

Edward Joseph Young: Obituary

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Biblical scholarship not only in America but throughout the world suffered a sad loss with the sudden death on 14 February, 1968, at the age of sixty, of Dr. Edward J. Young, Professor of Old Testament in Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, and Editor of the *Westminster Theological Journal*.

Young was one of the first students to take a theological course at the Seminary with which his name was to be so closely associated. Westminster Seminary was founded in 1929 to perpetuate the old tradition of enlightened orthodoxy maintained for generations at Princeton Theological Seminary, when it was feared that Princeton was relaxing its adherence to this tradition. He went to Westminster from Stanford University, where he had taken his arts degree, and after graduating as bachelor and master in theology at Westminster he spent some time doing research in the University of Leipzig. On his return he was appointed to the teaching staff at Westminster, and completed his research in Hebrew and other Semitic languages at Dropsie College, Philadelphia, where he earned his doctorate.

Young speedily established a reputation for himself as the most outstanding Old Testament scholar in America belonging to the older conservative school. His standard of orthodoxy was too high for many who adhered in a general way to evangelical orthodoxy; more than once scholars of the latter category have said to me : 'I am orthodox, of course, but not like Edward J. Young'. But if his standard of orthodoxy was high, so was his standard of scholarship. He commanded the respect of many scholars who disagreed totally with his theological position both because of his learning and because of his courtesy. His own beliefs on critical problems were firmly held and faithfully proclaimed, but he did not misrepresent the beliefs of others. He could always be counted upon to state them fairly and not to indulge in denunciation of those with whom he differed. In this,

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country he enjoyed the friendship and esteem of Professor H. H. Rowley among others. Professor Rowley and he both wrote on the book of Daniel and adopted irreconcilable positions with regard to its date and authorship. The study of Daniel seems to bring out the worst in some commentators, but not in these two: 'even on Daniel', says Professor Rowley, 'he [Young] acknowledged that the traditional view involved difficulties which he could not solve. This was preferable to the bogus solutions so often put forward'.

His principal works included *The Prophecy of Daniel* (1949), *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (1949), *Arabic for Beginners* (1949), *My Servants the Prophets* (1952), *Studies in Isaiah* (1954), *Thy Word is Truth* (1957) and *The Study of Old Testament Theology Today* (1958). His *Studies in Isaiah* constituted prolegomena to his magnum opus, his commentary on Isaiah now in course of production in three volumes as the firstfruits of Eerdmans' New International Commentary on the Old Testament. He was General Editor of this series, and had gone a considerable way in planning it and assigning the volumes to various authors. One

of his latest literary productions was an essay for a symposium on the Bible currently being prepared by the Editor of *Faith and Thought*.

In his *Introduction to the Old Testament* he took such a conservative line (maintaining the Mosaic authorship of practically the whole Pentateuch, the unity of Isaiah and Zechariah, the historicity of Jonah and Esther, the sixth-century date of Daniel and the like) that many readers were surprised, and some (wrongly) suspected an inconsistency, when they found that he rejected the Solomonic authorship of Ecclesiastes and dated the book in the post-exilic period. The writer, he suggested, 'placed his words in the mouth of Solomon, thus employing a literary device for conveying his message'. Very good, but perhaps other biblical writers employed a similar literary device in works where Dr. Young would have been less willing to allow such a possibility. In the same work he uncharacteristically expressed a preference for a familiar conjectural emendation in Judges 18:30 over the Massoretic reading – possibly because the emendation allows an earlier dating for Judges than does the Massoretic text.

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On two occasions I persuaded him to take part in a confrontation in *The Evangelical Quarterly*, once with the late Professor Aage Bentzen of Copenhagen (after I had reviewed and compared their respective Old Testament Introductions), and once with our friend Mr. H. L. Ellison (in response to Mr. Ellison's review of *The Study of Old Testament Theology Today*). He affirmed his convictions uncompromisingly, on the basis of 'the Christian-theistic principles of methodology'. But the two scholars with whom he took issue on these occasions also argued from the presuppositions of Christian theism. If investigators embark on the study of biblical criticism or biblical theology with the premise that God has not spoken or that miracles do not happen, their conclusions will be conditioned by their premises. But Christian investigators who regard it as axiomatic that in the world which He created God has both spoken and acted will not on this ground alone achieve unanimity on questions of date, authorship or interpretation of biblical documents. The tools of literary and historical criticism are there for them to use, and if such criticism (pursued with Christian presuppositions) points clearly in a certain direction, its evidence should not be refused because it conflicts with *a priori* theologoumena. For this evidence is an integral part of the world which God created.

These reflections are among the lessons which may be learned from the life and example of Edward J. Young. He has been taken at the height of his powers, and his place will be hard to fill. Many of us are grateful for all that he taught us; our gratitude for his memory can best be shown by giving ourselves with renewed energy to the studies which he adorned so signally.

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