Studies, 181 (73%) were written in English, 25 (10%) in French, 42 (17%) in German. Language, of course, is not invariably connected with nationality. German, for example, may cover articles emanating from Switzerland, Austria, and occasionally Holland and Scandinavia. In the corresponding latest eight volumes (41–48; 49 is not complete at the time of writing) the figures are: out of 288, in English 200 (69.4%), in French 21 (7.3%), in German 67 (23.3%). The number of articles in English, notwithstanding the great influx of American scholars, has dropped slightly; French articles have diminished by more than a quarter; German articles have increased by more than one sixth. What can be inferred from these figures? Very little. French-speaking scholars have other periodicals that serve as outlets for their research, but so have German scholars. Some other periodicals are multilingual. It may be that the use of various languages at the general meetings is more important than their use in *NTS*.

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The same two sets of volumes (1–8; 41–48) gives rise to another interesting comparison. In Volumes 1–8 there were 53 reviews of books written on New Testament themes. In 41–48 there were none. One must conclude that, though there are regular lists of 'Books Received', reviews have been abandoned as a matter of editorial policy. This is a decision on which no doubt different views will be held. This Jubilee notice has been – and rightly and inevitably – sufficiently laudatory of a great publishing achievement to permit its author to express an opinion. I think that the complete abandonment of reviews is unfortunate. I do not think that *NTS* should vie with *Theologische Literaturzeitung* or even the *Journal of Theological Studies* in an attempt to cover as many as possible of the significant books on the New Testament. There is however a place for a serious review of a few of the most important publications. Of the 53 publications reviewed in Volumes 1–8 I pick out the following eight – one for each year: J. Jeremias, *Jerusalem zur Zeit Jesu*; P. Winter, *On the Trial of Jesus*; R. Bultmann, *The Theology of the New Testament*; J. Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language*; H. Lietzmann, *Kleine Schriften*; I, II; D. Daube, *The New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism*; J. Munck, *Paulus und die Heilsgeschichte*; C. F. D. Moule, *An Idiom Book of New Testament Greek*. Suppose a scholar of equal standing with the author were given, say, as many pages as may be allowed to a Short Study, with the request simply to engage in serious conversation with a book of high quality, would not the result be well worth reading? I think it would. It might also be possible occasionally to commission a review article, after the manner of *Theologische Rundschau*.

Perhaps; but at this point it is more important to express our gratitude for what we have. Our thanks to all contributors, to all members of the Editorial Committee, and, above all, to the Editors:

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