

Ridley Hall, Cambridge

The Moule Memorial Lecture

'New Testament Scholarship and Christian Discipleship'

by the Bishop of Durham, Dr N. T. Wright

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Introduction

Thank you for your welcome, and for the invitation to give this lecture, which of course makes me both sad and proud. Sad because Charlie's death last autumn was not only a defining moment, the end of an era, but for me, as no doubt for many here today, the loss of a wise and wonderful friend whose capacity both for wisdom and for friendship knew no bounds, and who maintained, up to the last, that quizzical sense of humour, that sharp eye for detail, that blend of scholarly acumen and personal humility which we enjoyed and valued so much. I went on sending him things I was writing, right up to last summer, and I used to love those letters which many of you will have received as well: the first page declaring his deep gratitude for the privilege of being able to share the fruits of one's labours, his admiration for the new hypothesis, the arguments, and so on – and then the second page, and as often as not the third and fourth, beginning 'there were just one or two small points I noticed as I went through', followed by everything from microscopic details ('I was interested that in Colossians 2.10 you seemed to agree with Nestle in preferring the Alexandrine text') through to wide and shrewd theological and pastoral observations and implications.

Charlie was a busy man and under no obligation to me. I wasn't one of his pupils, but he adopted me, as it were, after the early death of my own mentor, George Caird, and he was unfailingly kind, supportive and constructively critical for over quarter of a century. It was a matter of delight to me, and I think in a small way to him, that I was able to dedicate to him the little book of my Hulsean Lectures, conceived and written under the watchful portrait of his great-uncle, Handley Moule, whose associations with this Hall are of course every bit as strong as those he has with Auckland Castle. I am reminded of a letter Charlie wrote when I was co-editing a *Festschrift* and we were soliciting his support; he warned me about the difficulties of secrecy, because as he said 'academics are inveterate moles', and then added in brackets, 'though I fear Moules are hardly inveterately academical'.

Thus, I am not only sad but also proud: proud to be involved in a small way in celebrating and commemorating one whose masterly scholarship and quiet but deep personal piety, issuing together in a friendship both scholarly and pastoral, are a model of exactly that combination of things you have asked me to speak about this afternoon. One final note of personal introduction: I was in a certain other university last Sunday, and I told a senior clerical friend there I was doing this lecture. He was delighted, and told me that when he had been a college Chaplain in Cambridge in the 1970s Charlie had been a great support to him and had helped him,

among other things, with setting up a pioneering seminar on medical ethics. That's not the sort of thing you would immediately associate with a busy New Testament scholar, but it's another small index of Charlie's tireless work behind the scenes to bring scholarship and discipleship together into fresh and creative pathways.

At this point Charlie would be the first to say, 'Oh, do get on with it;' and though I could reminisce about him longer, as could many of you, the point is now to honour him not by anecdote but by argument. How do New Testament scholarship and Christian discipleship fit together? It would be tempting just to say, 'Well, look at Charlie and you'll see', but though I shall have him in mind continually in what follows there are, I think, new and quite pressing questions in this whole area which are worth a fresh look. I take it that the implicit question of the title is an invitation to explore the ways in which these two large and somewhat ill-defined entities impinge on one another, and indeed the ways in which they don't: to explore the borderlands and overlap-points between them, the pressure points and puzzles which they generate. And I don't want this to be exploration merely, a satellite's-eye view of the territory. I would like to think of it as an invitation and encouragement. The world needs, and the church needs, more people like Charlie Moule. Ridley Hall, Cambridge is still, thank God, the sort of place where they might hear and foster that vocation.

People like Charlie, but not identical. God never does the same thing twice. There are new challenges in tomorrow's world and church, and I want to begin the body of this lecture by noting some of them and seeing how the territory they stake out frames the challenge of combining New Testament scholarship and Christian discipleship in tomorrow's world and church

1. New Territory, New Challenges

A major feature of the world in which we live is the increasingly shrill stand-off between fundamentalism and secularism. This can present itself as a re-run of the old post-war battle of scepticism against piety, and there are still elements of that. Some parts of the high modernist scientific establishment, and those parts of the arts world that joined in with its positivist rhetoric, used to say boldly that religion was purely subjective, that Christianity was based on historical nonsense, and that the study of theology in its various branches should have no place in a modern university. Within the world of New Testament scholarship in the 1950s and 1960s, that pressure led some to distance themselves from anything that might look like the projection of piety on to the solid, 'scientific' study of the text. Christopher Evans, fighting his corner in King's College London, used to argue forty or fifty years ago that the study of the Greek New Testament, not least the synoptic gospels, presented undergraduates with a more demanding set of interlocking intellectual challenges than any other subject in the university. This invited the response, of course: well and good, but why do you need a department called 'Theology' to do it in? Why shouldn't it be a branch of ancient cultural history, to be studied alongside Plato, Philo, Marcus Aurelius and the Dead Sea Scrolls? It's not clear to me that that style of NT scholarship really came up with a good answer for this; perhaps the best answer at the time might have been, 'well, go to Cambridge and you'll find someone who's doing rigorous scholarship within a theological framework'. But two developments since then have sharpened up the question quite a bit more.

To begin with, of course, religion has not done what the secular myth supposed it would, and vanished from the civilised western world. On the contrary, it has come back with a bang: with the literal and horrible bangs of fundamentalist attacks, as in September 11 2001, and the metaphorical bangs of a revived and (in every sense) enthusiastic Christianity which has left the old mainline churches standing – and it has often been, of course, the mainline churches which have kept the older traditions of biblical scholarship going. This new territory makes the challenge of holding together scholarship and piety seem if anything harder. The scholar will be all the more worried to be thought by his or her secular colleagues to be surreptitiously associated with ‘all that kind of thing’, while the Christian piety of the large and lively newer free churches seems to get on very well without careful sermons exploring the precise meaning of this or that Greek root. (I did once find myself in a television programme which was poking gentle fun at that older style, which featured a cartoon character called ‘The Original Greek’, a man who would wander on screen from time to time looking like the sort of chap you might see sipping coffee in Naxos or riding a moped through the back streets of Athens. The implication was clear: preachers who laboured for hours to understand what precisely Paul meant by *dikaiosynē*, or for that matter *harpagmos* – a favourite question of Charlie’s – were indulging in a harmless but unnecessary and irrelevant activity, a backwater from the main stream of energetic church life and work.) We have now returned, in many circles, to the world where academic theology and biblical studies are either regarded with suspicion, or indeed not regarded at all, not merely by some within the secular academy but also, sadly, by some within some parts of the Christian community. Perhaps we should add that this worrying feature of contemporary church life is not helped by the anti-intellectualism endemic in much English culture. A scholar is likely to be dismissed, patronizingly, as a ‘boffin’, a harmless eccentric drudge to be patted on the head but ignored for normal pragmatic purposes.

The second development, which sharpens up our overall question from another angle, is the mirror image of this: that, within many academic circles, the strict separation of biblical scholarship from personal faith has become itself an article of a different kind of personal faith, the faith in a split-level world; and any suggestion that a scholar actually believes some or all of this stuff is enough, in various circles, to place a question mark beside their ‘neutrality’ and hence their credibility – and hence even their hireability. The sharp separation of church and state in America, reflected in the frequent sharp division between divinity schools and departments of religion, has generated in the last few decades a new brand of New Testament scholarship in particular which is, more or less, a branch of the study of ancient thought and social movements, and which sometimes (though sometimes not) strikes that pose quite specifically as a way of then questioning the validity of Christian claims. One thinks of the great Geza Vermes in Oxford, but also of numerous others who have done interesting and (to my mind) worth while, if sometimes contentious, work on many aspects of the New Testament. At least one American seminary has a practising Jew as their main New Testament professor, and this can be a wonderfully creative and positive thing. Sometimes, however, as with Vermes himself, such scholars declare that because they are ‘neutral’, they can claim a supposed high moral or scholarly ground against those of us who are compromised by our own personal commitments, though this late modern rhetoric is now routinely unmasked by the postmodern point that we all have commitments and agendas, and that

looking for historical arguments on which to base your agnosticism is no more neutral an activity than looking for historical arguments on which to base your faith.

Then, continuing the map-work, some within the guild of New Testament scholarship have publicly declared that, though they used to be believing and practising Christians, they are so no longer. Michael Goulder comes to mind in this country, as do Gerd Lüdemann in Germany and Bart Ehrman in America. Sometimes they, too, then try to claim a certain high scholarly ground: they have 'seen through' all that stuff, have come out the other side of faith and can see its historical unseaworthiness. Meanwhile, some other scholars who do still profess Christian faith nevertheless declare that they keep their scholarship and their discipleship in watertight compartments: from Monday to Friday, declared one famous professor who had better remain nameless, I'm an atheist. You pray on Sunday as if the Bible is God's book, and you study during the week as if it's purely and simply a human product. Clearly that wasn't Charlie Moule's view – though Charlie, I think, remained all his life a bit wary of tying down in any precise formula what exactly the Bible was. But all this, naturally, sharpens up the question of my main subject: what difference if any might this, or does this, make? Is there a valid way of integrating New Testament scholarship with personal faith? Or should we put it the other way round? Is there a valid way of *not* integrating the two?

Putting our question on the map of the present standoff between fundamentalism and secularism helps us to recognise that these are not abstract questions. At the university level, they concern research funding, departmental reorganisation, appointment and tenure procedures, and the ongoing question of what a modern secular university actually is and what it can properly contain within itself. At the level of Christian life and witness, they concern the historical rootedness of faith, the fresh preaching and teaching of scripture, the development of appropriate contemporary apologetics, the need to be *semper reformanda* and the role of the Bible in addressing that need, and so on. Behind these questions the Christian theologian will see the old issues of nature and grace, and the interlocking ones of Athens and Jerusalem, of history and faith, and of the different notions of Christian discipleship and witness which swirl around them. But this leads to the second main mapping point. I regard the stand-off between fundamentalism and secularism as the giving of wrong answers to the right and urgent questions about how we move forwards culturally and socially in a post-postmodern world. To find the right answers, we need to think about the notion of public truth on the one hand and the notion of the common good on the other. And in both the question of New Testament scholarship and Christian discipleship has an important role to play.

It is, I suggest, vital for the health of the church that it energetically embrace some form of the notion that Christian claims are, and are to be assessed as, 'public truth'. They do not collapse into statements about the mental, emotional or even spiritual state of Christians, but have a purchase on publicly observable reality, more especially history, real life in the past, present and future. Today's shrill new atheists wave such claims away, declaring for instance that our knowledge of Jesus is late and patchy, but New Testament scholarship has a habit, not least in Cambridge and Durham, of coming back again and again to say, No, historical research may well teach us that we haven't understood Jesus fully, but nevertheless a remarkably good case for the historical roots of Christian faith can and must be made. Here Charlie Moule stands in the solid tradition of the three greats from a century before,

Lightfoot, Westcott and Hort; I think, for instance of that little book *The Phenomenon of the New Testament*, short enough to read carefully in an afternoon, powerful enough to blow a lot of sceptical hardware right out of the water. It won't do for a fundamentalist apologetic to collude with the new atheists by saying, simply, 'You ask me how I know he lives? He lives within my heart'. That is indeed a way of speaking about Christian experience and discipleship which the NT itself celebrates, but it will never be enough to persuade a sceptic to take the matter seriously; and persuasion of that sort is also something that the NT insists upon as part of Christian discipleship. If Christian claims are to be made in public, there can be no drawing back from the tasks of scholarship, which are themselves essentially and properly public tasks, putting material into the public domain in books and articles – and now of course on websites – and allowing anyone and everyone to respond, to comment, to draw attention to evidence missed or mishandled, to arguments that beg questions or skip stages, and so on. Speaking for a moment as someone concerned with the public truth of the Christian faith in relation to several social, cultural and political issues of our day, we cannot of course show all the time how all these things relate back to the New Testament, but unless there is fresh and good biblical and historical scholarship underneath our arguments the secularist retort is always going to win. From this point alone I hope some will hear a vocational challenge, to apply their God-given gifts to the tasks of undergirding, and perhaps also reorienting, the church's witness in the public square.

In addition to 'public truth', the notion of 'common good', so vital as we try to find and frame wise pathways for human flourishing in a multi-layered and multi-textured society, must include a sense of the value, not just within the Christian community but to the wider world, of a serious and carefully worked out account of Christian origins and of the meaning of the church's foundation documents. Misinformation abounds in the public square: to look no further, part of the riposte I received from a secular journalist to my sermon this last Easter consisted of wild misrepresentations of some things said by St Paul, misrepresentations which, had they been about, say, nuclear physics or Jane Austen's novels, he would never have allowed himself to get away with and for which he would have been ridiculed. Likewise, when we engage in dialogue with people of other faiths, one of the early problems is frequently a sheer lack of knowledge, not to mention clarity, on major issues of historical foundation and of the theological interpretation of key texts. (That of course cuts both ways.) If we are to conduct the debates our society urgently needs to have on a wide range of issues, from interreligious dialogue to questions of bioethics and much besides, a fresh, clear, properly researched and resourced and widely available account of what the New Testament is actually about is an urgent contribution to that wider project of the 'common good'. When you live in a fog of misinformation or disinformation, societies become misshapen and people get hurt. New Testament scholarship, whoever is doing it, can be and should be a means of contributing to those wider areas.

One final area of contemporary mapwork of a rather different kind before I turn to positive exposition of my main theme. New Testament scholarship has always been subject to the danger of over-footnoting; that problem is now reaching epidemic proportions. The NT is of course the smallest set text of any academic speciality I know, and within that those who specialise in *simply*, say, Paul or John are treating themselves to a luxury unimaginable in almost any other discipline. But this means that study of secondary and tertiary literature thus regularly takes the place within

the discipline that, in a wider area like Patristics or Rabbinics, would have been taken by the mulling over of other primary sources. And not only is this over-footnoting forbidding to the would-be student or researcher, which I'm afraid may be one reason why in the last generation comparatively few of our bright students have gone on into doctoral work and university teaching; it makes it seem harder and harder to accomplish anything, to arrive at a clear statement of something that needs to be said. Many books in the field now seem to have it as a badge of honour that only a third to a half of each page is actual text, with the rest being small-print footnotes. We have got to the stage – and this is particularly ironic when we consider the current debates about St Paul and the so-called 'New Perspective' – where writing in the discipline looks rather like the fifteenth-century commentaries on the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard, with comments on comments on comments on a text which was itself a synthesis of the Bible and the Fathers. Just as Luther and Calvin had to be bold and offer a fresh reading of scripture which was not encumbered with that massive freight, so there has to be a place, I suggest, not of course for a naive and unaware reading, but for a fresh engagement with the first-century sources themselves. I remember Henry Chadwick telling a doctoral candidate in Patristics that he should regard it as awarding a badge of honour if a scholar really deserved to get into his footnotes; whereas, in NT studies, footnotes have become themselves the badge of honour for the writer, the long-service medal for putting in all those laborious hours in the library. Of course we must discuss with our contemporaries, and take them seriously as we want them to take us seriously. But if we produce a mountain of scholasticism we are, in the long term, serving neither New Testament scholarship nor Christian discipleship. Third ways must be sought and found.

2. Scholarship and Discipleship: Proper Distinction, Proper Integration

With all this preliminary mapwork, I turn now to the main part of this lecture, to explore the proper distinction and the proper integration of scholarship and discipleship. First, distinction. I hope it is clear on the one hand that New Testament scholarship is not a private activity confined to active Christian disciples. When someone like Geza Vermes spends his life studying Jewish history and literature from the second-Temple period, and then turns his attention to early Christian documents, his questions are always important and if we sometimes reject his answers it is not because he is not a Christian but because we are unconvinced that his hypotheses do what good hypotheses ought to do – that is, to get in the data with an appropriate simplicity and shed light on other areas besides themselves. And on those grounds we will equally oppose some hypotheses put forward by other Christian scholars, as they will oppose ours. In other words, the absence of Christian discipleship does not mean that the scholar is to be regarded as coming in a different category. The Society of New Testament Studies is, rightly, eclectic, and though at its meetings there is a tradition of prayers first thing in the morning there is also an honourable tradition that those who attend prayers know that those who do not have every bit as much right as they do within the seminar that follows.

You can see this in the obvious example of historical lexicography. When people say to me, as they sometimes do, that the church doesn't need scholarship, I ask them if they are prepared to read the New Testament not only in the original Greek

but from the original manuscripts. Unless they are, they are dependant on scholars to collate and transcribe those manuscripts, to produce a clean text and then translate it. And in that labour nobody much asks whether the transcribers, text critics, lexicographers and translators are Christian disciples or not. At certain points there may be interesting questions that arise down that line, but the more mechanical the scholarly task is, the more it can be done by anyone with the proper equipment. This is where the Christian scholar will want to have a cheerful and robust doctrine of common grace, and give thanks for the gifts lavished by the creator on people of all sorts and for the human flourishing they represent in themselves and facilitate in others. From this point of view, to pick up something C. S. Lewis says somewhere about Christian scholarship, the actual process may be very much the same whether undertaken by a Christian or a non-Christian, just as, though there may be a difference between a Christian chef and a non-Christian chef, the process of boiling an egg is pretty much the same. Every discipline has its eggs that need boiling, and we should be delighted for all the help we can get.

By the same token, and even more obviously, you don't have to be a New Testament scholar to be a Christian disciple. Many of the most devout disciples of Jesus, saints, martyrs, heroes of the faith, men and women of prayer and courage and self-sacrificial love, have known little or nothing of the regular subject matter of New Testament scholarship. They have read their Bibles and been sustained by what they found there, without needing to address questions of textual criticism, lexicography, historical investigation, or even theological interpretation. (I am aware that I have not actually defined 'New Testament Scholarship', but I am assuming that the rich blend of topics I just mentioned covers most of it.) They may have misunderstood some passages and ignored others, but (as we often say) the heart of the matter was in them in a way that, sadly, it does not always appear to be even in those with the longest footnotes and the most publications. I speak advisedly. Of course, at the risk of sounding ungracious, one might always suggest that they would have been even more saintly and effective as witnessing disciples if they'd got the exegesis right, but one would quickly need to balance this by saying that many fine exegetes and text critics would have been even better if they had learned to pray and to love God and their neighbours a bit more. In fact, just as people sometimes sneeringly say that people come to church to express their neuroses, so it is sometimes, alas, with scholarship. One thinks on the one side of William Cowper, pouring his depressive heart into powerful hymns, and on the other of Alexander Cruden, shuttling between the mad-house and the Concordance. God moves in mysterious ways and our small categories will never do justice to the varied and curious – and sometimes in themselves healing – ways in which frail and flawed human beings, i.e. all of us, can be called to work for God's kingdom.

These points are presumably uncontroversial. Scholars don't need to be disciples and disciples don't need to be scholars. But might it help? Here the relationship is not equal and opposite. Except in the broadest sense of 'scholar', I do not think it necessarily helps for disciples to be scholars, but, more controversially, I do believe that in many ways, now to be explored, it does help for scholars of the New Testament to be disciples of Jesus Christ.

But let me first park the question of disciples becoming scholars in a broad sense. Actually, what I think does help is for them to be scholars in at least a second-hand sense: that is, that Christian disciples are well nurtured and equipped for their varied vocations when they are part of a larger community of worshipping and witnessing

disciples among whom the work of New Testament study, at the deepest level, is honoured and filtered in to the church's life, teaching and work. Here is the (rather obvious) point: that within the Body of Christ people are called to widely differing spheres of service and witness, each incomplete in themselves and needing the others. Whether the Christian in the pew realises it or not, he or she is nourished by *someone's* scholarship, even if it is that of Alfred Edersheim, whose book *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, published in 1883, enabled several generations to 'understand' many bit of the New Testament – in ways of course, which might now be questioned. One needs some help, after all, when reading the New Testament to know who the Pharisees are, what the word 'Messiah' means, how the Jewish sacrificial system worked, and so on. If many devout readers of scripture do not realise that they are dependent in all this and more on the work of earlier scholars, that does not make them any the less dependent. And if that scholarship, like all scholarship all the time, is in some respects deficient and misleading, wise disciples, even if unable to read fresh scholarship themselves, know they need it, and hope their pastors and teachers are plugging in to it and passing it on. One of the many great and endearing things about Charlie Moule was the way, in his long retirement, in which he would unstintingly go and speak to groups in parishes, deaneries and dioceses, not just telling them what he himself thought but providing a creatively critical account of what was new in the field and the ways in which it might help tomorrow's disciples to understand the gospel and to preach it and live it.

There is a deep theological point underneath all this. I believe, as an a priori, that the church will never get to the point where it has solved all the exegetical questions, understood all the theology of the New Testament, so that subsequent generations can sit back and look it up and not have to think for themselves. I have come to believe that God has so ordered things that each generation will have to wrestle afresh not just with a few details on the side but with the large questions of Jesus and the kingdom, of Paul and the faithfulness of God, of John's view of God and the world, of Revelation's vision of the new Jerusalem coming down from heaven. If the church as a whole is not doing this, it is not growing into the wisdom it will need for its many-sided mission. And that means that though most church members will not give themselves professionally to the tasks of scholarship, they need to be part of a fellowship in which such tasks are being energetically pursued and the resultant challenges and dialogue given proper space and weight. This means – and I don't think either the church or Christian scholars often reflect properly on this – that the task of biblical scholarship is a *necessary* part of the church's life in every generation. It isn't just that, as an unfortunate accident, we don't quite understand the Bible yet as well as we should, but perhaps another few monographs and commentaries will do the trick. It is, rather, that each generation needs to struggle with the big questions as well as the small ones as part of its own healthy witness and worship.

Of course, all this has often been done within the church in ways that ultimately have been less than helpful. Dennis Nineham used to tell the story of how the great Methodist scholar Vincent Taylor had helped out during the war in a particular parish, and how after the war the new minister had asked the weekly Bible Study group what they would like to look at now. 'We don't much mind,' came the answer, 'as long as it isn't that there Synoptic Problem.' Some fruits of New Testament scholarship are more obviously related to the needs of Christian disciples than others, and though no doubt a case can be made for the importance of someone

realising that Luke used Mark as a source it would be hard to argue that that was more important than understanding what both of them were talking about. Equally, in a recent review in the *Church Times* of more than passing interest to myself, the Bishop of Lincoln pointed out that some of the contemporary debates about justification seemed mere text-slinging matches, a kind of evangelical arm-wrestling which left him wanting, as a disciple, simply to sing Mrs Alexander's hymn, 'He died that we might be forgiven, he died to make us good.' There is, in other words (actually, words of the late great Ben Meyer), the danger of people who need the bread of insight being offered instead the stone of research. But the ideal at which churches should aim is that wise biblical research should be translated insightfully into the kind of wisdom which will generate, foster and nurture Christian discipleship, whether by the scholars themselves or by the intermediary work of preachers and teachers. If it is getting about, for instance, that St Paul taught that there was no future judgment according to works, and if people in the church were beginning to get the idea that once one had been clothed in the righteousness of Christ it would make no difference whatever to one's final state if one lived according to Christian morality or not, it might be necessary – this is of course a purely random example – for scholars to argue rather urgently that Paul really did envisage a future judgment according to works, the works wrought by the Holy Spirit but emphatically through the active and willing co-operation of the Christian ('God is at work in you,' wrote Paul, 'to will and to work for his good pleasure', Philippians 2.13), and for teachers and preachers in the churches to take this point and insist on it to the disciples who might otherwise be led into dangerous antinomianism. And one reason why a place like Ridley Hall exists, I take it, is to teach such preachers and teachers how to take on that vital intermediary role, as well, I hope, as encouraging and fostering the scholarly vocations we equally urgently need for the next generation.

If we can thus plot some ways in which scholarship might actually impinge on discipleship, what about the ways in which discipleship might impinge upon scholarship? First, a possible framing analogy. Arguments used to go to and fro in more than one University Faculty of my acquaintance about the desirability or otherwise of College Fellows in Theology also serving as Chaplains, and vice versa, and also of some University Chairs being available only for those ordained in a particular church. Various arguments were adduced about finding the best person for the job irrespective of their religious commitment, but some people responded that the religious commitment might actually help. The analogy with music was often made: would you rather be taught the history of music, or still more the elements of harmony, by someone who spent much of the rest of their time conducting a choir or playing in an orchestra, or by someone who was tone deaf? Of course, their performances might be maverick and their odd practice might influence their theory, but on balance most would prefer the maverick musician to the safe but tone-deaf teacher.

The parallel is not of course exact. Nobody in the secular university world, so far as I know, actually denies the existence of music and hence its importance as a university subject. But it is still potentially helpful. Provided there is also open access to teachers of every kind of background, I believe a university should make appropriate space, if necessary by tying some posts to some confessional positions, for those who, albeit sometimes in maverick ways, are trying to live the material they are teaching, not least because, as with music, theology (including biblical

studies) has a kind of analytic and organic relation to actual human life. The musical notes on the page mean what they mean because there are such things as singers and trombones and double basses. The New Testament means what it means because there are such things as prayers and holiness, as justice and mercy. For myself – obviously I am pretty thoroughly *parti pris* in all this – I recall watching this happening by observing myself in the scholarly mirror. In 1986 I returned from a full-time academic job in Canada to a half-and-half academic and pastoral job in Oxford (actually, it was two full-time jobs, but that's another matter). Up to that point I had managed to bracket out in my scholarly work the questions of what exactly Paul and John meant when talking about the Holy Spirit. But when I was working with undergraduates pastorally, praying for and with them, preparing them for confirmation and so on, I could no longer ignore those questions. And what I found myself thinking in that pastoral setting played directly back into further reflections at the academic level. More broadly, I cannot be the only scholar who has been preparing a sermon for a popular audience and has stumbled upon an insight about the meaning of a text which had eluded one in the library. There are of course dangers: the homiletically helpful connection between two texts may not be an accurate index of historical exegesis, and the preacher may be too eager, on returning to the library, to force the happy sermonic point on material where it does not in fact belong. But that merely brings us back to the publicness of scholarship, and the need for all things to be tested in the arena of wide-ranging debate.

But out beyond all of this, and the most central and important reflection to which I invite you this afternoon, is the question of the worldviews within which New Testament scholarship is done. There is as I have insisted plenty of room in the discipline for scholars who do not themselves subscribe to the beliefs of the texts they are studying, just as I certainly want to claim a place at the table in, say, the study of the Dead Sea Scrolls, even though I do not myself subscribe to normative Judaism itself let alone to that particular sectarian branch of it. Yes; but there is also the more complex and challenging question of how the scholar's mind is formed. And once that large question is raised there is no neutral ground, and the Christian disciple will say, humbly but clearly, that though our present formulations of Christian truth are undoubtedly deficient, as far as we can see the Christian worldview is the one which enables people to see the whole truth about God, the world and themselves, and that therefore, though many mistakes will continue to be made, there are bound to be ways in which Christian discipleship will in principle open up avenues of insight in the realm of scholarly study of the New Testament. At this point, Christian discipleship, though not a *sine qua non* of New Testament scholarship, can and should actually make a distinctive and sometimes decisive contribution to it.

This is a large and controversial claim, but I believe we cannot shrink from it without diminishing and/or relativising what we mean by 'Christian discipleship'. There are two reasons why the claim must be made. First, on the analogy with music, because the person who is trying to live by the same subject-matter that is being taught is likely *a priori* to be engaging with it at many different levels, not merely analysing it in a detached fashion and then going away and doing something else. The human mind works in so many different but interconnecting ways that it would be astonishing if insight did not come through such multi-layered fusion. Another analogy: someone teaching law who is also a practising barrister or solicitor might well be expected to have more all-round and creative insight into the subject than

somebody who stayed in the library and never saw a court of law. Or perhaps the analogy is with a teacher of law who also works for the police . . . Second, though, the claim must be made because it is part of the wholistic nature of Christian faith, as in Colossians and elsewhere, that all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are to be found in Jesus Christ, so that through Christian discipleship one ought to expect that all sorts of things in the world might come into clearer and sharper focus. Of course, that claim has to meet the sharp and perhaps angry retort of those who are all too aware of the many appalling failings of Christian disciples to understand and work within the world. But it seems to me analytically true none the less, even if actual followers of Jesus Christ are often lamentably failing to live up to it.

How does this work? I often think, when I come to Cambridge and walk around the Backs, of what Bertrand Russell said about writing a book. First he would read up the subject as fast and as fully as he could. Then he would walk round and round the garden of Trinity College until, suddenly, the shape of what needed to be said presented itself to his mind. Then he would hasten back to the study and write out what he had seen. (Somebody told me after this lecture was given that Charlie Moule was often to be seen similarly walking round and round the garden of Clare College.) That, of course, presents the fascinating question of how hypotheses are formed, where they (as it were) come from: the question of what Gerard Manley Hopkins called 'the fine delight that fathers thought'. There are many times in the work of biblical scholarship, as there must be equally in physics and French history, in geology and jurisprudence, when one is feeling one's way in the dark towards the possibility of a fresh hypothesis and allowing the data with which one's mind is stocked, and the frameworks of understanding one already has, to interact, to play around with one another as with a massive jigsaw, hoping for the 'aha' moment when a new pattern will emerge which can then become a full hypothesis, earning the right not to be instantly validated but to go forward for testing against the normal criteria common, within reasoned discourse, to all disciplines (those I mentioned earlier: getting in the data, appropriate simplicity, shedding light elsewhere). And in that dark and mysterious and often deeply frustrating and exciting process, the Christian disciple should know that, while prayer and piety do not guarantee the right answer, yet they have a double part to play, first in the general terms that a Christian physicist might be expected to pray about the hypotheses she was developing and testing, and second in the more specific sense that since the New Testament is *about*, and intended to generate and sustain, the practice of Christian faith, witness and life, there is the proper expectation of what you might call an internal interlinking between the prayer and the study of the scholar who is also a disciple. In particular, the innate knowledge of what being a Christian actually means opens up the possibility of hypotheses which are both fresh and faithful. The chapel is also a place of study; the library is also a place of prayer. And there must be many for whom, as it clearly was for Charlie Moule, it is often hard to discern where the one ends and the other begins, or indeed whether either of them really stops.

I stress again that this does not give the devout Christian scholar an inside track, a backdoor to successful hypotheses. Just as the gift of the Holy Spirit does not mean the absence of moral effort, and indeed failure, repentance and fresh starts, so the gift of what Paul remarkably calls 'the mind of Christ' does not excuse us from exercising our own minds, with all that that is going to mean in terms of cultivating

the virtues of the intellect, including making one's way through false starts, mental cul-de-sacs, the scholarly equivalent of repentance and fresh beginnings, and fresh attention to the data. But both in the small moments when one must choose whether to read this monograph or that one, whether to make this passage the central plank in the argument or relegate it to a footnote, whether or not to trust one's hunch and explore a particular but unfashionable line of thought, the integration of prayer and study, of faith and historical research, of discipleship and scholarship, is a peculiar and precious thing, something which, when it is functioning as it should, one would not trade for all the tea in China, or indeed all the footnotes in the *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft*. They are moments when the Christian scholar says the equivalent of Eric Liddell's famous remark in *Chariots of Fire*: God made me, and he made me fast, and when I run I feel his pleasure.

And, again and again, the fact that it is Christian discipleship we are talking about undermines the potential misunderstanding which would try to fit all this into the post-Enlightenment model of the great lonely hero-figure, thinking noble thoughts and declaiming them from on high. Rather, just as the non-scholarly disciple ought to recognise that he or she lives and works and prays within a larger whole in which the scholarly contribution is vital for health and life and growth, so the scholar-disciple must recognise that at two levels he or she is part of a larger whole. First, scholar-disciples are part of the larger whole of the wider world of scholarship, not least other Christian scholars, and that it is not just likely but absolutely certain that God intends them to learn with and through and from one another by mutual correction and admonition ('but you've ignored this text', 'but you haven't understood how Paul uses that Psalm', or whatever it may be). Christian scholarship ought to be characterized by humility as well as boldness – the phrase 'in my humble but accurate opinion' comes to mind, with its self-mocking irony indicating 'I am pretty sure of this but I still know I might be wrong'. But second, scholar-disciples are part of the larger world of the church, including the great majority of fellow-disciples who are not themselves scholars, and here there is a vital need both to recognise the responsibility to teach, at whatever level may be appropriate, and to recognise the need to learn, in various different ways, from those who have no Greek or Hebrew and for whom, as Ward Gasque memorably put it, *Formgeschichte* and *Traditionsgeschichte* and all the rest belong in the same category as *Bullsgeschichte*. Scholar-disciples must learn how to teach without pride, and to learn without fear, among their fellow members of the Body of Christ. Here again of course Charlie Moule is a wonderful example of both. But I recall, too, a conversation I had with a senior American New Testament scholar who told me that for most of his career he had accepted the normal post-Bultmannian idea that miracles, not least healing miracles, couldn't and didn't happen, and that the resurrection of Jesus was an event in the minds and hearts of the disciples but not in historical reality. Then, he said, in his own life and family he had run into various kinds of sickness, and the simple faith and prayer of the church around him had brought about remarkable healing of a kind he had not thought possible. This in turn had generated a fresh readiness to hold open scholarly questions he had long thought closed, and to entertain hypotheses he had long regarded as out of the question. He had not (like some with similar experiences) come to regard scholarship and the historical task as irrelevant or even dangerous. But he was doing it now with his mind and heart awake to a larger world of possibility. Living within the often surprising life of the

church can open the mind to things previously regarded as closed off. Scholarship can be refreshed by discipleship as well as vice versa.

Conclusion

As I have tried to sketch out the interplay of scholarship and discipleship, I have been very conscious, as I said earlier, that this is not an abstract question only, to be glanced at as one might look at a map of the moon, without any intention of going there oneself. I hope what I have done is to sketch, in the first part, a map of where we need to go in the urgent mission of the church in our day, and, in the second, a description of an integrated scholarship and discipleship which would help us advance into just that territory. I have tried to recognise the proper ways in which scholarship and discipleship can be pursued independently, but to highlight and actually celebrate the rich blend and the fresh possibility that can come when they are put together. In commemorating Charlie Moule, and in celebrating indeed this great Hall and University to both of which he gave so much of his love and energy and wisdom, nothing would give me greater pleasure, or Charlie greater honour, than to think that some here today will hear the call to that life of faithful scholarship and scholarly faith which he modelled and which the church urgently needs if it is to take the gospel of Jesus Christ into the post-postmodern world. 'I have no greater joy than this,' wrote St John, 'than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.' I imagine Charlie will be saying Amen.