

Foreword

Professor Grant R. Osborne

Eckhard J. Schnabel and Stanley E. Porter

Grant R. Osborne was born on July 7, 1942, in Queens in New York City, where his parents were working as professional musicians. His father, a trumpet player, played with virtually every big band in town and beyond. During the Second World War the family moved to Fort Wayne, Indiana, where they started to attend a local church and became committed Christians. Grant was introduced during his high school days to the serious study of the Bible in meetings of Youth for Christ, which prompted him to memorize books of the Old and New Testaments and eventually to attend Fort Wayne Bible College, where he majored in missions and pastoral training. During his undergraduate studies, Grant served as a student worker with T.E.A.M. for six months, living in Abbottabad in North Pakistan. Since chronic bronchitis prevented missionary ministry overseas, Grant entered pastoral ministry, serving for three years as the pastor of First Christian Union Church in Newark, Ohio. Grant introduced expository preaching to the congregation while meeting the numerous and time-consuming expectations of his church, which included directing an all-churches choir (Grant conducted performances of Handel's Messiah!). Experiencing the task of preparing three sermons each week as utterly stimulating, being invigorated by working consistently with the Greek text, Grant was eager and ready to engage in further studies. He enrolled at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois, where he earned a Master of Arts degree in New Testament studies in 1971. Taking up the challenge of Richard Longenecker, one of his professors at TEDS, to earn a Ph.D. in Great Britain, Grant prepared for doctoral studies in Europe by teaching Greek and Hebrew at TEDS, driving a school bus, and filling in as interim pastor in a church in the Chicago area, while his wife Nancy, whom he had married during his Ohio days, taught elementary school. Grant has the distinction of being the first doctoral student of I. Howard Marshall at Aberdeen University. His Ph.D. dissertation, with the title "History and Theology in the Resurrection Narratives: A Redactional Study," was passed in 1974. Dr. Osborne accepted a call to Winnipeg Theological Seminary (now Providence Theological Seminary) in Canada, where he taught from 1974 to 1977, and then moved to Deerfield where he has been Professor of New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School since 1977 for thirty-five years. Grant has spent research semesters at the University of Cambridge in England and the Philipps-Universität in Marburg, Germany, and has lectured in Korea, Hong Kong, and the People's Republic of China. He has served as New Testament editor of *TSF News and Reviews*, as general editor of the *IVP New Testament Commentary* series (InterVarsity Press), and as one of the editors of the *Life Application Commentary* (Tyndale), the *Three Crucial Questions* series (Baker), and the *New Living Translation*.

A major area of interest of Professor Osborne has been hermeneutics, a fact that he connects with both his dissertation research and his missionary interests and pastoral duties, and which entails "moving" the meaning of Scripture from the biblical text to its

contemporary listeners. Grant used the tools of redaction criticism, introduced twenty years earlier by Hans Conzelmann,¹ Willi Marxsen,² and Günther Bornkamm,³ in his dissertation on the resurrection narratives in the Gospels.⁴ He revisited redaction criticism in several articles for dictionaries,⁵ textbooks on exegetical method,⁶ journals,⁷ and books,⁸ defending the appropriateness of employing the techniques of redaction criticism in Gospel studies, especially against evangelicals who argued that redaction criticism and a conservative view of Scripture are incompatible.⁹ Using a boxing metaphor, Grant describes the first round in the evangelical debate about redaction criticism as the attack by John Warwick Montgomery at the Annual Conference of the Evangelical Theological Society in 1978¹⁰ against his 1976 and 1978 essays in *the Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, against which he vigorously defended himself,¹¹ arguing that in no instance did he suggest that the evangelists created events or sayings of Jesus. The second round began with the publication of Robert Gundry's commentary on the Gospel of Matthew,¹² which was criticized by some evangelical scholars.¹³ The third round witnessed

¹ Hans Conzelmann, *Die Mitte der Zeit. Studien zur Theologie des Lukas* (BHT 17; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1954).

² Willi Marxsen, *Der Evangelist Markus. Studien zur Redaktionsgeschichte des Evangeliums* (FRLANT 67; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1956).

³ Günther Bornkamm, Gerhard Barth, and Heinz Joachim Held, *Überlieferung und Auslegung in Matthäusevangelium* (WMANT 1; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1960).

⁴ Grant R. Osborne, "History and Theology in the Resurrection Narratives: A Redactional Study" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Aberdeen University, 1974), mentioned a few years later in Thomas Pola, "Urchristlicher Osterglaube. Bibliographie 1972–1980," *ANRW II/25.1* (1982): 873–90, here 885, and eventually published in a revised version as Grant R. Osborne, *The Resurrection Narratives: A Redactional Study* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984).

⁵ Grant R. Osborne, "Redaction Criticism," in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (ed. J. B. Green, S. McKnight, and I. H. Marshall; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 662–69.

⁶ Grant R. Osborne, "Redaction Criticism," in *New Testament Criticism & Interpretation* (ed. D. A. Black and D. S. Dockery; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 199–224.

⁷ Grant R. Osborne, "Redaction Criticism and the Great Commission: A Case Study Toward a Biblical Understanding of Inerrancy," *JETS* 19 (1976): 73–85; Grant R. Osborne, "Redactional Trajectories in the Crucifixion Narrative," *EQ* 51 (1979): 80–96.

⁸ Grant R. Osborne, "John 21: Test Case for History and Redaction in the Resurrection Narratives," in *Gospel Perspectives II: Studies of History and Tradition in the Four Gospels* (ed. R. T. France and D. Wenham; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1981), 293–329.

⁹ Grant R. Osborne, "Round Four: The Redaction Debate Continues," *JETS* 28 (1986): 399–410.

¹⁰ John Warwick Montgomery, "Why Has God Incarnate Suddenly Become Mythical?" in *Perspectives on Evangelical Theology* (ed. K. S. Kantzer and S. N. Gundry; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 57–65.

¹¹ Grant R. Osborne, "The Evangelical and Redaction Criticism: Critique and Methodology," *JETS* 22 (1979): 305–22.

¹² Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on his Literary and Theological Art* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982).

¹³ D. A. Carson, "Gundry on Matthew: A Critical Review," *TrinJ* 3 (1982): 71–91; Douglas J. Moo, "Matthew and Midrash: An Evaluation of Robert H. Gundry's Approach," *JETS* 26 (1983): 31–39; Norman L. Geisler, "Methodological Unorthodoxy," *JETS* 26 (1983): 87–94; R. T. France, "Jewish Historiography, Midrash, and the Gospels," in *Gospel Perspectives III: Studies in Midrash and Historiography* (ed. R. T. France and D. Wenham; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1983), 99–127; Philip Barton Payne, "Midrash and History in the Gospels with Special Reference to R. H. Gundry's Matthew," in *Gospel Perspectives III: Studies in Midrash and Historiography* (ed. R. T. France, D.

a symposium of evangelical scholars organized by Christianity Today,¹⁴ and a position paper by the faculty of Talbot School of Theology.¹⁵ A comment on the book illustrates Grant's willingness to change or modify a position that he held: responding to the charge that redaction critics tend to deny the possibility of harmonizing Gospel accounts in order to arrive at a chronological life of the historical Jesus, and that they tend to doubt the possibility of reconstructing the theology or the exact words of Jesus, he asserted in his 1986 essay, "I will admit that this applied to me for a while. In my original dissertation on the resurrection narratives I played down the possibility of harmonizing the accounts. However, as I reworked my thesis over a period of seven years I gradually realized not only the viability but the importance of doing so to the extent that the data allowed."¹⁶ This openness to correction and continued learning was evident in a recent Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society when a student from his own divinity school (who was younger than the number of years Grant has been teaching) challenged a particular position of his. At the end of the presentation, Grant raised his hand to comment, told the student that he convinced him, and emphasized that when you write you have to be willing to be wrong.

Unlike some scholars who devote their career to the use of one particular method of interpretation, Grant has also written on historical criticism,¹⁷ tradition criticism,¹⁸ genre or form criticism,¹⁹ literary theory,²⁰ typology,²¹ contextualization,²² and biblical hermeneutics in general.²³ Of particular significance is his influential textbook *The*

Wenham; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1983), 177–216. Robert Gundry answered his critics in several "Responses" in *JETS* 26 (1983): 41–56, 71–86, 95–100, 109–116.

¹⁴ Christianity Today Institute, "Redaction Criticism, Is It Worth the Risk?" *Christianity Today* 19/15 (18 October 1985): 1–12 (insert).

¹⁵ Wendell G. Johnston et al., "The Evangelical and Redaction Criticism in the Synoptic Gospels," *Talbot Review* 1 (1985): 8–13.

¹⁶ Osborne, "Round Four," 407.

¹⁷ Grant R. Osborne, "Historical Criticism and the Evangelical," *JETS* 42 (1999): 193–210; Grant R. Osborne, "Historical Narrative and Truth in the Bible," *JETS* 48 (2005): 673–99.

¹⁸ Grant R. Osborne, "The Evangelical and Traditionsgeschichte," *JETS* 21 (1978): 117–30.

¹⁹ Grant R. Osborne, "Genre Criticism—*Sensus Literalis*," *TrinJ* 4 (1983): 1–27; Grant R. Osborne, "Genre Criticism—*Sensus Literalis*," in *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy, and the Bible. Papers from ICBI Summit II* (ed. E. D. Radmacher and R. D. Preus; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 163–90.

²⁰ Grant R. Osborne, "Literary Theory and Biblical Interpretation," in *Words and the Word: Explorations in Biblical Interpretation and Literary Theory* (ed. D. G. Firth and J. A. Grant; Nottingham: Apollos, 2008), 17–50.

²¹ Grant R. Osborne, "Type, Typology," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (ed. Walter A. Elwell; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 1117–19; Grant R. Osborne, "Typology," in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (ed. G. W. Bromiley; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979–88), 4:930–32.

²² Grant R. Osborne, "Preaching the Gospels—Methodology and Contextualization," *JETS* 27 (1984): 25–42.

²³ Grant R. Osborne, "Hermeneutics and Women in the Church," *JETS* 20 (1977): 337–52; Grant R. Osborne, "Christology and New Testament Hermeneutics: A Survey of the Discussion," *Semeia* 30 (1984): 49–62; Grant R. Osborne, "Evangelical Interpretation of Scripture," in *The Bible in the Churches: How Various Christians Interpret the Scriptures* (Marquette Studies in Theology 4; ed. K. Hager; Marquette: Marquette University Press, 1985), 129–59; Grant R. Osborne, "Interpreting the New Testament," in *Proceedings of the Conference on Biblical Interpretation*, 1988 (ed. R. Jackson, J. I. Packer, and D. Vestal; Nashville: Broadman, 1989), 137–67; Grant R. Osborne,

Hermeneutical Spiral,²⁴ which was a 1993 *Christianity Today* Critics' Choice Award winner in theology and biblical studies. The hardcover edition of 1991 was followed by a paperback edition in 1997 and an expanded second edition in 2006. By October 2011, these three editions combined had sold over 50,000 copies.²⁵ It has been translated into Chinese, Hungarian, and Portuguese, and is in the process of being translated into Arabic, Indonesian, and Korean.

Grant's scholarship has not only been prodigious, but his direct influence upon students has been profound as well. Many of the contributors to this volume were students of Dr. Osborne at TEDS, and several served as his teaching assistants. To work with Dr. Osborne was a privilege and created an opportunity to see him up close. It allowed the student to be able to talk with him more intimately about issues in ministry, especially in New Testament studies, and even to read and proofread his major works—to be in the know, as it were—before they appeared in print. It is hard to describe the privilege of having been asked to read and respond to an article that, one realized both then and now, took evangelical scholarship into previously uncharted waters. Students in Dr. Osborne's courses will remember the voluminous notes that he prepared for them to read in advance—in essence a compendium of scholarship on the respective topic or New Testament book—and that formed the backdrop for classroom discussion. The notes for a course in hermeneutics were the basis of what was to become *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, one of Grant's most significant publications. At the time the notes were written, students at TEDS were probably among the few in all of evangelical scholarship who were being exposed to structuralism and other less traditional forms of hermeneutical thought. One of the editors remembers vividly being in a Johannine literature course—at TEDS called Leftovers, because it was not the Synoptics or Acts and Paul—when, near the end of the course, one of the students asked Dr. Osborne how he would preach a particular passage using the material that had just been studied and discussed. Immediately, and with great passion, Dr. Osborne launched into what can only be described as a profound and deeply moving sermon—and not a short homily—on the Johannine passage, demonstrating both how to make the seamless transition from text and scholarship to application, and, perhaps more importantly, the spiritual fervor and genuine devotion to God's word that Grant always professed and lived and continues to live before all of his students and colleagues. That impromptu sermon,

“Meaning in a Meaningless World: Hermeneutics and the Scholar,” *Journal for Christian Studies* 12 (1993): 1–16; Grant R. Osborne, “Hermeneutics/ Interpreting Paul,” in *Dictionary of Paul and his Letters* (ed. G. F. Hawthorne, R. P. Martin, and D. G. Reid; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 388–97; Grant R. Osborne, “The Many and the One: The Interface between Orthodox and Evangelical Protestant Hermeneutics,” *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 39 (1995): 281–304; Grant R. Osborne, “Evangelical Biblical Interpretation,” in *Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation* (ed. John Hayes; Nashville: Abingdon, 1999), 1:357–61; Grant R. Osborne, “Hermeneutics,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions* (ed. A. C. Moreau; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 430–32; Grant R. Osborne, “Hermeneutics and Theological Interpretation,” in *Understanding the Times: New Testament Studies in the 21st Century* (FS D. A. Carson; ed. A. Köstenberger and R. W. Yarbrough; Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 62–86.

²⁴ Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1991).

²⁵ We thank Dan Reid from InterVarsity Press for this information.

born out of years of studying and meditating on God's word, remains a vivid memory among many such memories from several years under Grant's tutelage.

For Grant, the focus on hermeneutics was never an end in itself nor a theoretical discipline, but invariably driven by theological and ultimately pastoral concerns, as several essays²⁶ and numerous dictionary entries²⁷ demonstrate. His preaching and teaching ministry in many churches in the Chicago area and beyond confirms his dedication to the church. One of the joys of his last ten years has been his strategic involvement in teaching pastors from mainland China. What seems to be Grant's last major project corroborates this assessment: he has started working on a biblical theology of the church, proving the point that, for him, truly biblical scholarship always benefits the church.

Colleagues and students have always appreciated Grant's cordial agreeability, cheerful disposition, unmitigated affirmation of friendship, deep humility, concern for the truth, and love of the Word of God. In addition, there is his sometimes hilariously self-deprecating sense of humor. It is quite possible that he will be embarrassed by this volume and the attention that it directs his way. He may agree, however, that if the essays on commentary writing collected in this volume help scholars to write better commentaries and prompt pastors to preach better sermons, the overriding concern of his own life as scholar, theologian, and pastor will have been served: *Soli Deo Gloria*.

Note:

[1] This article is taken from Eckhard J. Schnabel and Stanley E. Porter, "Professor Grant R. Osborne", in *On the Writing of New Testament Commentaries: Festschrift for Grant R. Osborne on the Occasion of his 70th Birthday* (ed. Stanley E. Porter and Eckhard J. Schnabel; Boston, MA: Brill, 2013), xi-xviii. It is reproduced here with the copyright permission of Brill Publishers and is partially abridged.

²⁶ Grant R. Osborne, "Mind Control or Spirit-Controlled Minds?" in *Renewing Your Mind in a Secular World* (ed. John D. Woodbridge; Chicago: Moody Press, 1985), 55–70; Grant R. Osborne, "Devotions and the Spirit-Controlled Mind," in *Renewing Your Mind in a Secular World*, 95–114; Grant R. Osborne, "Soteriology in the Gospel of John," in *The Grace of God and the Will of Man* (ed. Clark Pinnock; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989), 243–60; Grant R. Osborne, "Women in Jesus' Ministry," *WTJ* 51 (1989): 259–91; Grant R. Osborne, "Theodicy in the Apocalypse," *TrinJ* 14 (1993): 63–77; Grant R. Osborne, "History and Theology in the Synoptic Gospels," *TrinJ* 24 (2003): 5–22.

²⁷ See in the List of Publications by Grant R. Osborne his contributions to the *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (1984, second edition 2001), *Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (1986, second edition, 1995), and the *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (1988).