

Scholar, Mentor, and Friend

Memories and Thoughts of Bruce Manning Metzger

by Eldon Jay Epp

Bruce Metzger became a close acquaintance at the very outset of my career. Upon completing a doctoral dissertation on a textual criticism topic at Harvard University in mid-year, I accepted a short-term research position at Princeton Seminary (1961–1963). Ensnared in Speer Library, I encountered Professor Metzger almost daily, exchanging bits of information on subjects of mutual interest, especially books, and soon I realized that Speer Library was his second “office.”

A decade later, Metzger served on the Steering Committee of the Textual Criticism Seminar of the Society of Biblical Literature (SBL) while I was chair, and together we planned numerous annual sessions on critical issues in our field. Study of the New Testament text and the thousands of manuscripts through which it had been transmitted was somewhat moribund in North America at the time, but, as these meetings brought in younger scholars, the field regained its vitality. Metzger was a mainstay of the group, always available for scholarly presentations, reports, intriguing information, and, above all, encouragement and optimism.

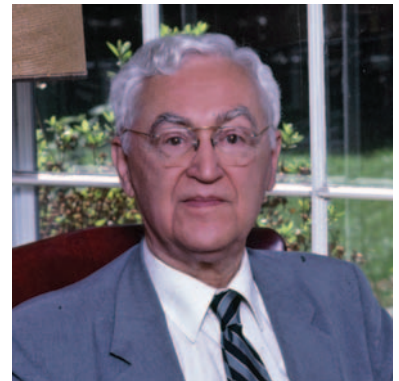
During that same period our association continued through the International Greek New Testament Project, and in 1971 Metzger began his term as chairman of its American Executive Committee, even though that year he was also president of SBL and the following year of the international New Testament Studies Society (NTSS). Under his leadership and in cooperation with the British Committee, two large volumes of critical apparatus for the Gospel of Luke were published for the project by Clarendon Press of Oxford University, the result of collaboration by more than 300 scholars from the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and elsewhere over a period of forty years.

By the late 1970s, Professor Gordon Fee and I had been associated for a dozen years with Bruce Metzger, both in the Inter-

national Greek New Testament Project and in the SBL's Textual Criticism Seminar. Metzger was soon to turn sixty-five, and we could discover no plans for the honorary volume that was customary for a distinguished scholar attaining that age. So, though neither of us had been his student, we conjoined to edit such a Festschrift. Quickly twenty-nine scholars from ten nations responded enthusiastically. This response itself was a tribute to Bruce Metzger's achievements and influence, as well as an indication of deeply felt personal affection. Appropriately the volume was titled *New Testament Textual Criticism: Its Significance for Exegesis—Essays in Honour of Bruce M. Metzger*, reflecting Metzger's lifelong commitment both to scholarship and to the church. Subsequently three more such volumes have been written in his honor (virtually unprecedented, I think)—though the fourth will have to be presented posthumously.

Over this productive quarter-century Bruce Metzger and I not only exchanged innumerable letters, which—before email—were customarily more formal, but we also enjoyed numerous face-to-face meetings. These were opportunities, in pre-telephone conferencing days, to get to know one another in a more personal world. Always, Metzger would listen carefully and would speak with clarity, precision, and measured judgment. As Professor Fee and I wrote in 1981 in his Festschrift dedication (in part):

“Always he can find a kind word for any and all; indeed, who has heard him utter an unkind word about anyone? When in disagreement, he shows no irritation, no harshness, no rancor. His consideration for others encompasses all—those who would be agreeable and supportive, as well as those who would disagree. One of the delights of sharing his company is to hear his anecdotes—often highly personal, little-known narratives about well-known scholars of the past—which are always enlightening, never denigrating, and invariably full of love for people.



Bruce Manning Metzger

Bruce Metzger has never forgotten that scholars, too, are people and that as human beings they are far more important—and inevitably more interesting—than they are merely as scholars.”

We remained colleagues for twenty more years, enjoying the same sessions at SBL and NTSS, exchanging copies of our publications, and picking up again on those casual conversations with which we began our friendship in Speer Library.

It will be obvious that Bruce Metzger's work has enriched my own scholarship, and references to it are scattered widely and deeply in my many footnotes. Most important were the major role he played on the teams that produced the two Greek New Testaments now standard in the world and the information and insight found in his *Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*. Beyond these is his significant contribution to the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, whose influence extends broadly into English-speaking churches, schools, seminaries, colleges, and universities—and will for many years into the future.

Those of us who knew and worked closely with Bruce Metzger now must face the realization that he will no longer be at our scholarly conventions, committee meetings, or text-critical sessions. His absence will be sensed deeply. Yet, we and succeeding generations will have his rich and enriching legacy of meticulous scholarship on the manuscripts and text of the New Testament. ■

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