

## Baird lectures and the New Testament: Inspiration, Transmission and Interpretation

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It has been fascinating to read those Baird lectures which have taken the New Testament as their theme. The sweep of the lectures has very neatly and comprehensively covered the main issues in New Testament studies over the past hundred and fifty years or so, and offers a telling insight into the changes that have taken place in New Testament scholarship.

From the list of lectures, I have selected eight as having direct relevance to New Testament studies, although some should be considered as being of shared concern with other disciplines such as Old Testament, of course, and theology. Having read all eight, it seems to me that one way to categorise them, to bring some sense of order to them, would be to divide them into three groups:

First, those which survey New Testament teaching on theological issues of concern, and under this heading I would include the very first lecture in the series, Robert Jamieson's "The Inspiration of the Holy Scriptures" from 1873; William P. Dickson's 1883 lecture, "St Paul's Use of the Themes Flesh and Spirit", and William Barclay's "Ethics in a Permissive Society" from 1971.

My second category would be those lectures which explore the history of the transmission of New Testament texts, including issues of textual criticism, and there are three of these: Thomas Nicol's "The Four Gospels in the Earliest Church", 1907; "New Testament Criticism: its History and Results" by J.A. McClymont in 1911; and George Milligan's 1930 lecture, "The New Testament and its Transmission".

And lastly there are two studies of individual NT books, William Milligan's "The Revelation of St John" from 1885; and perhaps most famous of all, and most fitting for our current setting here in New College, William Manson's "The Epistle to the Hebrews" from 1949.

A diverse range of subjects, then, and several approaches to similar issues offered. Inner biblical exegesis is the term used for the way the books of the Bible discuss each other, the way Paul uses quotations from the Old Testament for example: this internal discussion between the Baird lectures is never explicit: as far as I can see, none of the lectures I have read ever refers to the work of another earlier in the lecture series, although it might be tackling the same issue in a complementary way. However, what unites all of the lectures, I suggest, is their commitment to the terms of the Baird Trust lectureship, and obviously that shouldn't surprise us. They all, it seems to me, mount strong defences of their positions in opposition either to the prevailing mood of the time, or to the up and coming trends in biblical criticism. From Jamieson's defence of a doctrine of divine, infallible inspiration of scripture, in the face of a sustained attack on this doctrine from scholars both near and far, to Barclay's insistence on the relevance of the Gospels and Pauline teaching to ethical discussions in the 1970s, despite what he calls the "large number of people who would say quite bluntly that they do not believe that Jesus has anything to do with today at all" (p.27), from beginning to end we have a robust taking on board of the Trust's terms of reference for the lectures. As the Deed of Trust states, the lectures are

For the illustration and the defence of the vital truths herein before referred to, as well as for the promotion of Christian knowledge and Christian work generally, and for the exposure and refutation of all error and unbelief".<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Jamieson, *The Inspiration of the Holy Scriptures*, (Edinburgh & London: Blackwood & Sons, 1873), p. iii.

I am not qualified to say whether or not the lecturers all lived up to the further terms of the lectureship, that they were all men “of piety, ability, and learning, and who [were] approved and reputed sound in all the essentials of Christian truth”,<sup>2</sup> although, unless I am very much mistaken, they have all been men. But all take their thesis, in the face of opposition, and develop it and argue it with conviction and élan. And for that alone they are, on the whole, thrilling examples of statements of belief well worth taking time to reconsider.

Having said that, I’m not going to have time to examine each of the sets of lectures in any detail, and I will concentrate on those which grabbed my attention and seemed to have something new to say. And so I turn first to the first lecture, Jamieson’s defence of the doctrine of the divine inspiration of the Bible, from 1873.

While very rarely mentioning his opponents by name, Jamieson, a former Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, is writing at a time of great debate and upheaval in the academic understanding of the reliability of the Bible, both as a historical record and as a unified theological whole. The influence of German scholarship was beginning to make itself felt in Scottish divinity faculties, particularly, ironically, in those of the Free Church. William Robertson Smith’s pivotal article on the Bible in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* would not appear until 1875, but his views on the historical reliability and unity of the Bible had already caused trouble, and were widely reported. Jamieson worries about the “scientific character and critical tendencies of the age”, which have brought about “a quiet but settled scepticism”, particularly among the “higher classes of society”.<sup>3</sup> Jamieson writes in opposition to those who, “instead of receiving implicitly [the Bible’s]

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p.iii.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p.7.

statements as the word of God, [advocate the employment of] an active and constant exercise of judgment ... to extract the precious ore from the earthly accretion with which it is encrusted- to select the divine from the human, and to determine in what portions God is addressing us.”<sup>4</sup> Jamieson asserts that his aim is to set before his audience the “evidence of fact”, that the Old and New Testaments are the “revealed word of God, and the only supreme rule of faith and manners”, offering “supreme infallible authority”.<sup>5</sup> It is illogical to apply human judgment to issues such as the reliability of specific biblical texts if the texts’ direct, divine origin is accepted as an article of faith, backed up, as Jamieson will argue, with internal and external proofs.

From our perspective, it is easy to caricature Jamieson as someone who was flying in the face of an unstoppable intellectual movement which would change the way the Bible was regarded, at least in most academic circles. It would be easy to pick apart statements such as “the [NT] books which were inspired were universally received by the churches without a dissenting voice”<sup>6</sup>; or that the texts which make up the NT offer a “complete system of doctrine, duty, and discipline, exhibit[ing] a striking proof of the watchful providence which presided over the development of the early Christian church”<sup>7</sup>; or that the New Testament writers’ claim to inspiration was “attested by our Lord, who, by various expression of His, virtually and absolutely gave the sanction of His high authority to their instructions, whether in oral discourses or in writings”.<sup>8</sup> Later Baird lecturers would have plenty to say in opposition to Jamieson’s claims that the controlling guide of the Gospel writers “did not permit them to err in the way either of improper omission on one hand, or of the fictitious additions on the other”<sup>9</sup>, or that they, “left to themselves, and unmodified by each other...

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p.9.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, p.10, 12.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p.21.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p.25.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p.33.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p.173.

attained so much variety in the midst of inevitable sameness”.<sup>10</sup> Differences between the Gospels, upon which so many theories of their sources and unreliability have been based, are for Jamieson proof of the many ways Jesus affected different people, and the frequent and varied encounters they had with him. There is no middle way for him between admitting the Gospel writers were inspired, or concluding they were “imposters”.<sup>11</sup> Jamieson sums up, “In short, although discrepancies and apparent inconsistencies are found in many parts of the sacred writings, they are all capable more or less of explanation and reconciliation. No serious error has ever been proved: the Scripture, possessing plenary inspiration, must be regarded as an authoritative and infallible rule in all matters of faith and duty”.<sup>12</sup>

It would be easy to find more of these sorts of statements in Jamieson’s lectures, and, from our very different perspective, criticise their apparent blindness to what are generally accepted as “givens” in NT studies today: that the NT is a collection of texts each speaking with a very different voice, reflecting different theological and historical viewpoints, often in tension with each other; that there is a relationship, or many relationships, of dependence between the Gospels; that the early churches came to a concensus about which books were inspired, and therefore canonical, only after several hundreds of years of debate and uncertainty. But we should remember that when Jamieson was writing, his was by far the majority view among his fellow ministers and certainly among church members. And perhaps that should make biblical scholars today a little humble when we are tempted to argue our position with such certainty. We all have to remember that we each see through a glass darkly, only in part; and there is much still to know.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p.181.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, p.236.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, p.373.

The next two lectures with biblical theology as their theme may be discussed in less detail. In 1883 William P. Dickson, Professor of Divinity at Glasgow University, offers a series of lectures on St Paul's use of the terms Flesh and Spirit. Helpfully Professor Dickson tells us why he chose this topic: it is because "it has not.. been dealt with of late years in any monograph specially devoted to it in this country, while it has been recently subjected to formal and elaborate treatment by various German theologians in connection with the theory of a supposed influence of Greek philosophical ideas in moulding the Apostle's thought".<sup>13</sup> Ten years on from Jamieson, Dickson is equally keen to defend the NT writers from the sceptical views of German biblical criticism, which, in this case had argued that Paul was influenced by Greek philosophy rather than the Old Testament and Jewish monotheism. In a very erudite and closely argued text, Dickson refutes any claim that Paul was relating to the Greek use of the terms flesh and spirit, which tended to identify matter and the material with evil, and had the effect of transferring the traditional historical understanding of sin as coming from Adam (demonstrated in Romans 5.12f) into a general principle with no beginning. Instead, Dickson argues that Paul identifies flesh with humanity per se, humanity in its mental and corporeal entirety, neither good nor bad. The body may be the seat of sin, the scene of sin's manifestations, but it is not in itself evil. Evil, and its consequences, came into the world through Adam's decision to sin. Claiming to fall back on the principle that "sacred Scripture is its own best interpreter", Dickson seeks to affirm that the "old Protestant views of the meaning of Scripture are correct",<sup>14</sup> while demonstrating that

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<sup>13</sup> William P. Dickson, *St Paul's Use of the Terms Flesh and Spirit*, (Glasgow: Maclehose & Sons, 1883), p.7.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, p. 343.

The treatises by recent German scholars ... are unquestioningly marled by great acuteness and subtlety, they present a somewhat motley combination of exegesis, criticism, and speculation, dubious in methods and incongruous in results; that the leading idea common to them of St Paul's having partially drawn his thoughts or language from Greek philosophy- [apart from its threefold improbability, in view of the readers to whom he addressed himself, in the light of his own pre-eminently Jewish nationality and culture, and in the face of his special disclaimers of dependence on, or alliance with, the wisdom of the world-] has no foundation in the facts of the case.<sup>15</sup>

Instead, the Old Testament is the key to Paul's thought. Once again we have a very conservative, defensive response to new scholarship, although in this case, Dickson's emphasis on the Paul's Jewish heritage has in recent times enjoyed something of a revival in Pauline studies, and he might not seem quite so out of step with current scholarship as the German writers who troubled him so much.

We travel forward nearly a century to our next biblical theologian in the series, and here we have quite a change in tone and content. William Barclay's televised lectures from 1971, on Ethics in a Permissive Society, have been discussed with great eloquence already. What strikes me as someone who works in the field of NT is Barclay's ability to harmonise the NT texts and to marshal them into such a clear and accessible argument, and his very natural use of Greek words and explication of their meaning, which powerfully reminds all of his hearers or readers that we are working with a translated text. By bringing the NT world into focus, Barclay demonstrates that the Bible is indeed a text in exile, in David Jasper's phrase, and we all need to be reminded of that. If sometimes the smoothness of his argument, and the confidence of his

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid, p.341-342.

interpretations hint that there is only one reading possible, and suggest, against the evidence, that the NT speaks with one voice, then perhaps we readers of the postmodern age need to challenge that view. But like Jamieson, and Dickson, Barclay's contribution to the series illuminates a particular and perhaps in his case rather optimistic time in the history of NT studies.

We now come to a rather specialised area of interest, my second category, which seemed to capture the imagination of a small group of Baird Trust lecturers between 1907 and 1930. The transmission of the NT documents, the textual criticism of the various manuscripts available, and the place of extra-canonical texts, were the subject of three contributions between these dates. In the first of these, "The Four Gospels in the Earliest Church History", Thomas Nicol, Professor of Divinity and Biblical Literature at the University of Aberdeen, bases his argument on the assumption that

In any estimate we form of the trustworthiness of the Gospels as a presentation of the life, the teaching and the work of Christ, much depends upon the directness of their sources and their proximity in time to the events which they record.<sup>16</sup>

From this starting point, in perhaps the nippiest of the lectures I have read in terms of its interaction with other (mainly German, of course) biblical scholars, Nicol seeks to prove the apostolic authorship and the unbroken transmission of the Gospels. He briefly surveys and rejects the "rationalistic" arguments of Paulus, Strauss and Baur, and dismisses the work of higher Criticism which presents Christ as a mere man. Nicol's opponents depend on placing the date of the writing of the Gospels towards the end of the first century CE, and even into the second century, so that there is time for theological reflection, interaction

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<sup>16</sup> Thomas Nicol, *The Four Gospels in the Earliest Church History*, (Edinburgh & London: Blackwood & Sons, 1908), p.1.

between Christian and pagan (read Greek) influences, the accretion of miraculous and legendary incidents, and the general transformation of the earliest tradition. So, using the biblical and extra-canonical manuscripts available to him, Nicol seeks to push the date of the Gospels right back to just after the time of Jesus. As he states:

The contention of the present course of lectures is, that the Four Gospels are authentic and trustworthy productions of the Apostolic Age- that they have come down to us practically unchanged from the hands of their Apostolic authors, and that their influence can be traced, individually and collectively, from a very early time, moulding the spiritual life, and intellectual development, and social and missionary activities of the rapidly extending Christian Church.<sup>17</sup>

To do this, Nicol examines how the Gospels were regarded from the end of the second century backwards as far as the evidence will allow, covering the testimony of Irenaeus, Tatian, Justin Martyr, the Shepherd of Hermas and the history of the Gospels themselves. Despite what he calls the “dark tunnel” of church history from around 65 to 155, during which time evidence for the existence of the Gospels as we know them is lacking, Nicol concludes that it is reasonable to argue that the Gospels were the testimony of eye-witnesses, “written by the Evangelists whose names they bear”.<sup>18</sup>

In the brief time I have to discuss Nicol’s lectures, I am not doing justice to the careful way he argues his case, and we also have to remember that he did not have access to many of the early manuscripts we now rely on to make the case for a very fluid tradition in the early church. The dark tunnel, however, points to

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid, p.33.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, p.309.

me to a time when the Gospels had not yet all been compiled, there was a multiplicity of stories circulating and being told, and eye-witness accounts and theological and legendary accretions were being interwoven. The connection between the apostles and the Gospels, particularly the Fourth Gospel and the apostle John, is much less certain than Nicol suggests, and there was plenty of debate and dispute about authorship between the early fathers and those who came to be known as unorthodox. The relationship between the epistles and the Gospels also complicates the picture, and Nicol's claim that the Gospels and the Pauline epistles are in "full accord" just doesn't seem to do justice to any of the texts.

In his 1911 lectures, *New Testament Criticism: Its History and Results*, J.A. McClymont revisits some of these issues, and also those of the very first lectures by Jamieson on the inspiration of scripture. McClymont's opening chapters, in their careful weighing up of the evidence and avoidance of grand claims for the biblical text, have stood the test of time, and a twenty-first century reader, or at least this twenty-first century reader, finds little to argue with. Taking Luther's view that private judgment is needed to recognise divine truth, based on his reading of 1Cor 2.15, McClymont argues that "the application of scientific methods in the solution of [the Bible's] literary problems"<sup>19</sup> is a legitimate approach. He comments, "if it be guided by sound principles, criticism cannot injure the interests of truth; only error and falsehood have anything to fear from its conclusions".<sup>20</sup> In direct contrast to Jamieson, McClymont argues for an impartial examination of scripture, leading to the conclusion that the gospel writers were "left to the free exercise of their natural faculties",<sup>21</sup> that some passages show no sign of a supernatural influence having been exerted on the writer, that the witness of the Bible does not necessarily depend on the historical truth of books such as the Gospels or Acts, and that

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<sup>19</sup> J.A. McClymont, *New Testament Criticism: Its History and Results*, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1913), p. 3.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, p. 1.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, p.22.

there is evidence to suggest that the Gospel writers were influenced not just by the Old Testament, but by their culture, including contemporary Jewish and Gentile thought. He concludes:

All that we are entitled to claim, or have any need to claim, for the Bible, is that it contains the Word of God to a degree unequalled in any other book or in any other literature.<sup>22</sup>

Drawing on the textual critical work of Westcott and Hort, McClymont goes on to make a thorough survey of the various manuscripts available of each of the New Testament texts, seeking to restore the writings to as close as possible their original form. In doing so, he explores the issues that others before him have been unwilling to address critically, including the interdependence of the synoptic Gospels, the process whereby they came into existence, and the need to make judgments between the Gospel witnesses where they are in obvious conflict. Although McClymont's work is more of a survey than an attempt to offer new insights into these issues, his series of lectures points to a shift in thinking about the New Testament in the Church in Scotland, not universally accepted, but more available to a wider audience than ever before. His conclusions, that it is impossible to arrive at anything like certainty regarding many questions of textual criticism, but that a personal response to the claims and revelation of Christ found in the Bible is more important than any opinion about the authorship, date or text of any specific book, were framed in such a way that they were more likely to be accepted by his hearers and readers. As an apologist for what we know as modern biblical criticism, McClymont is an impressive example.

Finally and briefly in this second category we jump to 1930, and George Milligan's lectures on "The New Testament and its Transmission". This might

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid, p.29.

be described as a more accessible version of McClymont's text, with the added benefit of lantern illustrations, reproduced in the printed version as 7 rather fine facsimiles. Milligan, professor of Divinity and Biblical Criticism at Glasgow University, directs his lectures firmly at the ordinary Bible reader, who is "conscious that much work has been done in recent years in the textual criticism of the New Testament, and is anxious to be assured that its writings have come down to him as nearly as possible in the words of the first writers".<sup>23</sup> Although Milligan covers much of the same ground as McClymont, assessing the evidence of the early manuscripts of the New Testament, he extends his enquiry through the whole history of the NT text, discussing, for example, the Vulgate, critical editions of the Greek NT from Erasmus to Westcott and Hort, and versions in English from Wycliffe, via the Authorised Version to the Revised Standard Version. With its various appendices covering topics such as recent archaeological discoveries and verse division in the NT, this serves as an excellent textbook or introduction to the field of the transmission of the NT. I found it interesting that when raising the question of the necessity of a further revised translation of the NT, following the publication of the RSV, Milligan argues that the time was not yet right, given the extensive work that was going on into the vocabulary and manuscripts of the Bible. The Chester Beatty papyri were just coming into the public sphere, and although he could not be aware of this, the Dead Sea would in the next couple of decades yield even more valuable information about the cultural and theological world in which the NT was written. Nevertheless, Milligan concludes with these words of comfort for his ordinary Bible reader:

Though the exact wording of particular sayings or incidents may still be uncertain, we have the assurance that the main teaching of our Lord rests upon a firm and certain basis.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> George Milligan, *The New Testament and its Transmission*, (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1932), p. vii.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, p.179-180.

Two sets of lectures make up our third category, those which deal in detail with just one book of the New Testament. The first takes us back to near the beginning of the Baird Trust scheme, to 1885 and another Milligan, William, George's father, Professor of Divinity and Biblical Criticism at Aberdeen University. His theme is the Revelation of St John, and I have to admit to you that this is one of my favourite lectures of all that I have had the pleasure of reading for this conference. Not that it is particularly original, or that I agree with all of his analysis, or that some of his orderings of the various elements of the text demand to be read. I like this one because it is sensitive, uplifting, unsensational and above all lacking in much of the sectarianism that characterised some of the Church of Scotland at the time, and would become more prevalent in the 1920s and 30s. Milligan chooses Revelation as his subject out of a sense of the Church's "imperative obligation" to try to understand it. Echoing Jamieson on scriptural inspiration, he asserts that "Nothing is more certain than that, had it not been intended that we should use this book, the exalted Redeemer would not have given it by revelation to His servant".<sup>25</sup> He then goes on, however, to urge his readers to lay aside their preconceived notions of the book, and of appropriate responses to it, arguing that

The principles of historical criticism must be applied by us with the strictest faithfulness. We must judge the book mainly by considering its own contents, by taking into account what we otherwise know of the writer, and by keeping in view the special circumstances amidst which he wrote.<sup>26</sup>

The reader's task is to seek meaning in the text, based on a belief that "it is not the words but the man who is inspired", and so it is not with the words as such

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<sup>25</sup> William Milligan, *The Revelation of St John*, (London: Macmillan & Co., 1886), p. 5.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, p.13.

but with “the truth contained within them, that we have to do”.<sup>27</sup> Milligan stresses that the writer wrote for his own time, not offering further prophetic revelation, but a new interpretation of his readers’ present situation, as followers of Christ in a particular context. With this deeply historical, contextual view, Milligan offers an interpretation of the influences behind the symbolism of Revelation, suggests a structure and plan of the book, and tries to relate its content to a period in the life of the early church. He argues that any attempt to map the events described in Revelation onto contemporary or future happenings is a lost cause, and against the purpose of the text. Rather, he suggests, the writer of Revelation explores three ideas already exemplified in the history of Jesus Christ, conflict, preservation and triumph, and expresses them in such a way as to offer support to the elect but suffering members of the church he was addressing.

It [Revelation] is simply the highly idealised expression of the position and fortunes of the “little flock” which, against the world and against the Church in the ordinary sense of that word, listens to the Good Shepherd’s voice and follows Him.<sup>28</sup>

In passing, Milligan assesses the use of the image of the whore of Babylon, for him a warning that not all who say they belong to the church will be part of the triumph Jesus has secured. We know of course that this horrific symbol has often in reformed circles been identified with the Roman Catholic Church, but Milligan refutes this particular and easy identification. He states that “Babylon embraces much more than Rome, and illustrations of what she is lie nearer to our own door”.<sup>29</sup> Here he may not be specifically excluding Rome, but I admire him for not taking the easy route which, in the 1880s, would have been met with approval by many.

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid, p.16.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, p188.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, p.184.

Revelation for Milligan, then, is not a prophecy of a future age, its details to be searched for their contemporary relevance, but a vision of the present of an historical church in difficult times, written to comfort and uplift, and to encourage a steadfast fixing of the eyes on the church's true hope, the revelation of Jesus in his glory. This set of lectures, which in their detailed complexity, cannot have been easy to sit and listen to, offer an interpretation of a challenging text which continues to have something to say to modern readers.

At last, then, we turn to my final set of lectures. William Manson's Baird lectures of 1949, published in 1951, are perhaps the high point of the Lecture's contribution to New Testament studies. Manson's thesis, although not widely accepted in its entirety today, is still engaged with in modern commentaries, and Manson remains in the bibliographies of any self-respecting Hebrews scholar.

Like the lecturers before him, Manson's contribution arose from a need to argue or defend a thesis which he felt was under attack. In this case, he sought to counteract what had become the dominant view of his time, put forward by scholars such as James Moffatt and E.F. Scott, that Hebrews was written in response to a secular drift amongst church members towards irreligion or paganism, rather than as a response to their return to the Jewish customs of before, which was his view. To make his case, Manson argued and made popular the view that there was a specific and identifiable link between the epistle to the Hebrews and the earlier Jewish Christian tradition represented by the figure of Stephen from Acts 7. He seeks to place the author of Hebrews firmly in the theological tradition of the circle of Stephen and the Hellenistic Jewish Christians, whose views are recorded in Stephen's speech in the seventh chapter of Acts. And certainly, there are striking verbal and thematic correspondences between that speech and parts of the epistle to the Hebrews:

In Acts, Stephen is reported as referring to the temple as “made with hands”, arguing that the temple was never intended to become a permanent structure. Hebrews uses the same term for the tabernacle or tent which preceded the building of the temple (9.11, 24).

Stephen’s speech portrays the people of God as always on the move, as does Hebrews (3.7-4.13), understands angels as positive mediators of the law (7.52), as does Hebrews (2.2); both texts describe God’s words as “living” (Acts 7.38, Heb 4.12), and speak of rest in the promised land (Acts 7.45, 49; Heb 4.3).

Manson argues eloquently for a direct connection between Hebrews and Stephen’s teaching, and constructs an impressive case for this relationship to be seen as the key to the epistle. For Manson, the Christians addressed by the epistle to the Hebrews have been, or are in danger of, reverting back to the sacrificial system of Judaism, and the writer of the epistle, in common with Stephen as we know him from the Book of Acts, is arguing that Christ has replaced that way of becoming right with God. The epistle is not trying to persuade its readers away from paganism, as many of Manson’s contemporaries were suggesting.

Manson’s view has not gone without challenge of course. Later scholars have reminded us that Stephen’s speech in Acts is obviously Luke’s reworking of earlier material, and the origin of the sources Luke used are uncertain. Manson constructs a weighty argument about Stephen and his circle on rather uncertain evidence. Other scholars have pointed out that Stephen in Acts treats the tabernacle favourably, and criticises attitudes towards the temple, not the tabernacle. In comparison, Hebrews makes no mention of the temple, but criticizes the arrangements surrounding the tabernacle as provisional and inadequate now that Christ has come. So the fit between the two is not as close as it might have been.

However, although Manson's argument has not been accepted completely, many commentators today will concede that it is possible that the writer of Hebrews was familiar with the ideas which lie behind Stephen's speech, wherever they came from, and accept that at least one of the purposes of the letter may have been to criticise even the tabernacle foundations of temple worship, and draw even more negative conclusions about the role of the priesthood and the law than Stephen and his followers did. It is Manson's view that Paul's understanding of Christ as the end of the Law should be balanced with Hebrew's understanding of Christ as the end of the sacrificial, temple system, and that the Christian church should be understood as "built on the foundations of the Old Testament, and rising phoenix-like from the embers not only of Jewish legalism but of the Jewish means of grace".<sup>30</sup> This corrective to our understanding of the message of Jesus and the development of the early church was a necessary one, and Manson's Baird lectures had a key role in bringing about this realignment of modern critical thought.

Manson's lectures are aimed very firmly at the guild of biblical scholars. They are a far cry from George Milligan's popular treatment of New Testament transmission, or Jamieson's stirring defence of biblical inspiration as he understood it, or Barclay's televised offering. But taken together, all of these lectures point to the flexibility of the Baird Trust's remit, its commitment to the issues of importance in the field of NT studies, and its value in bringing to a wider audience the joys and complexities of a belief-based and responsibly-argued defence of the message of the New Testament.

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<sup>30</sup> William Manson, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1951), p.197.