

Institute for Biblical Research 1973- 1993 Prologue and Prospects

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Tyndale House, Cambridge, is the seedbed out of which the Institute for Biblical Research was born. It crossed my path first, I believe, in the Christmas vacation of 1953 when I was a doctoral student at Edinburgh. It was then about nine years old, had a library of 1,500 or so books of mixed vintage and was being used during that holiday period by the warden, Andrew Walls, and his family and by one lone American doctoral student. After I finished my studies and returned to the States, it continued to be a summer resort for me, both for the New Testament Study Group, for its gradually growing library, and for the nearby University library.

In the late sixties I was impressed with the idea of a Tyndale House for evangelical scholars in the United States but dismissed it as an impractical dream. When the gentle urgings continued, I at length recognized them to be from the Holy Spirit and proceeded for a year or more to resist the idea in my prayers. "Lord, you've already given me a ministry of teaching. Lord, it's really not practical, and anyway I would not know how to go about such a project." Finally, I prayed, "All right, Lord, I'll call together some colleagues, and we will talk about it."

A letter to colleagues (see Appendix), which initiated our Institute, expressed the hope that a residential library for biblical research can be established . . . in the United States . . . as a center for research and conferences, and as a catalyst to encourage students toward a ministry of biblical scholarship. It would be organized along evangelical confessional lines and work in cooperation with the InterVarsity Christian Fellowship but . . . be governed by its own board.

An address at the twentieth anniversary meeting of IBR at Washington D.C., 19 November 1993.

In response, on 26 October 1970 some ten of us discussed the matter over lunch in a small cafe during the SBL meeting in New York City and established "The Tyndale Committee" to implement these goals. Two of the participants had young daughters who are now Fellows of the Institute, Marianne Meye Thompson and Judith Gundry Volt reminding us of how far we have come since that day.

Several colleagues rightly pointed out that to build a library one needed a permanent organization. After meeting annually for three years as The Tyndale Committee, and encouraged by British Tyndale Fellowship members at an international meeting in Los Angeles, the Committee asked me to write a constitution, which was adopted at Chicago in 1973 with some fifty charter members joining during the ensuing year. The name, Institute for Biblical Research, was patterned after the Institute for Advanced Studies in Princeton, New Jersey.

The Institute combined elements of an institute and of a fellowship with members being given the title, "Fellow"; somewhat later the category, "Associate," was offered to Ph.D. candidates in biblical studies. Continuing the yearly meeting immediately preceding the SBL and encouraging our Fellows to be active also in that secular academy, it supplemented this with an annual IBR lecture and sessions for papers and seminars. It also sent a representative to the InterVarsity Urbana conferences and established annual regional study groups in southern California, the Northwest, the Deep South, the Midwest/Chicago, the Southwest and the Northeast, some of which were regular and others sporadic. The Institute has been blessed by the establishment of a journal, *Bulletin for Biblical Research*, and by a steady increase in membership until today it includes some three hundred fellows and fifty associates, mainly from the USA and Canada, but a few from places as far away as Australia, South America, Europe, and South Africa. It has also encountered some problems and tensions, which are to be expected in any association of this nature.

At the beginning, some supposed that IBR was formed to compete with the Evangelical Theological Society. Following the InterVarsity statement of faith, it did not use the term inerrancy, and incorporated a fuller theological confession. Also, convinced that one can get bigger game with a rifle than with a shotgun, it limited membership to the Ph.D. level with specialties in biblical studies and in ancillary disciplines of ancient history, such as biblical archeology and Ancient Near East studies. But in none of these distinctives was IBR intended to supplant the ETS with its more varied theological interests. That a good number of IBR Fellows are also active members of ETS suggests

that these two Evangelical societies can supplement and support one another in their service to Christ.

With its limitation on membership IBR disappointed some colleagues with a D.Min. degree and some with specialties in Historical and Systematic Theology. To make matters clear, it specified this limitation in By-law IX (1986). But we did not do this in any spirit of elitism or from a lack of appreciation for other disciplines but in the conviction that for an age of specialties, we could make our best contribution within our stated framework.

From its inception IBR has included in our dues a subscription to *Tyndale Bulletin*, published by our sister society in Britain. With the increase of that publication to two issues per year, the establishment of our own journal and the inflation of the costs of both, the Institute faced and still faces the problem of how to continue *Tyndale Bulletin* as a link between IBR and the Tyndale Fellowship and at the same time to keep our dues within the reach of a considerable number of our Fellows. But whether by this or by other means IBR should, and I am confident shall, maintain its ties with the institution that shares our theological and scholarly commitments and that, by its important work on the elucidation of Scripture in the cause of Christ, has inspired and continues to inspire our endeavors.

More serious have been the theological differences among our Fellows between what may be termed 'the patriarchals' and 'the egalitarians'. It is reflected in the revision of our Constitution 'to minimize the use of generic masculine language' (Amendment IV, 1986) which was not, however, an ideological statement but an act of Christian courtesy to avoid unnecessary offense and at the same time to leave the door open for both points of view. The problem has not thereby been resolved but, with this attitude of mutual respect and of agreement to disagree, it has not produced the animosity among our Fellows that has occurred elsewhere in the Evangelical community.

I do not wish to underestimate the seriousness of this issue which, at least in its more radical forms, reaches to the depths of theological understanding about the nature of man and of God and that raises questions of sexual identity that the church also encountered in the Gnostic controversies of the first Christian centuries. But I am hopeful that, within IBR's commitment to the unique divine authority of Scripture and to an academic freedom for all to express their convictions either in inclusive or in masculine-generic idiom, the issue will not be destructive to our fellowship but may, like the divergence between Calvinism and Arminianism, teach us that we can work together in the midst of differences.

For a long time the IBR has lived with the problem of how to implement the vision for a residential reference library. In the seventies it received an overture from Carl Henry to join with the Institute for Advanced Christian Studies in a combined center for biblical and theological study. More recently, it considered a request to share a house of studies with other Evangelical organizations. For both queries, IBR had to ask whether its founding vision could be accomplished by a combined endeavor with others who had different though no less worthy goals.

For the past twenty years a number of us have prayed, and I have submitted proposals to some dozen foundations, seeking a positive response to our quest for a residential reference library. For the proposals IBR selected Princeton and later added Fort Worth as examples that fulfilled all the specified criteria for locating the library. However, apart from a British foundation's offer to consider a supplemental grant, I always got a negative reply but persisted in a half-resigned fashion with the thought that, like David's denied desire, perhaps it would be given to the next generation to build a house for God. Last year, however, I experienced the awe of a remarkable answer to a twenty-year-long prayer.

In 1991 *Life's Little Instruction Book*, H. Jackson Brown's observations and reminders to his college-bound son, was published by Rutledge Hill Press, founded by two Christian businessmen, Lawrence Stone and Ron Pitkin. The book received a hearty reception, was the topic of discussion on network television shows and sold over five million copies. It funded the publishers' Rutledge Hill Press Foundation (RHPF), established to aid worthy Christian causes. In the providence of God, they asked a colleague from an earlier publishing venture to join the Foundation's board. He was IBR Charter Fellow, William L. Lane, who was not long at a loss to think of a worthy Christian cause.

At the same time my president, Russell H. Dilday, of Southwestern Baptist Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, was also attracted to IBR's vision and to the possibility of locating its library adjacent to our campus. He supported, and in October 1993 Southwestern's trustees approved, a ninety-nine year lease at \$1.00 per year of a nearby five-acre knoll for IBR to build its library. Southwestern has the fifth largest North American theological library and is rated by *Christianity Today* (February 1990) as the number one seminary in the nation. It is situated within two miles of the Texas Christian University library and is itself a theological university with three schools and over 4,000 students from some forty denominations although, of course, the vast majority are Baptists. It is evangelical in doctrine with a number of IBR members on its faculty and in its Ph.D. program.

Despite the concern of some that Texas resembles in climate those nether regions to which nobody wants to go and has the educational ambiance of petroleum engineering, let me assure you from eight years experience that there is air-conditioning and that the seven universities and five theological faculties in the Dallas-Fort Worth metropex offer as great a variety and as lively a theological interchange as anything I encountered during twenty years in the Columbia University New Testament Seminar for colleagues from the New York-Philadelphia area.

At its meeting on 15 April 1993 the RHPF considered our proposal, which detailed two possible sites that met all IBR's criteria for its Library: Princeton, New Jersey and Fort Worth, Texas. It also discussed briefly Los Angeles and the San Francisco Bay area. After consideration of construction and maintenance costs, the prospect of a land-lease at Fort Worth and other factors, it approved for funding on the Fort Worth site the proposed library that is displayed on the beautiful designs in the room tonight. The Foundation is unable to cover the whole cost of the project but has graciously agreed to underwrite a development officer, who will seek supplemental support for our endeavor. In the broader sense all IBR Fellows and Associates are 'development officers', and we urge the support of each of you as we seek additional funds to complete and to endow our library.

In closing, I give thanks to God and to our Lord Jesus Christ for the providential care and direction given to us. I also wish to recognize and thank President Dilday of Southwestern and our architect Ms. Susan O'Brien, who wanted to be with us, and others who are here: Ron Pitkin, Vice-President/Rutledge Hill Press, James Powell, Director, Rutledge Hill Press Foundation, and Bill Lane, who has done so much to bring our vision to reality. With the establishment of this research center a new chapter opens in the history of the Institute for Biblical Research. It is a bright prospect that will markedly increase IBR's contribution to our discipline and to our ministry for the kingdom of Christ.

*Praise to the Lord, who does prosper your work and defend you;
Surely his goodness and mercy here daily attend you.
Ponder anew what the Almighty can do,
If with His love He befriend you.*

From LOBE DEN HERREN, by Joachim Neander, 1680

(Appendix follows)

APPENDIX

New Brunswick Theological Seminary
17 Seminary Place
New Brunswick, N.J. 08901

October 1, 1970

Dear Colleague:

As a student in Britain and later as an occasional visitor, I have been assisted by and deeply impressed with the work of Tyndale House, Cambridge. It is my hope that a residential library for biblical research can be established along the same lines in the United States.

As I envision it, the House would serve both as a center for research and conferences, and as a catalyst to encourage students towards a ministry of biblical scholarship. It would be organized along evangelical confessional lines and work in cooperation with the Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship but, unlike Tyndale House, it would be governed by its own board.

I am under the impression that you have had contact with the work of Tyndale House and might be interested in seeing a similar facility developed here. If so, and if you plan to attend the annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, could some of us have lunch together on Monday, October 26, to discuss this matter? If the ASOR luncheon-meeting poses a problem, would you indicate this in your reply. We may be able to arrange an earlier time, say 11:30 A.M., so that we will be free in time to hear any ASOR after-dinner speaker.

As soon as I get a number of replies, I will apprise you of the precise time and place of our luncheon.

Yours sincerely,
E. Earle Ellis
Professor of Biblical Studies