

## *The Tyndale Fellowship For Biblical Research*

**F.F. Bruce**

[p.52]

In May 1938 some senior members and friends of the Inter-Varsity Fellowship of Evangelical Unions met in the house of one of their number in London to consider how best the reproach of obscurantism and anti-intellectual prejudice might be removed from Evangelical Christianity in England. How far this reproach was justified is a question outside the scope of this paper; at any rate, it was widely believed that Evangelicals were afraid of scholarship, especially Biblical and theological scholarship, and Evangelicals in England did not always act in such a way as to explode this belief. In this respect, of course, there was a considerable difference between English and Scottish Evangelicalism. One ordinand in the 1920's, who is now on the staff of a theological college, was strongly urged by an eminent Evangelical clergyman not to read for theological honours in one of the ancient English universities; and when he disregarded this and other warnings, the oddity of a confessed Evangelical pursuing such a course earned for him in Evangelical circles the title of "The Theologian". Most happily, the precedent he established was followed by others. But the situation left much to be desired when these men met to consider it in 1938.

After some discussion, they constituted themselves as the Biblical Research Committee, loosely attached to the Inter-Varsity Fellowship. The object of this Committee was from the first to endeavour by all possible means to promote sound Biblical scholarship among Evangelical Christians in England. Contact was made with probable sympathisers throughout the British Isles, as well as in Europe and America, and a few men who were interested in certain fields of Biblical scholarship were encouraged to pursue these interests and produce work which might help to remove the reproach of unscholarliness from English Evangelicalism. One or two major works of Biblical scholarship undertaken at that time are now in course of publication.

The outbreak of war in 1939 augured ill for the schemes of the infant Committee, but in fact those schemes grew and fructified during the war in a measure beyond what could have

[p.53]

been hoped. By the summer of 1941 sufficient progress was made to encourage the Committee to convoke a Conference of sympathisers from all parts of Britain to consider further plans. This Conference met at Kingham Hill, Oxfordshire, two or three weeks after Hitler's attack on Russia; and those who were present will not readily forget it. The Conference profited greatly by the wise and experienced advice of that true father in God, the late Principal Donald Maclean of Edinburgh, who had played a leading part in the resurgence of Scottish Evangelicalism twelve years previously, when he and his colleague, the late Professor J. R. Mackay, inaugurated THE EVANGELICAL QUARTERLY. It was at this Conference, incidentally, that the first steps were taken towards ensuring the continued witness of the QUARTERLY under its present constitution.

Among the decisions reached at Kingham Hill the three most important were (1) to hold an annual Summer School, (2) to found two annual lectures in Biblical studies, one for the Old Testament and one for the New, and (3) to secure a residential centre and library for Biblical research.

Arrangements were made at once to hold a Summer School the following year, and held it was, despite many unfavourable conditions arising from the war, at St. Deiniol's Library, Hawarden, North Wales. The stimulating intellectual atmosphere at St. Deiniol's showed those who attended something of the value of such a residential centre, and encouraged them to do their best to secure one of their own. Very few attended the first Summer School, but at least it was a beginning, and those who came found the time by no means wasted as they read I Samuel in Hebrew and Galatians in Greek. Larger numbers attended the Summer Schools of 1943 and 1944, which were held at Wadham College, Oxford; and the 1945 Summer School was held in our own residential centre, Tyndale House, Cambridge (of which more anon), to study the problems of the Fourth Gospel for the first week and the Biblical Doctrine of the Church for the second week. The latest Summer School was held there in July 1946, having as special subject for the first week "The Relation between the Testaments" and for the second week "The Authority of the Bible". At these Summer Schools, as well as on other occasions, we have benefited greatly by the help of friends from Scotland and Ireland—it may not be invidious to mention Professors G. T. Thomson

[p.54]

and A. M. Renwick of Edinburgh, and the Rev. W. C. G. Proctor of Trinity College, Dublin.

After careful deliberation, it was decided to call the two annual lectures founded as a result of the Kingham Hill discussions "The Tyndale Lectures" in Old and New Testament studies. The first two were delivered at Oxford in December 1942, and two more have been delivered each Christmas vacation since then. Among our Old Testament lecturers we have had Dr. W. J. Martin of Liverpool and Professors E. Robertson (Manchester), N. W. Porteous (Edinburgh), and D. Winton Thomas (Cambridge); among the New Testament lecturers have been Dr. Basil Atkinson, Mr. E. K. Simpson, Professor Francis Davidson, and Principal P. W. Evans. Some of these lectures have been published in pamphlet form: *Samuel and Saul*, by E. Robertson; *The Theology of Prepositions*, by B. F. C. Atkinson; *Words Worth Weighing in the Greek New Testament*,<sup>1</sup> by E. K. Simpson; *Pauline Predestination*, by F. Davidson; "The Prophet" in the Lachish Ostraca,<sup>2</sup> by D. W. Thomas; *The Date of Ezra's Coming to Jerusalem*,<sup>3</sup> by J. S. Wright; *The Speeches in the Acts of the Apostles*,<sup>4</sup> by F. F. Bruce.<sup>5</sup>

It was necessary, of course, to find an audience for these Tyndale Lectures; they were therefore held during the Annual Conference of the I.V.F. Theological Students' Fellowship, which regularly meets during the Christmas vacation, and a number of senior men came together for a day or two in the same place, primarily to hear the Tyndale Lectures, but also for further papers and discussions. The Biblical Research Committee therefore decided to convene a Conference each Christmas vacation, to spend three or four days discussing a given topic. In the Christmas vacation of 1944-1945, for example, the topic was Biblical Interpretation; in 1945-1946, Biblical Eschatology; in 1946-1947, Biblical Anthropology.

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<sup>1</sup> On-line at [http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/words\\_simpson.pdf](http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/words_simpson.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/lachish\\_thomas.pdf](http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/lachish_thomas.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/article\\_ezra\\_wright.html](http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/article_ezra_wright.html)

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/speeches\\_bruce.pdf](http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/speeches_bruce.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> All published by the Tyndale Press, 39 Bedford Square, London, W.C.1, except *Samuel and Saul*, which was published by the John Rylands Library, Manchester.

The need for a residential centre was increasing all the time, and at last, in September 1944, we were able to secure the excellent freehold property at 16, Selwyn Gardens, Cambridge, to which the name "Tyndale House" was given. The name of William Tyndale is one in which no one party or section of English-speaking Christendom has a special interest; he and his work are our common heritage. And-rather strangely

[p.55]

Tyndale's name had not been already appropriated by a learned foundation, as those of Wycliffe, Ridley, and others had been. Tyndale House was first used for its proper purpose when the Conference convened by the Biblical Research Committee met there in January 1945, and it was solemnly dedicated to God for that purpose on the afternoon of January 2, at a simple service in which the Rev. G. T. Manley, Professor G. T. Thomson, and Dr. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones took part.

When Tyndale House was acquired, a library was ready to be housed in it. From the time of the Kingham Hill Conference onwards, some of us had been collecting books suitable for Biblical and theological research. The heavy expenditure thus entailed was most generously defrayed by a Christian gentleman of long-range spiritual vision, whose anonymity must be preserved at his own desire. Now, Tyndale House contains a library of several thousand volumes, on which the Biblical scholar's eye rests with fond and envious delight. It is strictly a residential library, so that volumes cannot be lent out. It is mainly intended for the use of people who come to stay for longer or shorter periods at Tyndale House in order to carry out some form of Biblical research, though its facilities are also at the disposal of residents in Cambridge who wish to consult the volumes in Tyndale House. Colonel J. N. D. Anderson, O.B.E., M.A., LL.B., late of Egypt and Cyrenaica, a Cambridge graduate and Semitic scholar, has recently been appointed Resident Warden and Librarian.

As a result of the Summer Schools and Winter Conferences, a larger group of interested men and women was gradually forming round the Biblical Research Committee as its nucleus. It was plainly desirable that this group should be more definitely integrated, and at the first Conference held in Tyndale House (January 1945) it was constituted as the Tyndale Fellowship for Biblical Research. This Fellowship is linked with the I.V.F. in that the I.V.F. Biblical Research Committee is also the Council of the Tyndale Fellowship, and its theological outlook is that expressed in the I.V.F. Doctrinal Basis. Its object is to maintain and promote Biblical studies and research in a spirit of loyalty to the Christian Faith as enshrined in the consensus of the Historic Creeds and Reformed Confessions, and to re-establish the authority of Evangelical scholarship in the field of Biblical and theological studies.

[p.56)

Among its activities the Tyndale Fellowship endeavours (1) to encourage younger scholars to engage in Biblical research, along linguistic, historical, archaeological or theological lines; (2) to call attention to and to examine contemporary research bearing upon the right understanding of the Bible; (3) to urge the claims of Biblical studies to a permanent and influential place in the national system of education; (4) to create opportunities for intercourse and co-operation between those who have at heart the objects which the Fellowship desires to promote, and to co-operate with similar bodies among the English-speaking nations and on the European Continent and elsewhere.

Membership of the Tyndale Fellowship is open to all persons of either sex who are in sympathy with its objects and wish to take an active part in Biblical Research. Members are kept in touch with the affairs of the Fellowship by means of the quarterly *Tyndale Bulletin* and circulating portfolios devoted to various branches of Biblical and theological studies. They are encouraged to contribute to these studies by writing monographs or theses for higher degrees, by reading papers at Conferences, Summer Schools or Reading Parties, by contributing articles to appropriate periodicals, and so forth. Several articles appearing from time to time in THE EVANGELICAL QUARTERLY have been first composed to be read at meetings of the Tyndale Fellowship.

But an important question is sometimes raised. While the Tyndale Fellowship professes its desire to remove the stigma of obscurantism from English Evangelicalism, is it in fact free from obscurantism itself? Does not its acceptance of the I.V.F. Doctrinal Basis commit it *ipso facto* to an unprogressive "Fundamentalism" (to employ what Principal Maclean aptly called "a refined theological swearword!")? Are not its conclusions in the field, say, of Biblical criticism, prescribed and settled in advance? The answer is, unreservedly, No.

As for its acceptance of the I.V.F. Doctrinal Basis, that is simply a summary, in untheological language, of the Protestant faith as exhibited in its chief formularies. The Basis has frequently been criticised for explicitly predicating "infallibility" of Holy Scripture as originally given, as well as its divine inspiration and supreme authority in all matters of faith and conduct. But *Evangelical Belief*, the official interpretation of the Basis, explains this "infallibility" to mean "that the Scriptures

[p.57]

themselves, in their proper sense, never lead astray the soul who is sincerely seeking truth" (1st edition, p. 10).<sup>6</sup> The words, "in their proper sense", necessarily imply that each part of the Bible must be viewed in the light of the whole, and that the Old Testament must be read in the light of the New.<sup>7</sup> There is nothing obscurantist in this position.

Admittedly, the Tyndale Fellowship has its presuppositions and its distinctive point of view. It is committed to the Catholic Evangelical Faith.<sup>8</sup> Few, if any, Biblical scholars, whether working singly or in groups, approach their studies without presuppositions of any kind. Those who say or think that they do, very often betray in the event that their presuppositions, even if unsuspected by themselves, are none the less real. It is much better to be aware of one's presuppositions and bias, and to acknowledge them frankly, as allowances can then be more easily made for them.<sup>9</sup> Some Biblical critics, on the other hand, while professedly pursuing their research with unbiased minds and scientific methods, have in fact proceeded on the assumption that the supernatural may be discounted. They

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<sup>6</sup> The use of the term "infallibility" has been bedevilled by the dogma of Papal Infallibility. The I.V.F. Doctrinal Basis probably took it from the *Westminster Confession of Faith*. The word is strictly equivalent to Gk. ἀσφάλεια, used in Luke i. 4 (translated "certainty" in A.V. and R.V.); and the interpretation quoted above from *Evangelical Belief* gives the precise meaning of the term. Later on the same page we read: "By using the word 'infallibility' in reference to Holy Scripture, we mean that it is in itself a true and complete guide, and requires no external correction either by Church or Tradition."

<sup>7</sup> Of course, it is also true that the New Testament must be read in the light of the Old, but in a slightly different sense of the phrase.

<sup>8</sup> This does not mean, of course, that we have not the soundest reason for holding this Faith in the first place!

<sup>9</sup> "Prejudices that are recognized as such are generally harmless; the unrecognized ones are the dangerous ones" (A. D. Ritchie, *Civilization, Science and Religion* [1945], p. 12).

were at liberty to make this assumption if they wished, of course; if we disagree with what our opponents say, we readily defend their right to say it; but it would have been better if their anti-supernaturalist premisses had been explicitly admitted by themselves and understood by their hearers and readers. A curious situation arose when, towards the end of last century, devout Christian scholars in Scotland and England accepted conclusions reached in Biblical criticism from rationalist premisses by Continental scholars. When Dr. James Begg described to Thomas Carlyle the development of such a situation among some Scottish theologians, the sage of Chelsea, no devotee of the Reformed Faith himself, thundered: "Have my countrymen's

[p.58]

heads become turnips, that they think they can hold the premisses of German unbelief and draw the conclusions of Scottish Evangelical Orthodoxy?" It is a good thing to know what our premisses are, to acknowledge them openly, and to see to it that our conclusions stand in some sort of rational relationship to them.

It is helpful to contrast the position of the Tyndale Fellowship with that of Roman Catholic Biblical scholarship. Roman Catholic scholars have, of course, their special presuppositions and preferences; that is but natural, and we have no fault to find with it, the more so as they freely avow them. But the Papal authorities are not content to leave well alone and trust their scholars not to reach conclusions at variance with the premisses of their faith. The growth of the Modernist movement in the Church of Rome led to the establishment by Pope Leo XIII in 1901 of the Pontifical Biblical Commission, which in many cases prescribes the limits within which Roman Catholic Biblical scholars may operate. A reference to Dr. E. J. Kissane's scholarly work on Isaiah, for example, will show the learned author's pains to show that his view of the composition of that book does not transgress the limits prescribed by the Biblical Commission.<sup>10</sup> The late Abbot Chapman, in the introduction to his book *Matthew, Mark and Luke* (1937), related the steps by which he exchanged his earlier view of the priority of Mark for his later one of the priority of Matthew. We do not question that he really did change his mind through further study of the evidence as it appealed to him; but his arguments would carry greater weight if the Biblical Commission had not previously laid down the priority of Matthew as a conclusion not to be gainsaid. Or, when Mgr. Ronald Knox in his new translation of the New Testament says that while the passage about the Three Heavenly Witnesses in I John v. 7 does not occur in any good Greek manuscript, "the Latin manuscripts may have preserved the true text", we wonder what he would have said had he been left free to exercise his own judgment in the matter.

No such conclusions are prescribed for members of the Tyndale Fellowship. In such critical *crucis*, for example, as the codification of the Pentateuch, the composition of Isaiah, the date of Daniel, the sources of the Gospels, or the authenticity of the Pastoral Epistles, each of us is free to hold and proclaim

[p.59]

the conclusions to which all the available evidence points.<sup>11</sup> Any research worthy of the name, we take it for granted, must necessarily be unfettered.

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<sup>10</sup> E. J. Kissane, *The Book of Isaiah*, Vol ii (1943), pp. lviii f.

<sup>11</sup> Thus, if in this QUARTERLY different views of the common authorship of the Fourth Gospel and the Apocalypse have been aired by two members of the Tyndale Fellowship—Mr. Beasley-Murray in Vol. xviii

Evangelical Christians must, once and for all, give the lie to the common idea that they are afraid of scientific research. If the idea were true, it would say little for the strength of such people's personal faith. But it must not even *seem* to be true. Of course, if our premisses are intellectually untenable, the sooner we know it the better; but if we are convinced that our position is impregably secure, then we shall welcome all the light that science and scholarship have to throw upon it, whether coming from friendly or from hostile quarters, in order that it may be *seen* to be impregably secure. The early Christians challenged the closest scrutiny of their claims: "this thing", they gladly asserted, "was not done in a corner". We wish to be of their spirit. Our desire for our contemporaries, as Luke's for Theophilus, is that they may know the certainty—in the proper sense of the word, the *infallibility*—of the Christian message as they read or hear it.

From the outset, the Biblical Research Committee and the Tyndale Fellowship have emphasised the importance of the linguistic side of Biblical study. Sound theology must be based on sound exegesis, and sound exegesis on a sound text; and to establish and understand a sound text we require a thorough acquaintance with the original languages. And a thorough acquaintance with these requires some knowledge at least of other languages which influenced them. The New Testament idiom cannot be properly understood without some knowledge of Hebrew and Aramaic, and the intensive study of these Old Testament languages leads one into such other languages as

[p.60]

Sumerian, Akkadian, Hittite, Hurrian, Egyptian, Persian, and Arabic. We desire to be worthy followers of the Reformers in our insistence on the primacy of the strict grammatico-historical exegesis of Scripture, and we emphasise the necessity of laying a stable foundation for this exegesis, and discourage the taking of short cuts. Though this policy may not show such immediate results as some would like to see, we believe that the results, when they come, will be the more enduring.

It has been pointed out that the success of the Evangelical Revival two centuries ago was all the greater because the intellectual tenability of Christianity, scouted by the Deists, had been re-established for many, in terms which appealed to the eighteenth-century mind, by Bishop Butler. There will be the greater hope for evangelism in this century if people in general can be rationally persuaded that Evangelical Christianity has nothing to do with a pseudo-conservatism that fears to face the facts of Biblical or any other science lest it should find its position undermined. A sane and cogent Biblical theology can be presented in terms which, on the one hand, acknowledge the revelation of God recorded in Holy Writ

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(1946), pp. 185 f., and the present writer in Vol. xvi (1944), pp. 107 ff. [[http://www.earlychurch.org.uk/pdf/evangelist\\_bruce.pdf](http://www.earlychurch.org.uk/pdf/evangelist_bruce.pdf)]*—*it is simply because we differ as to which side the weight of the evidence comes down on. Or, when Mr. Nunn, in his recent Tyndale Fellowship publication (reviewed on p. 79), maintains the Apostolic authorship of the Fourth Gospel, is purely because the evidence he adduces points so irresistibly to that conclusion. We may contrast the situation in which a Roman Catholic scholar like M. J. Lagrange finds himself. At the beginning of his *Évangile selon saint Jean* (1925), he says: "L'Église catholique a rangé parmi les livres canoniques les évangiles selon Matthieu, Marc, Luc et Jean." Le quatrième évangile a donc été écrit sous l'inspiration de l'Esprit-Saint. Pour 'tons c'est un dogme, ce n'est pas une question. Ce n'est pas non plus une question de savoir s'il a eu pour auteur le disciple bien-aimé, Jean, fils de Zébédée. Ce point est fixé par la tradition ecclésiastique" (p. vi). In our view, the inspiration of the Fourth Gospel is sufficiently clear even to a reader endowed with the slenderest spiritual discernment, while its authorship can be determined only by considering the internal and external evidence.

and, on the other, cannot be assailed as unscientific, illogical or obscurantist. The Tyndale Fellowship desires to play its part in preparing the way for such a presentation. It is no friend of the irrationalism popular in some modern theological circles.

The need for renewed efforts in Biblical and theological study in the British Isles in these post-war years is all the greater because of the eclipse-temporary, we may well pray-of these studies in Germany. When we contemplate the magnificent wealth of contributions to Biblical research made over so many years in Germany, it is with a sense of appalling loss that we learn that, at the time of writing, not one periodical devoted to Biblical or theological learning is being published in that land. Fortunately, we cannot say that none is being published in the German language, for we have to welcome the new *Theologische Zeitschrift* edited in Switzerland by Professor K. L. Schmidt; but this can go only a small way. to repair the loss. There may be some people who view with equanimity or even satisfaction this eclipse of German scholarship in the Biblical field as in so many others; but the Tyndale Fellowship is of another mind. There have indeed been tendencies from time to time in German Biblical scholarship which did not commend themselves to

[p.61]

Evangelical thought;<sup>12</sup> but its present sorry plight can be regarded as nothing less than a calamity for the whole world—though not such a calamity as its plight under a triumphant Hitlerism would have been, for then the hope of an early and vigorous resurrection, which we may now indulge, would have been slender indeed.

On these and other grounds we feel we have reason to hope and believe that the Tyndale Fellowship may have "come to the kingdom for such a time as this"; and we confidently look for the sympathetic interest of all who have at heart the revival of the full-orbed historic Evangelical Faith, and invite the cooperation of those like-minded who desire to pursue the paths of Biblical scholarship to the glory of God and the blessing of their fellows.

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<http://www.theologicalstudies.org.uk/>

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<sup>12</sup> Those who have talked and written, especially during the recent war, as if all Biblical and theological study in Germany were affected by rationalistic tendencies, seem never to have heard of such giants as Zahn and Schlatter!