

A Historical Note:

“I’m celebrating a few things...”

This is a ‘historical’ piece. Written over a period of a few days and completed on the 31st October 2003 in Jaffna, this statement has since been edited only a little. A HEALTH WARNING is attached for any New Testament scholar reading it!

Since the British New Testament Conference at the beginning of September 2003 and my return to Jaffna, I have added to my previous two ‘parsings’ of Mark’s and Luke’s Gospels. Firstly, it was Matthew. Then it was Acts, then the turn of John. A start was made on the Revelation, a glance at IJohn, a little longer at IIIJohn and Jude, and then Romans. And what a delight it was, a complete surprise, being able to read ‘Romans’ in the way that Paul and Tertius had always intended it be read. Something that no one has done for centuries. And that is my point, my singular and all important point (‘parsing’ is simply a part of the method, an analytical tool). All these New Testament books can be read as their *authors* first intended. They are describable in ways that New Testament scholarship has simply not known anything about! There is no kind, or gentle way of putting it. (*On the 30th November 2003, I completed my first full parsing and rhetorical analysis of all twenty-seven books.*) Twenty-one years ago I started this work. In the few weeks since the British New Testament Conference it has come of age. There are structures. There is a style. There are things to be known beyond even the imaginings of most scholars.

My Methodology

Literary analysis, for me, begins with reading a text for its contents, emphases and themes and with looking, at the same time, for any signifiers of structure. This is the first stage of rhetorical analysis. Next to be explored are the writer’s preferences for opening and closing formulae and any manner of method he might have used to signal the beginnings and endings of his passages. Sectional, sub-sectional and part propositions are raised in this way. These are then tested by a ‘full parsing’ of the text.

A full parsing of all the above books discloses that their writers employed the three-part presentational style, *abb’*. This means to me that we can accurately discern, as did the first readers/reciters, all the delineations of these writers’ pieces which make up all the wholes and which together make up all the book wholes.

It is my judgement that these texts work at two levels, at what might be described as the ‘public’ and ‘private’ levels. At the ‘public’ level is that which is heard by the audience. We know it as the contents, that which was delivered from the mouth of the reader/reciter to the ears of the listeners. At the ‘private’ level is information the writer provided for the reader/reciter. Because it was then the writer’s assistance to the one who would read/recite the work, it is today the assistance to anyone who might want to know *how* a book is written. And knowing *how* a book is written, of course, gives us sure

knowledge of *what* is written. And knowing *what* is written, of course, gives us insight into understanding *why* it was written in the first place.

I do not exaggerate. This writing style allows us pinpoint accuracy. We can read whole texts in their parts, as they were first written. This is rudimentary information. It is basic to understanding these New Testament works. A study of church lectionaries demonstrates that many passages for Sunday reading both begin and end in places that the writers themselves would definitely not have chosen. New Testament scholarship in general is totally oblivious to the discipline of the writers. It is nothing short of shameful! It is scandalous!

It came to me, once back in Jaffna, after the British New Testament Conference of 2003, that I really did have a methodology that worked. I was able to do something that no one had literally been able to do for centuries. What had worked for Mark was then found to work for Matthew, and then for Luke-Acts as a whole, and wonderfully also for John. Book after book, I was completing work that over fifteen years ago had been published in *Sliced Bread*. But when it worked for me also on Paul, never having before looked into Paul's writings in this way, it was something, really something, the icing....! Reading Romans without sharp focus is one thing, but reading it in sharp focus, in full 3D and panoramic effect with surround sound, and for the first time, was something so special that it seemed to me it was worth living fifty-five years for just this one experience. But!

A Personal Critique of New Testament Scholarship

It is said: 'The New Testament *can hardly be considered as literature at all... The aesthetic motive and the desire to produce fine writing as something worthwhile in itself are foreign to its authors... The New Testament itself reveals little acquaintance with any literature other than the Old Testament... Their comparative indifference to pagan literature was on the whole an advantage to the writers of the New Testament. They gained therefore in freshness and freedom from stale conventions and artificial rhetoric... **They were not conscious literary artists, obeying a convention, and imitating the correct models, like Hellenistic authors, but rather practical men falling into familiar forms when these happened to provide them with effective means of expression, in the case both of the oral and written literature.**' (From: 'The Literature and Canon of the New Testament', *Peake's Commentary*, reprinted 1977.)*

One has to ask, How could anyone have got it so wrong? How could anyone (or everyone) have got it so *badly* wrong, and as badly wrong as this? Did the one who was writing these things not look at the New Testament texts himself to see if anything he was saying about them was actually right, or not? [Romans is a five section chiasm, 1,2,C,2',1', with sectional structures, ABB'/ABB'/ABB', as used in eleven other books.] And was there no one around to tell him that he had got it all wrong? [Matthew and Luke-Acts demonstrate 1-5,C,5'-1' sectional arrangements; John and Revelation: 1-3,C,3'-1' schemes.]

I am not normally led to consider possible conspiracy theories, or possible sinister motives, but with this I am! It is so incredibly badly wrong. [Mark's sectional structure shares the same arrangement as the book structure of Homer's *Iliad*, ABB',X,ABB', see *The Markan Matrix*, p.348.] Or, is it possible that Classics Scholars deliberately hid the truth, for good motives? Yes, of

course, *good* motives! The New Testament had to be preserved from being associated with any *pagan* influences! I'm trying to believe in a conspiracy, trying very hard, but the less attractive alternative is I think the one that I am going to have to live with. The only possible position that I think can be entertained is simply that New Testament scholarship has been found wanting! It has never done its own homework!

I have had my own testing times with New Testament scholars! In 1988 when I put my work out in *Sliced Bread: the Four Gospels, Acts and Revelation; their Literary Structures* it was met with an academic's review, 'The Revelation to John maybe, *but not surely the Gospels?*' That's all! After all that work on sifting the structures and presenting the structures of the books! Yes, there was some appreciation of my 'scholarship', and an acknowledgement of all the work I had covered, but in the end the judgement hung on the reviewer's assumption: we have never seen anything like this before, so it cannot possibly be right! And when my next book *The Markan Matrix: a Literary-Structural Analysis of the Gospel of Mark* came out, in 1999, it did get a particularly long review in a thoroughly academic publication (*JTS*, vol.52, Apr. 2001). But all the reviewer could say, towards its close, was, 'Much as one respects the scholarship and conviction which has gone into this book, *sadly it runs counter to too many currents and consensuses* in Markan scholarship....' How does one answer this? What is this academic word, 'sadly'? For whom is one to be 'sad'? For me? Or are we to be sad for Markan Scholarship? And what of 'currents' and 'consensuses'? To whom are they important? The ones who are responsible for them!

I have a few more examples of the problems scholars have. A revered Professor I bumped into at the recent Conference, asked me (in regard to 'Mark'), 'You're the one, aren't you, who's interested in numbers?' I actually have no predilection for numbers, but I do note that Mark does (see for example Mk. 8.19-21). The Professor, *like many of us*, has a problem with 'numbers'. Another who became a good friend in Sri Lanka, now returned to Scotland, is a Professor of Applied Theology. After years in the work, like the aforementioned Professor, he cannot *believe* that there is anything more to the study of the New Testament than what *he knows* already. And in the last four weeks, as I've emailed my most recent findings to the relevant BNTC delegates (appropriate to their seminar groups and research interests), I have had the kind of response I might have expected: a deafening silence from the majority, and two replies from delegates requesting me to remove their names from my lists! I have had, however, the happy experience of a handful of what do seem to be sincere 'thank yous' and the not unexpected gentle and warm support of one (Methodist) Professor. The reason for the majority's silence? Busyness, most likely. But New Testament scholarship has been so long without any factual, objective information about the texts that even now, when it is given such information, one wonders if it will be able to recognize it for what it is! New Testament Scholarship has been 'off the rails' for years.

I'm in my 56th year of life. I'm so thrilled to be excited about anything, I suppose. And here is something to make alive every fibre of my being! I'm angry too! Someone should have been able to tell me when I was a boy that Mark's Gospel was four series of seven days! The New Testament world of scholarship is naked, has no clothes! It has never *known* the New Testament books! I'm in my 25th year of ministry, my 21st year of serious New Testament analysis.

Just when we needed it most in the modern era, there was no one around to teach us rhetoric. We are having to learn about it from scratch, from our libraries. For me there was one particular moment of realization. I was standing in the Classics section of the Glasgow University Library. Aristotle's *Ars Rhetorica* in hand. The rules of the Epilogue: when you get to your *epilogos*, don't use 'ands' to begin your sentences. Don't use 'ands'... Don't use 'ands'! One of the *certainties* of modern scholarship is that Mark did not write Mark 16.9-20, and one of the reasons is that *it lacks* the *καί* (the 'and') with which he normally began his sentences! Inept, absurd, silly, unskilful! Ignorant! Has modern New Testament scholarship any foundational disciplines of any worth?

Just when we could have done with someone who really knew about parsing, there was again no one at all to help! Lost! The art and the science, the discipline... gone! My friend and Methodist Professor, however, persuaded me to think about my own definition. What was it that I was doing and was now calling 'parsing'? I turned to the Seventh edition of the Concise Oxford Dictionary (the only edition I have in Jaffna). And I found woefully inadequate definition there. For me parsing is to do with 'part'-ing, by which I mean that the function of parsing is first and foremost the discerning of the parts, by understanding them fully, as well as by understanding how they function in relation to other parts. It is an exercise not for its own sake, but for the sake of understanding a whole piece of literature in terms of all its parts. Certainly, it was not conjured up in the first place by Classics' Teachers with the intention of boring school students stupid.

And now perhaps we come to the strangest realization of all. We read that New Testament criticism *despairs* of all sorts of things that it says it *cannot know* about the New Testament books themselves. Yet, I simply do not believe this any more! For 'despairs of' read 'delights in'. Ignorance has been bliss! Just about any theory, or any fanciful idea ('Q' for one!) could be entertained, anything at all which could be conjured up for a legitimate exercise. But for all the frenetic activity, and for all the recent diversification of New Testament interests, where are the sure results? Consensuses are not quite the same, are they? And where in the list of research priorities is our exploration of the actual texts of the New Testament? At the top, where we might have expected it to be? Not according to what I have seen of the lists of post graduate research interests. How can we talk of New Testament scholarship as a 'discipline' in its own right, if we are not exploring the Greek of the New Testament texts and manuscripts? Is it the aforementioned 'despair' that led to the work's relegation?

And there is yet more. We speak of what we *believe* to have been the skills of past New Testament scholars, before the new critical era. But what I want to know is this: if they had had skills in rhetoric as we are led to believe, and if they had had skills in 'proper parsing', why...? Be patient with me. Let me try a little harder to shape the question in the clearest possible way. If the old disciplines of Rhetoric, of reading Greek and of doing proper parsing were all the stock-in-trade of past New Testament scholars, why (Yes! and Yes?), why were we not the recipients of handed down truths from them about the structures of the New Testament books and the styles of the New Testament writers that would surely have been known to them if we can know them now, using the tools that we thought were once theirs?! A discipline of study, even a disciplined study, cannot have failed in its task for so long, can it? The conspiracy theory has a lot going for it! The alternative is otherwise true: no one, for centuries has actually been reading the New Testament texts for themselves! No one has bothered him/herself enough to go back to the

manuscripts and read them! They have let the years of scholarship cloud their eyes from seeing the scholarship of the New Testament writers for themselves. If you are one who has been reading the capital letters and the full stops in the texts you have been studying as the actual delineations of sentences that the writers intended, you have not been doing your job. You never went back to the texts that the writers left us, in their 'sentence-less' *and* even wordless states!

Mark is a brilliant writer! He's no writer at all! I am on another tack now, into head wind! He's a wonderful theologian! He's no theologian! Opposite views are heard on just about everything in New Testament circles! (In regard to Mark, many views pertain simply because his work isn't understood for what it is.) No wonder New Testament scholarship is ridiculed in the pulpits of fundamentalist churches all around the globe. And we hear from their preachers, 'scholars say...', and 'theologians would have us believe...'

In Sri Lanka at the present time 'an 'anti-conversion' bill is being presented in Parliament' and there is 'a sudden and unprecedented increase in violence against Churches, particularly the newer and smaller Churches, and pastors and workers' (in the south mainly, from a growing number of Buddhists; but also in the northeast, from a few Hindus). My quotes are taken from the Pastoral Letter, the National Christian Council, 17th October 2003. It is a complicated issue, but my judgement is that one significant component is rampant, un-checked, mainly western-style Christian Fundamentalism.

It may be that you will not like where this bit of my presentation is going. As clearly as I can I will say what I think ought to be said. Christian Fundamentalism is one outcome of failed New Testament scholarship. That the church itself is biblically naïve and theologically naked is also the result of failed New Testament scholarship. That the church itself is failing disastrously in the materialist culture it helped cultivate is due in no little way to the paucity of relevant help it has received from its New Testament scholars.

Some Personal Recollections

Am I to be accused of ranting? Maybe! But I'll tell you this, and you will no doubt believe me. I left my first three-year ministerial appointment very reluctantly to go to Cambridge University in 1981, to Wesley House and Fitzwilliam College. I kept putting off going and I was told in the end, 'If you don't go this year, you won't be going at all.' It was the then Methodist Secretary of Candidates for the Ministry who told me this. I'd been at All Nations Christian College in Ware for two years, on a shoe-string budget, and with a wife and two young children, and I'd then answered a call to serve as a 'lay minister' in Methodist Churches in Lower Holloway and Camden Town - rough, difficult areas, between 1978 and 1981.

Leave the asylum seekers from El Salvador? The prostitutes? The drug addicts? The squatters? The Scotsmen who wanted to get back to Aberdeen? Leave an Irish Catholic Priest who could celebrate his 25th year of ordination, after the celebratory Ecumenical Service, in the School playground standing on a dais with a pint of beer in one hand and a fag in the other, and address us on his joys in priestly service? Leave churches that were growing? Leave three Methodist Churches that were growing in membership, attendance and relevance? Leave when we were working as

churches and architect minister to renew and beautify the buildings, inside and outside? Leave when we were building accommodation for a Christian Community and Mission Team in residence in Camden Town? Leave and go to Cambridge and study academic theology?

I went. And for the first term it was basic Greek for me, also Source, Form and Redaction Criticism! Relevant? What! There was a degree to be had! I'd got a degree in Architecture. I was told I had to get one in theology too! Yes and after I'd taken seven years to register and practice as an Architect, another seven years of training had to be completed. But I'd done five, there were only two more to go, and I'd already completed the only necessary probationary year as a Pre-Collegiate probationer. I'd be ordained at the Middlesborough Conference, in Durham, after Cambridge. I committed myself to the task. Jacob, all over again!

My first four weeks in Cambridge were spent in Camden Town. The Beacon Hill manse off the Camden Road had to be vacated before the 1st September, but the building work hadn't been completed in Camden Town, so the church was my home during the week and Wesley House, Jesus Lane, at the weekends. I was working with a father and son building partnership. We used to rib each other a lot. That is, I learned to give as good as I got. One of my best moments with them was when I was due to lead worship at a Wednesday lunchtime service at Wesley's Chapel, our Methodist 'cathedral'. They were both anxious that at 11.30am I hadn't begun to change out of my working clothes into my 'clericals'. It got to 12.00noon. 'I'm going like this. I'm representing you and people like you', I said. And they'd just taught me to plaster.

The first term in Cambridge was one I would like to forget, but it all changed for me in the weeks after the Christmas break. I had to decide on the courses in which I would be examined. Because I thought myself too old at 33 to be preparing for exams, I opted for an Undergraduate thesis to relieve myself of one course. Immediately, I began glimpsing a work that needed attention. My focus was the structure and content of the Central Section of Luke's Gospel. (Lk. 9.43b-19.48 eventually defined the extent of it, for me.) I became acquainted with copies of the earliest manuscripts at the University Library. The Finals came quickly enough, too quickly! Besides the course work, there were services to prepare, daily prayers and duties as President of the Student Common Room, for the second time in my life. And there was my wife too, and our three young children then, a soccer team to play for and squash! (On the last day of the final term, the Methodist Secretary of Candidates for the Ministry joined us at Wesley House for evening dinner. I was able to thank him, very genuinely, for insisting that I studied for a theological degree in Cambridge.)

My family was in Hull the day of my last exam, having gone ahead of me. To celebrate my completion of the courses and the exams, after evening hall at Wesley House I went to my study room on 'A' staircase and ceremonially swept my last exam's books and papers onto the floor, from off the top of my desk with the back of my right hand. On the desk, I then placed my own special folder. Working till 4.30am on Mark's Gospel, I went to bed on a high. I knew before I left Cambridge that Mark's Gospel was likely Four Series of Seven Days, that Luke and Acts likely paralleled each other and that they and Matthew were likely eleven-section chiasms. I thought *then* that John was likely also an eleven-section chiasm. It was the summer of 1983, the summer of my Ordination, twenty years ago.

Λοιπὸν· ('For the rest...')

What had struck me in Cambridge was that there was a huge job still to be done on the Books of the New Testament. It was in fact very unsettling *knowing* that there was a lot more still to be discovered, that there were so many indicators of this. What struck me when I attended the British New Testament Conference in Birmingham (in 2003) was that there was still a lot left for me to do. And yes, I had wanted a chance to present a paper on my subject, but I hadn't been given it. I twice tried. I attended anyway from Sri Lanka and I'm glad I did. When I got back to Jaffna, apart from the work I do, nothing could have stopped me from getting back down to my own New Testament research.

Eight weeks have now passed and it has been another immensely exciting period in my life for making New Testament discoveries. I'm here on my own just now, a repeat of twenty years ago. Again, my wife is with the children, but this time Sue's in Scotland, for the birth yesterday, to Kenny and Rosalind, of our first grand child, Finlay James Hutchison. I raise this work to you Finlay! Your *amapa** salutes you! At least there's one little boy who's going to grow up knowing that Mark's Gospel is Four Series of Seven Days.

* *amapa* is Tamil for 'mother's father'

A Postscript (April 2006)

In 2003 and 2004, I attended the annual British New Testament Conference, from Sri Lanka. I gained a lot, each visit, though what I really wanted was an opportunity to share something of what was exciting me. (My pre-conference, e-mailed proposals of papers were not taken up.)

I was delighted, therefore, on my third attempt, to be given my first opportunity in 2005 to present, at the Liverpool Conference, on the methodology and results of my own New Testament research. The paper was well received by my seminar group. (I also gave out copies of my earlier edition of this booklet to others there.) But since then, I've heard nothing from anyone.

In the last year, I've had the 'usual' rejections from publishers, just as prior to 1988 and to 1999, and one after four months of hopeful waiting. The upside is that in this time the work has gone on improving. The downside is that I am having to self-publish again.

A Postscript (January 2008)

Since writing the above, I have attended two more annual conferences run by the British New Testament Society, I have had two more grandchildren, spent many extra (fascinating and laborious) hours on the Greek texts, had numerous opportunities to speak on these discoveries (in churches and at Theological Societies) and have nearly reached the age of sixty. But still I have no publisher!