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Frederick Fyvie Bruce
1910–1990

FREDERICK FYVIE BRUCE died on September 11, 1990, shortly before what would have been his eightieth birthday. He held a number of academic posts before coming to the Rylands Chair of Biblical Criticism and Exegesis in the University of Manchester which he occupied from 1959 to 1978. He was first and foremost a Pauline scholar, but his interests were widespread.

He was born on 12 October, 1910, the son of Peter Bruce, in Elgin, Morayshire, in the north-east of Scotland. From his earliest years he displayed outstanding intellectual gifts, and it was natural that as 'a lad o' pairts' he should proceed from Elgin Academy to the University of Aberdeen where he distinguished himself in the study of the Classics, taking a First-Class Honours degree and winning various awards including the Ferguson Scholarship and the Croom Robertson Fellowship. He then proceeded to the University of Cambridge where again he was the most distinguished graduate in Classics in his year; he was awarded the Sandys Studentship (1934). Among the teachers who most influenced him in these days he lists Alexander Souter—'I suppose that, among all my university teachers, he is the one to whom I owe most'[1]—in Aberdeen and Peter Giles in Cambridge.

At this stage in his career he appeared to be set to follow an academic career in Classics. He therefore spent a year (1934–5) in the University of Vienna and studied Indo-European philology; it was here that he picked up his knowledge of the Hittites. At this point he was contemplating a second year in Vienna and the possibility of a Ph.D, but there came the possibility of a teaching post in Edinburgh. The attractions of getting into teaching—and also of an earlier marriage than would otherwise have

[1] F. F. Bruce, *In Retrospect. Remembrance of Things Past*, Glasgow: Pickering and Inglis, 1980, 48.

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been possible—sufficed to change Bruce's plans. He took up a terminable appointment as an assistant lecturer in Greek (1935–8), with Sir William Calder as his Head of Department. From there he moved to a permanent appointment as lecturer in Classics in the University of Leeds (1938–47).

Somewhat surprisingly he published scarcely anything in the area of Classical Studies. Although he wrote a dissertation for the Croom Robertson Scholarship on 'The Latinity of Gaius Marius Victorinus Afer', it was never published,[2] although Bruce retained an interest in him and wrote articles on his work.[3] His doctoral studies remained unfinished, although they did lead to a couple of articles on Roman slave-names.[4] At that time the attainment of a Ph.D was not regarded as the essential passport to an academic career which it has now – unfortunately in Bruce's eyes—become.

Already at this point his scholarly interests were shifting to biblical studies in general and New Testament studies in particular. He carried further his study of Hebrew and gained a Diploma in Hebrew (1943). (He had also won the Crombie Scholarship in Biblical Criticism awarded by the University of St Andrews in 1939.) At the same time, the opportunity came to give some teaching on the Greek New Testament and he began to produce scholarly work in the field of New Testament. In particular, he commenced his commentary on the Greek text of Acts.

Consequently, when the University of Sheffield opened a Department of Biblical History and Literature in 1947, he was well-equipped by self-education to apply for the Headship, and he was duly appointed. The fact that he was not a clergyman, but a layman, was apparently one of the points in his favour at a time when there was a suspicion of Christian theology in the University and a certain fear on the part of some that an ordained person might not be wholly objective in the study of the subject.

Over the next twelve years Bruce built up the work of the tiny Department which consisted of himself and one other colleague with

[2] There is a copy in the Manuscripts and Archives Section of Aberdeen University Library.

[3] 'Marius Victorinus and His Works: In Memory of Alexander Souter', *Evangelical Quarterly* 18, 1946, 132–53; republished in *A Mind for What Matters,* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990, 213–32; 'The Gospel Text of Marius Victorinus', in E. Best and R. M. Wilson (ed.), *Text and Interpretation. Studies in the New Testament Presented to Matthew Black,* Cambridge University Press, 1979, 69–78. Bruce also wrote on the works of another Victorinus (Victorinus of Pettau) in 'The Earliest Latin Commentary on the Apocalypse', *Evangelical Quarterly* 10, 1938, 352–66 (*A Mind for What Matters*, 198–212).

[4] 'Latin Participles as Slave Names', *Glotta* 25, 1936, 42–50; 'Some Roman Slave Names', *Proceedings of the Leeds Philosophical Society: Literary and Historical Section* 5, 1938, 44–60.

some part-time help. His own scholarly reputation was such that he was appointed to a Chair in Biblical History and Literature in 1955, and his own University awarded him a DD in 1957. To the best of my knowledge he was one of the youngest persons ever to be so honoured by Aberdeen in this century—and he a layman without a degree in theology! In 1959 he was invited to occupy the Rylands Chair in Manchester, where he remained until his retirement. He served as Dean of the Faculty of Theology in 1963–4.

Such is the outline of his scholarly career. it included the normal tasks of undergraduate teaching and administration, but it also involved the successful supervision of a remarkable number of postgraduate students, especially at Manchester, where, it is said, he had more than any other teacher of biblical studies at that time. The many published theses produced under his supervision testify both to the quality of the students whom came to work with him and to his own expertise in stimulating and developing their scholarship. He was also in great demand as a lecturer in other institutions in Britain and all round the world.

The appointment of a person to a university post is generally understood to be both to teach and to do research. If we interpret 'research' in a fairly broad sense to cover scholarly work and writing that is not necessarily original in character, Bruce's contribution was phenomenal by its sheer extent. His list of publications is quite prodigious. He produced a vast amount of scholarly material of all kinds, much of it more of a textbook character, and some of it at a popular level (but never lacking in scholarly quality). He also did a quite remarkable amount of the kind of work behind the scenes which wins few public plaudits but is essential nonetheless. Among the earliest references to such work is the brief comment in the second edition of the Oxford Classical Texts version of *Novum Testamentum Graece* (1944), where the editor, Bruce's former teacher Alexander Souter, expresses thanks to him for reading the proofs *qua est summa doctrina diligentiaque*—a phrase which well sums up the man. In this connection one remembers his immense task of proof-reading the whole of the English translation of G. Kittel and G. Friedrich's *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament* (10 volumes), said to have been accomplished mostly while travelling daily in and out to Manchester from Buxton on the train. But this work represents only the tip of an iceberg. The number of other works, published and unpublished, that Bruce read or corrected, the number of scholarly queries that he dealt with in correspondence, and the promptness with which he answered correspondents generally in his own hand or on a portable typewriter—these are almost incredible.

A couple of formal features of his writings may be noted before we look

at the contents. First, Bruce was one of the best contemporary popularisers of biblical scholarship, expressing himself in simple terms for the benefit of a wide public. There is sometimes a certain scholarly haughtiness towards so-called popularisers, and the impression is fomented that what they are doing is not real scholarship. One rather suspects that those who criticise in this fashion are like the fox in Aesop's fable; unable to write well at a popular level themselves, they pour scorn on those who can. But it must be forcefully urged that writing for a popular audience is an important aspect of scholarship. Far too often the accusation is heard that the pulpit is fifty years behind the teacher's rostrum, and the pew even further out-of-date. Some of the blame for this situation undoubtedly rests on a scholarship which does not trouble to communicate with both pulpit and pew in a way that both can understand. In any case, to write at a popular level is not inconsistent with a truly scholarly approach, and it may be argued that one test of a person's scholarship is the ability to express arguments and conclusions in a manner that is generally intelligible. That the more popular works of Bruce represent the fruit of worthy scholarly labours is proved beyond cavil by the fact that even the advanced scholar will find profitable material in them. Bruce's work is in no danger of being confused with that of the populariser whose work is second-hand and cheap. This is apparent, for example, in Bruce's contribution to more than one one-volume Bible commentary where his comments on the text proved that he knew what really needed explanation and provided it succinctly, and where the scholar will read with ease between the lines Bruce's mind on matters of controversy and debate.

Second, at whatever level he was writing, Bruce expressed himself with superb clarity and ease. His work is always a delight to read, so smoothly does it flow. He is never guilty of obscurity, and he is a master of the apt phrase. All this is the mark of a writer who has carefully thought out what he wants to say and is thus able to express it neatly and unequivocally. Here is something worthy of praise in an age when dullness, and even vagueness and obscurity, sometimes seem to be the hallmarks of scholarship. The clarity and utility of his writings is demonstrated by numerous translations into European and Asian languages.

Bruce belonged to what may be called the conservative wing of New Testament scholarship. This approach is characterised by its recognition of the generally reliable character of the New Testament from a historical point of view and by its understanding of its theological teaching as finding its appropriate systematic expression in the outlook of the Protestant Reformation. No doubt Bruce was influenced here by his upbringing in the Christian Brethren, who are among the more right-wing groups in

Protestant orthodoxy.[5] This fact will inevitably raise the question in some people's minds whether his conclusions in matters of biblical study and theology were not dictated by his presuppositions rather than being the result of objective study of the evidence. To this question various points may be made.

First, it is increasingly accepted that no scholar is entirely free from presuppositions which affect the way in which a text is read or a problem is solved, and that the right approach lies in recognising and allowing for one's presuppositions as much as possible and in entering into dialogue with scholars with different presuppositions.

Second, it follows from this that the legitimacy of different approaches must be recognised, and the decisive test of the validity of any conclusions is whether they rest on a fair reading of the evidence; in other words, a scholar's conclusions cannot be rejected simply because 'you would expect him to say that in view of his presuppositions', but they must be examined in the light of the evidence; when presuppositions replace evidence and cogent argument, then is the time to criticise.

Third, it is important to observe that Bruce was concerned not only to uphold his own interpretation of the New Testament over against a more 'liberal' approach but also to help people in his own tradition to move out of the kind of 'fundamentalism' which is antithetical to any kind of biblical criticism into the 'conservative evangelicalism' which recognises that the Bible is open to historical and literary study.

This last point deserves some development. Prior to Bruce's work there had been little in the way of first-class scholarship from this wing of the church since the turn of the century. The prevailing theological climate was that of a liberalism which looked at the Bible so much from a human point of view that it was in danger of depriving it of its character as a source of divine revelation.[6] Admittedly, the rise of the kind of theology associated with the name of Karl Barth did much to restore the balance between the character of the Bible as the words of man and the Word of God.

[5] It may be necessary to comment that the group to which Bruce belonged is to be sharply distinguished from the so-called Exclusive or Closed Brethren and similar sectarian groups. His own account of the 'Open' Brethren will be found in *In Retrospect*, 313–17. It must be admitted that at the time when it was originally published (1961) it represented an ideal of freedom and openness which was by no means universally maintained, and it is certain that the influence of Bruce himself has had a lot to do with the fact that the Brethren of today are much closer to it.

[6] This point has been increasingly recognised by later scholars standing closer to that tradition. See, for example, T. W. Manson, 'The Failure of Liberalism to interpret the Bible as the Word of God', in C. W. Dugmore (ed.), *The Interpretation of the Bible*, London: SPCK, 1944, 92–107; J. Smart, *The Strange Silence of the Bible in the Church*, London: SCM Press, 1970.

Nevertheless, the general effect of liberalism was that Christians of a more traditional outlook concluded that the results of criticism were entirely negative, and therefore that the method itself was fundamentally flawed. Biblical criticism and assaults on the faith appeared to be synonymous to them, and the result was a fairly complete withdrawal by traditionalists from the field of biblical study.

If the situation has now changed, it is in large measure due to the work of Bruce who has demonstrated to his fellow-evangelicals that biblical criticism can help them to understand the Bible better and can lead to positive conclusions as well as negative ones.

At the same time he has equally shown to students of a more liberal persuasion that there is an intellectually respectable case for a view of the human character of Scripture and its composition which is fully compatible with the claims made for it as divine revelation. More than anybody else Bruce has demonstrated that it is possible to approach the Bible in a spirit of critical study and to find that it stands up to critical scrutiny. This does not mean that Bruce's work always leads to an acceptance of traditional conservative conclusions. He shared, for example, critical doubts about the authorship of the Pastoral Epistles, and he adopted positions in Old Testament scholarship which were not always readily acceptable to many of his more conservative friends.

In all this Bruce was something of a bridge-builder between different schools of scholarship. Unlike many more traditional Christians who avoided all contact with those from whose views they dissented, Bruce was prepared to join in the common scholarly enterprise and was respected by those who might reject his conservatism but could not mistake his scholarly integrity and capability coupled with his eirenic spirit.

What, then, were the particular qualities and interests that characterised Bruce's approach?

In the first place, he brought to his biblical studies the background of a sound training in the Latin and Greek Classics and several years of experience in research and teaching in a university setting. This meant that he was familiar with the principles and methods used in the study of ancient literature, in particular the literature of the Hellenistic world which formed the environment of the New Testament. He was able to approach the New Testament from the standpoint of one who knew how to evaluate Greek literature and what to expect from it. Consequently, he could study the New Testament 'like any other book' and was not hindered by theological prejudice (whether conservative or radical) from a dispassionate examination of its contents.

Bruce thus found himself in that group of Classicists who have directed their attention to the New Testament and reached a positive verdict on

its historical worth. It is surely no coincidence that Bruce did his early classical training in the University where Sir William M. Ramsay had once taught Humanity. It is true, of course, that Bruce had no need to undergo a conversion like that of Ramsay from a negative estimate of the historicity of the New Testament to a positive one, but this is no reason to regard his position as any the less objective. The work of both scholars is to be judged by its quality and not by irrelevant psychological considerations. The significant fact is that classical scholars often do seem to have a higher estimate of the historical worth of the New Testament than do the professional theologians—and this is not because they are ignorant of the work of the latter. Bruce himself comments:

> The NT writings were not, of course, designed as historians' source material, and apart from Luke-Acts are not written in historiographical style; but historians will not be deterred on that account from using them as source-material; nor will they be intimidated by theologians who assure them that their task is impossible and illegitimate.[7]

Second, we may link with Bruce's classical outlook his stress on the importance of archaeology. Classical archaeology has an important contribution to make to the understanding of the New Testament, especially in Acts whose detailed background can be illustrated and substantiated to a remarkable extent from archaeological discoveries. Bruce's earliest book, *Are the New Testament Documents Reliable?*,[8] makes ample use of this method within the framework of a general treatment in which he takes full account of other types of critical study. In it he stated:

> I have written as a teacher of classics, with the purpose of showing that the grounds for accepting the New Testament as reliable compare very favourably with those on which the classical student accepts the authenticity and credibility of many ancient documents.[9]

To be sure, such an approach may lead to scepticism about the historical reliability of parts of the NT,[10] but it certainly indicates that in places where control is possible the historicity of many details in Acts in particular can be upheld.[11]

[7] F. F. Bruce, *New Testament History*, London: Nelson, 1969, 159 n. 1. See further his presidential address to Studiorum Novi Testamenti Societas, 'The New Testament and Classical Studies', *New Testament Studies* 22, 1975–76, 229–42.

[8] First published in 1943. Republished as *The New Testament Documents: Are they Reliable?* and frequently reprinted.

[9] Ibid. iii.

[10] As in the case of classical scholars who have compared Acts with ancient romances; R. I. Pervo, *Profit with Delight: The Literary Genre of the Acts of the Apostles*, Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987.

[11] See the work of Bruce's pupil C. J. Hemer, *The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History* (edited by C. H. Gempf), Tübingen: Mohr, 1989.

Bruce's interest in archaeology was not confined to the Graeco-Roman world. He gave the Tyndale Old Testament Lecture in 1947 on *The Hittites and the Old Testament*,[12] and he wrote the chapter on 'Tell el 'Amarna' in a survey volume produced by the Society for Old Testament Study.[13] He succeeded S. H. Hooke as editor of the *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* (1957–71), where his regular 'Notes and News' added greatly to the value of the journal, and his interests even extended to editorship of *Yorkshire Celtic Studies* (1945–57).

But the area where he made his own chief contribution is in the assessment of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Bruce characteristically produced a 'popular' book on the discoveries—*Second Thoughts on the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1956)—which is second to none as a reliable and readable account of the matter. He also produced a brief and original study of *The Teacher of Righteousness in the Qumran Texts*[14] and, more importantly, a detailed and constructive monograph on *Biblical Exegesis in the Qumran Texts* (London: Tyndale Press, 1959) which greatly illuminated the sect's understanding of their Scriptures. He served as editor for the material on the Dead Sea Scrolls in the *Encyclopaedia Judaica*.

Third, Bruce has recognised that the New Testament must be understood in the light of the OT and of Judaism. In his earlier days as a teacher he was responsible for dealing with both Testaments—and he was one of the few contemporary scholars with the breadth of expertise to be able to do so. *Israel and the Nations* (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1963) is a competent survey of the history of the period, now no doubt dated in comparison with more modern studies. Bruce's main interest, however, was in the interpretation of the Old Testament in the New, and several publications took up this theme, especially *This is That* (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1968); *The Time is Fulfilled* (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1978).

This combination of Classical, archaeological and Old Testament studies formed the background for Bruce's main work in the field of New Testament. His achievements in this area can be considered under four heads: the history of New Testament times; the Book of Acts; the career and letters of Paul; and the rest of the New Testament.

1 Among Bruce's earliest works was a trilogy, based on extra-mural lectures, which brilliantly portrayed the early history of the church. The three books, *The Dawn of Christianity* (London: Paternoster Press, 1950),

[12] London: Tyndale Press, 1947.

[13] D. Winton Thomas (ed.), *Archaeology and Old Testament Study*, Oxford University Press, 1967, 3–20.

[14] London: Tyndale Press, 1957. It was originally presented as The Tyndale Lecture in Biblical Archaeology, 1956.

The Growing Day (1951), and *Light in the West* (1952) were combined into one volume as *The Spreading Flame* (1953). One of the original impetuses to this work was the aim of showing that the facts concerning *The Rise of Christianity* differed in very significant respects from the presentation of them in the book of that name by E. W. Barnes, the very liberal Bishop of Birmingham (London: Longmans, 1947).[15] The result was a brilliant, eminently readable survey of the New Testament period which Bruce was then persuaded to carry on into the sub-apostolic period and right through to the conversion of Britain.

At a later point he wrote an entirely fresh volume on *New Testament History* (London: Nelson, 1969) which deals with the NT period and its background in considerable detail; its strength indeed lies in the mass of detailed information, but it lacks discussion of controversial matters in the record of the actual events of Christian history. While Bruce was able to present a picture of Christian origins which many will find coherent and persuasive, and which is corroborated by a number of recent, similar investigations[16], it is to be regretted that he did not really enter into debate with advocates of an approach which finds the New Testament record much less straightforward.[17]

2 A study of *The Acts of the Apostles: The Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary* (London: Tyndale Press) naturally fits in with this historical interest. It was, as we have noted, the first major area to claim Bruce's attention. The commentary was published in 1951, and it is not too much to say that it marked the real beginning of conservative evangelical scholarship as well as setting a high standard for others to follow. Intended as a textbook for students, it was characterised by careful attention to detail in matters of textual criticism and Greek syntax. Its basic approach was historical; it gave a coherent interpretation of Acts as an authentic history of the early church written by Luke, the companion of Paul. Here certainly Bruce was fully aware of the historical problems, as they had been posed at that time and dealt faithfully with them. It is noteworthy that his preparations for the volume included a lecture on *The Speeches in the Acts of the Apostles* (London: Tyndale Press, 1943) in which he dealt with the objections to their historical basis not only from H. J.

[15] Bruce was not the only scholar to attempt a refutation of the bishop's views. On a much smaller scale, see F. G. Kenyon, *The Bible and Modern Scholarship*, London: Murray, 1948.

[16] E.g. F. V. Filson, *A New Testament History* (London: SCM Press, 1965); B. Reicke, *The New Testament Era* (London: Black, 1969); L. Goppelt, *Apostolic and Post-Apostolic Times* (London: Black, 1970).

[17] E.g. H. Conzelmann, *History of Primitive Christianity*, London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1973.

Cadbury, whose work was well-known in the English-speaking world but also from M. Dibelius whose work was scarcely known outside Germany (as indeed it continued to be during the war years until it was translated in 1956).[18]

If from the perspective of today the commentary had a weakness, it was that it was too narrowly linguistic and historical and was lacking in theological content. True, it was written just before the point when the recognition began to prevail that a New Testament commentary must be primarily theological because the nature of the subject matter requires it to be so. Nevertheless, the real explanation of the omission lay in the fact that Bruce was simultaneously engaged on a commentary on Acts for what was known in the UK as the New London Commentary and elsewhere as the New International Commentary; this series was intended to present a running exposition of the text at a non-technical level with scholarly detail relegated to footnotes. The pattern was congenial to Bruce, and the commentary paid much more attention to theological matters than was the case with the earlier one *(The Book of the Acts* (London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1953). If readers in the 1990s feel nevertheless that it does not deal sufficiently with the theology of Acts, and that, while theological points are discussed, the question of the relation between the theology of the author and that of the early church is not really raised, it can justly be urged that these questions reflect the concern of contemporary scholarship and that Bruce wrote before they had become as dominant as they now are.

What Bruce was doing is showing that a positively evangelical approach to the text of the NT makes sense of it. After all, the test of any kind of understanding of a text is whether it arises from the text and is demanded by the text or has been forced upon it at the expense of failure to do justice to the text. In Rudolf Bultmann's commentary on the Fourth Gospel, for example, the exegesis is conducted on the basis of the assumption that the Gospel is to be understood in terms of Existentialism; hence Bultmann continually expresses what he thinks John really means in Existentialist language. But this approach may not do justice to what John says; it may be plausible for some parts of the Gospel, but there are others which

[18] The Lecture was the first to be given under the auspices of the Biblical Research Committee of the Inter-Varsity Fellowship (which was the predecessor of the Tyndale Fellowship for Biblical and Theological Research established in 1945), of which Bruce was a founder member and Chairman from 1942 to 1951, and which has been mainly responsible for the revival of biblical scholarship among conservative evangelical Christians. It was to this group that Bruce volunteered to write his commentary on Acts as early as May, 1939. Throughout his life Bruce was a strong supporter of the Inter-Varsity Fellowship (now the Universities and Colleges Christian Fellowship), serving as its Honorary President in 1955.

will not yield to this treatment, and so the whole enterprise is rendered questionable.[19]

Now one can raise the criticism that evangelical Christians like Bruce may assume too easily that their understanding of the gospel flows directly from the text and that their language is the best for expressing its meaning. They may take it for granted that the thought-forms of the past will still be meaningful today, and that the essential message of the New Testament does not need any correction or reformulation in the light of succeeding centuries. So far as Bruce is concerned, however, he was clearly aware of these questions even if he did not bring them out into the open as much as he might have done. For example, in a discussion of the heavenly intercession of Christ, as it is presented in Hebrews, he wrote:

> If we translate this emphasis into terms less pictorial than those which the writer to the Hebrews uses, we may say that the death of Christ, and the spirit in which he accepted death, constitute an abiding force in the eternal order, powerfully acting in defense of mankind.[20]

Nevertheless, Bruce would equally firmly claim that for Christians the New Testament is part of the authoritative revelation of God, and there can be no question of evading its authority.

This same general approach can be found in his work as a whole.

3 From Acts we turn to Paul. Here is the area of the New Testament where Bruce found himself most at home. He wrote commentaries on varying scales on *Romans* (Tyndale NT Commentaries, 1963, ²1985); *1 and 2 Corinthians* (New Century Bible, 1971), *Galatians* (New International Greek Testament Commentary, 1982), *Ephesians* (New International Commentary, 1984; he also wrote a shorter exposition published independently by Pickering and Inglis, 1961); *Philippians* (Good News Bible Commentary, 1983; republished in the New International Biblical Commentary, 1989); *Colossians* and *Philemon* (New International Commentary, 1957, ²1984), *1 and 2 Thessalonians* (Word Biblical Commentary, 1982). Of these the major works are those on Galatians and 1 and 2 Thessalonians, both of them based on the Greek text and discussing it in considerable detail, and the commentary on Galatians is perhaps Bruce's best work. It combines acute linguistic discussion with profound discussion of theology, and the whole is suffused with the warmth that comes out of sympathetic understanding of the text. It is doubtless written on more conventional lines than the equally important work of H. D. Betz which appeared almost simultaneously, but its very freedom from conjecture may well make it more of an abiding contribution to the literature on the epistle.

[19] As is argued in the equally meticulous and scholarly commentary by R. Schnackenburg in Herders theologischer Kommentar zum NT.

[20] F. F. Bruce, 'The Interpretation of Hebrews', *Interpretation* 23, 1969, 3–19, cited from 9.

In addition Bruce wrote at length on the career and thought of Paul. Part of the impetus to this may well have lain in the obligation of the Rylands Professor to take his share in the public lectures of the Rylands Library. A regular stream of essays on different aspects of Paul's life and thought and on the Book of Acts were delivered in public and published in the Bulletin right up to 1986 when health problems restricted his public activities. These formed the basis for a major study of *Paul: Apostle of the Free Spirit* (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1977) in which Bruce summed up his understanding of Paul. The work is not a 'theology of Paul', but it places his thought, as expressed in his letters, in the context of his career and the world in which he lived. The stress on freedom, reflected in the title, is something that was increasingly congenial to Bruce.

4 Fourthly, there is Bruce's contribution to the study of the rest of the New Testament. Here his commentary on *Hebrews* in the New International Commentary (1964, [2]1990) must be reckoned a major achievement. He also wrote on *The Epistles of John* (Glasgow: Pickering and Inglis, 1970) and the *Gospel of John* (Glasgow: Pickering and Inglis, 1983), in both cases on the level of a more popular type of exposition which dealt admirably with the meaning of the text but which eschewed the technical problems which would have been foreign to the kind of audience which he was addressing. There is no denying that to a considerable extent the shape of Bruce's writing was determined by the character of the audience; he had to start from where they were, and the kind of people in his constituency would not have coped with the technicalities and critical problems which he dealt with in his more learned works. But even in the New International Commentary series Bruce was adept at keeping the text non-technical and providing the more scholarly material in footnotes.

Bruce was less at home in the Gospels, although he wrote at a more popular level on the life and work of Jesus, and never without illumining the subject. *Jesus and Christian Origins outside the New Testament* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1974), *The Real Jesus* (1985), and *The Hard Sayings of Jesus* are among his writings in this area. One of his earliest works was a series of essays on *The Books and the Parchments* (Glasgow: Pickering and Inglis, 1950, [4]1984), in which he surveyed at a popular level the story of the various ancient versions of the Bible. More recently he produced the standard account of the history of *The English Bible* (London: Lutterworth, 1961; revised as *History of the Bible in English*, New York: OUP, [3]1978/London: Lutterworth, 1979) tracing the story up to the publication of the New English Bible. Still more recently there is his work on *The Canon of Scripture* (Glasgow: Chapter House, 1988) which is noteworthy for discussing both Testaments together.

All these—and others not listed here—constitute a formidable enough list of publications—some fifty books in all. Add to that the fact that in his last years he carefully revised several of his earlier works to bring them up to date.[21] Besides all these, there was a wealth of contributions to collective volumes on all kinds of biblical subjects; they frequently offered a shrewd assessment of currently fashionable ideas and gave well-founded reasons why they should or should not be accepted. There was a regular stream of writings in more popular religious journals; for years he contributed a series of answers to questions by readers in the Brethren monthly magazine, *The Harvester*, and something like a thousand of these short pieces were gathered together in *Answers to Questions* (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1972). The same journal saw his memoirs published month by month, eventually shaped into his book *In Retrospect: Remembrance of Things Past* (Glasgow: Pickering and Inglis, 1980), which is written with typical dry wit and offers a fascinating commentary on his early life in north-east Scotland as well as on his experiences south of the border. His last work, *A Mind for What Matters* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), originally intended to be published as a tribute on his eightieth birthday, is a collection of mainly previously published essays, including a couple on the history of Brethren thought which reveal his specialist knowledge in that area. He was associated with *The Evangelical Quarterly*, first as Associate Editor and then as Editor for thirty-eight years up to 1980. He also edited the *Journal of the Transactions of the Victoria Institute* (1949–57), a periodical devoted especially to questions on the interface between science and religion.

F. F. Bruce may not go down in history as a highly creative, original thinker. His name will not be associated with any brilliant new thesis in biblical scholarship, in the way in which, for example, his predecessors in Manchester, C. H. Dodd and T. W. Manson, have given their names to 'realised eschatology' and the corporate aspects of the Son of Man image respectively. His gifts were of a different order and perhaps more akin to those of the first holder of the Rylands Chair, A. S. Peake, who was also responsible for the high-level mediation of biblical scholarship to the Christian church. Bruce's contribution lies more in his encyclopaedic knowledge and interests, combined with a phenomenal memory and a brilliantly lucid and engaging written style (strangely different from his

[21] Thus he revised his volume which included Colossians and Philemon in the New International Commentary fairly substantially (and contributed a fresh treatment of Ephesians in place of the previous one by his colleague, E. K. Simpson), as also the volumes on Acts and Hebrews (1984, 1988 and 1990 respectively). His last major work was a thorough revision of his first major publication, the commentary on the Greek text of *The Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), where he was not afraid to alter his judgment on such an important matter as the dating of Acts.

rather dry delivery as a speaker), which enabled him to present fresh information at every point rather than to weave and conceive major new hypotheses. He was able to sift the work of others, to weed out what was doubtful or ephemeral, and to present in solid and convincing form a picture of the real state of affairs. New Testament history and thought alike are thus placed on a firm basis; the readers know that they will learn much from the presentation and not be exposed to daring and unlikely hypotheses. It should need no argument that this is among the proper tasks of a scholar, and that, while one is grateful for the stimulus of new hypotheses, it is of supreme value to be presented with sound learning and sober conclusions.

The high respect given to Bruce as a biblical scholar is evident from the honours which he received. In addition to the Aberdeen DD already mentioned he received an honorary doctorate (D Litt.) from Sheffield (1988). In 1973 he was elected a Fellow of the British Academy. He was particularly delighted to be awarded the Academy's Burkitt Medal; for Biblical Studies in 1979. He was president both of the Society for Old Testament Study (1965) and also of the Societas Novi Testamenti Studiorum (1975)—a rare double honour shared with Matthew Black. He received two Festschriften, one from colleagues and one from former students, and an issue of the *Journal of Semitic Studies* was dedicated to him.[22]

This tribute is not the place to comment on his life outside his scholarly career in any detail. He was married in 1935 to Betty Davidson, a fellow student in Aberdeen, and they had two children, Iain and Sheila. Throughout his life he enjoyed the happiest of home life with his wife and family. He enjoyed travel and listed it among his recreations. Some people found him difficult to get to know, for he was not a master of small talk, but colleagues and students alike have testified to his genuine friendship and care expressed in many ways; he demonstrated his interest in them and their families, and was as ready to play on the floor with their children as to talk with them on social occasions. He was completely lacking in pride and ready to learn from people of every shade of opinion. Only in his last three

[22] W. W. Gasque and R. P. martin, *Apostolic History and the Gospel* (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1970); D. P. Hagner and M. J. Harris, *Pauline Studies* (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1980); C. E. Bosworth and S. Strelcyn, *Studies in Honour of F. F. Bruce: Journal of Semitic Studies* 23/2, Autumn 1978. Some account of Bruce's life and influence can be found in *The Journal of the Christian Brethren Research Fellowship* 22, 1971, which was devoted to aspects of his work and Christian witness. The present obituary incorporates the substance of the author's contribution on 'F. F. Bruce as a Biblical Scholar', ibid., 5–12. See also Frederick Fyvie Bruce: An Appreciation', by Laurel and Ward Gasque, in *Aware*, November, 1990, 1–6, and the obituary in the *Journal of Semitic Studies* 36, 1991, 1–6, by A. R. Millard (to whom I am indebted for much valuable information). Lists of his major writings can be found in the two Festschriften and of his minor writings (to 1971) in the CBRF Journal.

or four years did he experience ill-health, but even then his capacity and zeal for scholarly work did not desert him; as late as the end of August 1990 he despatched a contribution to an as yet unpublished collection of *Documents from New Testament Times*, and he continued to work until a matter of days before his death. The University of Manchester held a memorial service on 13 March, 1991, at which his academic career and achievements were particularly remembered. Earlier, on 27 October, 1990, a memorial service of a more personal character was held in Brinnington Chapel, Stockport, where Bruce was an elder. Perhaps there is space even in a British Academy obituary for the story of the building site worker who joined Brinnington Chapel after becoming a Christian, and who was confronted by his work-mates with difficult questions about his new-found faith. He produced the most excellent and well-informed answers until at last his-mates asked him where he got all his answers to their questions. 'O well,' he said, 'there's an old fellow in our church called Fred. He seems to know all about these things.'

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