

LEON LAMB MORRIS: AN APPRECIATION

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“LEON MORRIS HAS CONVINCED ME,” THE DISTINGUISHED SCOTTISH professor acknowledged. “Every man must have a mercy-seat, a place of propitiation.” That statement, awarding to Morris the laurels in his debate with C. H. Dodd as to whether *hilasterion* means propitiation or expiation, introduced me to Leon Morris’s name nearly twenty years ago. It was not until several years after (1960, I think) that I met Dr. Morris for the first time in Santa Barbara, California. With fear and trembling, I awaited the arrival of the esteemed scholar, whose reputation had by then been enhanced by his *Apostolic Preaching of The Cross* and his commentaries on the Thessalonian letters. To my delight I discovered that my fears of awesome stuffiness were unfounded.

Here was a man humble in his discipleship, unimpressed by his own learning, cordial in his friendship. His relaxed attitude toward his accomplishments particularly impressed me. Immigration requirements insisted that he present the diploma of his Ph.D. degree (which he had earned at Cambridge in 1952) before he would be granted a visa to enter the United States as a visiting professor. Somewhat sheepishly Morris confessed to me that he had searched high and low before he found it. An academic document that some would have guarded like the crown jewels he had casually mislaid. Years of intimate, though intermittent, contact with Leon Morris have only deepened my admiration and affection for him. In fact, writing this tribute I find to be a hard assignment. Were I to say what I feel, the result would be sentiments too deep for public exhibition. Yet to say much less than I feel might seem to gloss over the depths of our friendship.

It takes a while to know the many sides of Leon Morris. His missionary background, for instance. His interest in the atonement and the theology of the cross do not derive alone from his concern that the evangelical tradition make a responsible contribution in the Anglican communion or in academic circles. It also stems from his personal commitment to the preaching of the cross as the power of God to salvation. This is a message which he has proclaimed through the years in the parish and in his missionary ministry in the Australian Outback where he served for five years (1940–45) as priest-in-charge of the Minnipa Mission, Diocese of Will-oehra, South Australia. There he held services in more than twenty centres which were like scattered dots on 40,000 square miles of bleak terrain.

Paved roads were almost non-existent. Leon and Mildred Morris (they were married in January 1941) usually followed other car tracks through the bush or made their own. Often Mildred drove while Leon read the books required by the London B.D., a bouncy, dusty way to gain an education. His concern for the isolated villages, homes, and stations normally beyond the reach of Christian preaching later led him to act as Victorian Secretary of the Bush Church Aid Society in 1952-53.

Before he became a missionary, he was a science student and teacher. His training at the University of Sydney (B.Sc., 1934) and at Sydney Teachers College prepared him for his first career - teaching school. It was during his first year at university that God called him to trust in Christ as Lord and Saviour. His study of sciences stood him in good stead when, after three years of teaching, the call of God came again. This time it redirected his career to ordination in the Anglican Church.

His scientific ability to weigh options and make sober choices he carried over to his theological training. He was granted the Th.L. by the Australian College of Theology in 1937. Not only was he awarded first class honours, but he won the Hey-Sharp Prize as the top Th.L. candidate in Australia. From the University of London he received the B.D. degree with first class honours in 1943 and the M.Th. in 1946. In 1951 he had the honour of becoming the first Australian scholar to be elected to membership in the international Society for New Testament Studies.

This record seems all the more remarkable when viewed in the light of his demanding administrative and pastoral responsibilities. During the past twenty-five years or so he has served as Vice-Principal of Ridley College, Melbourne (1954-59), as Warden of Tyndale House, Cambridge (1961-63), and Principal of Ridley College since 1964. In his quiet, unflappable way, he has carried out his duties with grace and efficiency. Hundreds of students in Great Britain, the United States, as well as Australia have been nurtured by his personal interest in them. Discussions over coffee have blended scholarly acumen, pastoral experience, innate commonsense, keen concern for persons. Individual counselling sessions have helped scores of students to find a way through their problems. At heart, administration is the service of people - not the shuffling of paper. At such service Principal Morris excels.

The "cure of souls" has been at the centre of his ministry through the years. His educational and administrative tasks have been enriched by his wide and varied experiences in the parish. Following his ordination as deacon (1938) and priest (1939) he served as curate of St. John's, Campsie, in the Diocese of Sydney (1938-40), of Holy Trinity, Coburg, in the Diocese of Melbourne (1948-49, 1953-55), of St. John's, Bentleigh (1957-58), and of St. George's, Bentleigh, in the Diocese of Melbourne (1958-59).

His credentials as a churchman continue to be impressive. Since 1964 he has served as Canon of St. Paul's Cathedral, Melbourne and was among the nominees for the Archbishopric of Sydney in 1966. He is at present Secretary of the Commission on Doctrine of the Church of England in Australia. As both a loyal Anglican and a sane ecumenist, he has laboured in many causes that cross denominational lines, including the chairmanship of Billy Graham's 1968 Melbourne crusade and the presidency of the Inter-Varsity Fellowship of Australia. During various sojourns in America he has served as a Visiting Professor at theological seminaries or divinity schools like Columbia (Decatur, Georgia), Fuller, Gordon-Conwell, Trinity, and Westminster. During one brief period in 1966 he also lent a hand to the editorial staff of *Christianity Today* in Washington, D.C. His presence was felt in interdenominational discussions on Biblical authority held at Wenham, Massachusetts in 1966 and on world evangelism at the Berlin Congress the same year.

The scholars whose essays in this volume pay tribute to Leon Morris are spokesmen for a vast host of academics, pastors, Bible translators and laymen to whom Morris's name has become a household word. Integrity of scholarship and clarity of expression combine in his writings with a reverence for the teachings of Scripture. This combination makes a marked impact on his readers whether through his more technical or his more popular writings.

The remarkable bibliography shows the range and variety of Dr. Morris's work. His weightier commentaries on Thessalonians and John have taken their place alongside the standard expositions of those books. His more popular commentaries on I Corinthians, Thessalonians, Revelation, and Ruth have been exemplary in their field, models of deep learning clearly and simply expressed. His critical works like *The Apostolic Preaching of The Cross* and *Studies in the Fourth Gospel* show his sense of strategy. It is the person and work of Jesus Christ on which his studies have centred. This focus has made Morris's work evangelical to the core. The Saviour and the good news he has brought are his chief interests. While appreciating all aspects of the academic task, he has personally chosen to test some of the main currents of Biblical scholarship, rather than to paddle in the backwaters. Not only my Scottish professor but a legion of Bible students have been convinced of the truth and power of the Gospel by Morris's scholarship.

Leon Morris's students and friends know sides of his life that his readers can only guess at: his puckish sense of humour, his deep personal piety, his quiet openness to his friends, his keen interest in sports, his thorough enjoyment of all of life. I have never met anyone from overseas who learned so quickly and followed so avidly American sports. Football, baseball and basketball have become as much a part of his interest as tennis, soccer and cricket. He knows not only the names of the star players

but the intricacies of the rules. Some of my finest memories are recollections of hours passed at athletic events discussing theology and sports with Dr. Morris.

No tribute to Leon Morris would be complete without a mention of Mildred, his wife. From those days early in their marriage, when she drove the bumpy trails of the Outback while he studied, to the present, as she brings her warmth and grace to the faculty and students at Ridley, her gentle inspiration, her strong devotion, her unflagging courage, her readiness for new ventures have provided a fitting context for his ministries. In a sense these essays must be for her as well as for him.