

## *New Testament Studies*: 2004–: Editor's Perspective

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The editor of *New Testament Studies* is usually more than content to hide behind the impersonality of the role, protected by the corporate responsibility, if not identity, of the editorial board. For this, the 50th volume, however, an editorial postscript has been suggested, to balance the retrospective given by Professor C. K. Barrett at its start – although this is not designed to inspire more extensive searches for chiasms within the volume. It would take a braver, or more foolhardy, person than I, though, to label this a prospective, while it is, I must emphasise, written from a personal perspective and not as a signal of agreed editorial policy.

Close readers of the minutes of the annual meetings of the *STUDIORUM NOVI TESTAMENTI SOCIETAS* will know that the number of subscribers to the Journal remains healthy, despite cuts to library budgets and the fears some hold of the erosion of the printed word. So far, the availability of electronic access to the Journal, now to consortia as well as to individual institutions, sometimes as part of a package of journals, appears to hold no threat: rather, we can celebrate the increased number of potential readers. To that extent, prospects for *New Testament Studies* remain encouraging. Indeed, some of these new readers may be from smaller, perhaps confessionalist, institutions, while others will be from outside of our discipline, and this offers us a challenge as to how we present the significance of our work or suggest points where fruitful dialogue can take place.

Nevertheless, to anticipate the contents of the retrospective of the previous 50 years that may appear in our 100th volume would require prophetic gifts that elude most of us. This is not the place to reflect on the present state of NT studies, for such analyses are common enough elsewhere, while to expand on the most creative points for future growth would be almost bound to offend some readers by what has been included or excluded. Professor Barrett has already noted how the Journal has tracked both the major material discoveries that have changed the shape of our discipline, such as those of the Dead Sea Scrolls or Nag Hammadi codices, and the rise of new ways of approaching the text, such as social-scientific analysis or the range of 'literary' readings. As regards the latter, some find the

Journal somewhat conservative – whether with regret or thankfulness – although ultimately it can but reflect the best of what would-be contributors submit for consideration.

As the careful phrasing that follows the title indicates, ‘published . . . in association with *SNTS*’, contributors are not restricted to those who are members of the Society, but, for good or ill, the Journal’s focal range largely mirrors that of the interests of the Society. These in turn may be gauged by the seminar groups whose work constitutes a significant part of the activity of the annual meeting. Despite the cycle of introduction, review and termination, a survey of these (since the Society’s jubilee meeting in 1988) reveals a considerable degree of consistency and continuity: the major writings or genres of the NT; acknowledged ‘problems’, such as that of the Synoptics or of the Historical Jesus; the literary, cultural and material ‘world(s)’ of early Christianity, whether identified as Jewish or as Graeco-Roman; aspects of the theology of all or part of the NT; and the close attention to the textual tradition of the NT and to its language. Continuities in labels, however, may mask change in the questions that can be asked: studies in the Synoptic Gospels may now include assessment of non-canonical Gospel texts, in their own right and not just to re-confirm the superiority of the canonical; the label ‘Christian’ can no longer be used as if antithetical to ‘Jewish’ without asking questions both of historical context and of subsequent *Wirkungsgeschichte*; even where not at the top of the agenda, the dynamics of the relationship between text and reader repeatedly demand acknowledgement. The apparent revival of familiar topoi may, by an actual or implied question mark, signal that readiness for self-criticism on which the discipline depends. All this suggests that *New Testament Studies* will also continue to be a home for the scribe of Matt 13.52, offering *καινὰ καὶ παλαιά*, or, better, for many scribes to engage in a vigorous debate. The challenge here is to demonstrate that there is no party line and that there is no fear of exclusion on the grounds of being too much, or too little, enmeshed in the ‘new’ fashions or committed to the ‘old’ traditions found within the discipline.

Here I may risk causing offence and mention just three areas for particular comment, drawing on a (still limited) experience as Editor. The first is that both Society and Journal have always honoured the world outside of any narrowly defined boundaries of the NT. It is important that study of the Dead Sea Scrolls, of Philo, of the LXX, or of the so-called Pseudepigrapha is pursued for its own sake and not with an obligatory tag of ‘relevance for the NT’, and that such study can be carried out within the pages of *NTS*. Another measure of this may be the move from speaking of the Graeco-Roman ‘background’ (of the NT or early Christianity) to ‘environment’ and thence to ‘world’. Those who work in this area will know that what may cast sudden light, for themselves or for others, cannot be determined in advance, but also that placing the NT at the centre of that world is a

conceit with which we may work, but should do so self-critically. The presence of such disinterested study in the *Journal* is a reminder that, while NT scholarship is often parasitic on or derivative from scholarship outside of its confines, it cannot afford to be second-hand, superficial, or out-of-date. With increasing trends towards interdisciplinarity this demand becomes the more urgent. With respect to Second Temple, Diaspora, and early rabbinic Judaism we have already largely recognised the temptation to shape the then-contemporary world to suit our own needs, and the necessity of ‘getting it right’, not least through a more immediate awareness of the full range of relevant sources and of the problems of their interpretation. There is still room to extend this ἀκρίβεια more thoroughly both to the non-Jewish world of the time and, by extension, to our use of models, methods, and ‘parallels’ from our own time.

Secondly, I have already alluded to the current landscape of NT study, much of which it shares with other humanities disciplines. It is common to point not only to the proliferation of approaches, but to the enthusiasm with which that proliferation is embraced, and also, we might say, to the loss of the innocence of the text as well as of the reader, both of which can be viewed as constructed or as constructing, as manipulative or as manipulated. This polyphony accompanied by scepticism, not necessarily to be construed as a negative, has rendered the identification of agreed criteria for assessment and validation, both of methods and of their conclusions, problematic. If, to avoid total solipsism, the answer lies in the possibility of communication and of a community of interpretation and testing, then an editorial board acts as the representative of such a community; yet the charge of being closed and not inclusive, or of perpetuating a particular position, is always possible. It would be inappropriate, and in any case impossible, for any journal to encompass every shade of scholarship without a loss of its intrinsic character. Yet, how can *NTS* continue to encourage the best NT scholarship, for newer as well as for established participants, and to provide a home for healthy debate between differing approaches and perspectives, and so remain true to its heritage?

A third area of reflection follows naturally from this. Many of the newer voices champion avowed commitment over against a much-maligned goal of ‘objectivity’. It has, of course, always been the case that NT study entails commitment – to its own integrity – while the longevity of the seminar on ‘Inhalte und Probleme einer neutestamentlichen Theologie’ bears witness to the fact that the claims and convictions of the NT are, for many, not only a matter of historical interest. It is true that particular committed readings, for example feminist or post-colonial concerns, do not have a designated space, although that does not mean that they are totally silent within the aegis of the Society, either within specific contexts, such as seminars on hermeneutics and, more recently, on the mission of the church, or within the experience and perspectives brought by individual mem-

bers – although to say this should not encourage complacency. Yet perhaps they also sometimes choose to remain safely within the spaces – series and journals – that they have developed for themselves. The Society’s support of two theological libraries in eastern Europe and the work of the East Europe Committee, the establishment of an African Liaison Committee with its roots in the post-conference at Hammanskraal after the annual meeting at Pretoria in 1999, the use of the Travel Fund, now the International Fund, to support members who might not otherwise be able to attend, and the widening map of its meeting venues as well as of its membership, all express a commitment to an enlarged vision of its purpose of furthering the study of the NT. *New Testament Studies*, particularly if, through new technologies, available to an ever wider audience, can also play a vital role in allowing these other voices and concerns to be heard alongside the more familiar. The challenges discussed in the previous two points will apply again, while there will also, as there, be a need for self-criticism as we acknowledge the blind spots and injustices from the past.

These cannot be but personal reflections on the challenges that lie ahead for *NTS*. In the end, the direction the Journal will take depends on the judgements made by the editorial board, for whose willing efforts I, like previous Editors, am ever grateful; but, most of all, it depends on the readiness of you, the readers, to take up your pen (!), and to submit those manuscripts (or encourage others to do so) that you would like to read and to be discussed over the next 50 years of *New Testament Studies*.