

William R. Baird, 1924–2018

The name of William Baird first appeared on my mental screen during my middler year in seminary, when a small book entitled *Paul's Message and Mission* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1960. Pp. 176. \$3.00) was displayed in the seminary library's "New Books" section. I was impressed by the substance and clarity of this compact volume written by a young Yale Ph.D. who had done post-doctoral work in Marburg, who was personally acquainted with Rudolf Bultmann, and yet wrote engagingly and without condescension for non-scholars. The book's unstrained integration of history, exegesis, and theology was just what was needed by a seminarian whose own budding scholarly interests needed encouragement and orientation. The *JBL* review by S. Vernon McCasland confirmed my impressions: "The author makes it his business to ... penetrate into Paul's thought and to state it clearly ... with the feeling that it is still worth knowing" (*JBL* 79/4 [Dec. 1960], 389-90). Only sometime later, after I had become acquainted with some of his other work, did I learn that Bill belonged to the same small denomination as I: The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). Bill, a minister's son, never had any Oedipal struggles about his own vocation as an ordained minister, served his whole career in Disciples seminaries, and placed his academic work in the service of the church without wearing either his faith or scholarship on his sleeve (1952-1956, Graduate Seminary of Phillips University, Enid, OK, now Phillips Theological Seminary in Tulsa; 1956-1967, College of the Bible in Lexington, KY, now Lexington Theological Seminary; 1967 until his retirement in 1992, Brite Divinity School of Texas Christian University [TCU] in Fort Worth, TX).

Bill's 1955 dissertation had set the tone and direction for much of his later work. Written under the supervision of the transplanted Bultmannian Erich Dinkler, it focused on the Pauline kerygma in 1 Corinthians 15:3-8 and Galatians 1:11-17 (summarized in a *JBL* article 76/3 [Sep. 1957], pp. 181-191), followed by publications on 1 Corinthians and a book on the Bultmannian approach to Paul and NT theology. Baird became known not only as a Pauline scholar of the first rank, but also as a splendid classroom teacher, receiving the Chancellor's Award for Distinguished Teaching from TCU in 1986. Among his several services to the academy was his editorship of the *SBL Dissertation Series*. During his long tenure, his combination of critical eye and encouraging heart for younger scholars resulted in publishing a large number of quality dissertations. There can be no doubt, however, that in Bill's own judgment, with which many colleagues would concur, the crowning achievement of his scholarly career is the three-volume *History of New Testament Research* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992, 2002, 2013). This labor of love, which will have no equal for at least a generation, was completed in Bill's eighty-eighth year, after he had already survived severe health crises.

Bill was a scholar. Most of us came to know him through his writings. I am glad to say that I happen to be among that small, privileged group that knew him personally as friend and colleague, which is not an alternative to knowing him as scholar. He was to us not only a model of teaching, scholarship, and Christian ministry, but exemplified that it was possible to overcome the absent-mindedness and narrowness that can result from the passion for our own profession. I had known him from personal contacts at professional meetings and church assemblies, but when I became his colleague, friend, and then successor at TCU, I found a model not only of scholarship and teaching, but of devotion

to family, of interest in politics (campus, city, state, national, international), of love for the arts (he attended concerts, promoted local music festivals, played his violin in the symphony, became an expert photographer with deep appreciation for Ansel Adams). Bill's passion for sports (a fierce competitor in tennis, borderline fanatic/fan of the TCU Horned Frogs), devoted participation in local congregation and ecumenical church, his gentleness and patience with other people combined with deep convictions about what is good and right, were all models to students and colleagues what it means for a scholar to be a human being. We are glad to have known him. We will sorely miss him.

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18 January 2018