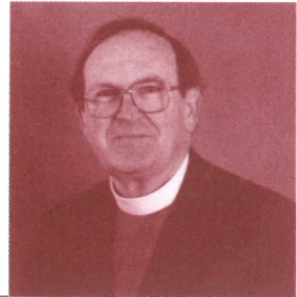


# RETIRING THOUGHTS

THE RT REVD JOHN TAYLOR



**IT IS NOW EIGHT YEARS SINCE I RECEIVED AN APPROACH FROM THE TRUSTEES OF THE BIBLE SOCIETY INVITING ME TO SERVE AS HONORARY PRESIDENT OF THE SOCIETY AND MY FIRST REACTION AT THE TIME WAS TO WONDER IF THEY NEEDED TO HAVE ONE AT ALL!** They had been soldiering on quite adequately for several years since losing Archbishop Stuart Blanch from that office, and I seriously wondered what the “added value” might be, especially of a retired bishop like myself. Neil Crosbie and Martin Robinson tried to convince me. In the end, the vision they gave me of the direction the Bible Society proved so attractive to me that, added value or no added value, I agreed to accept the honour and do what little I could to give my support.

Now, as I retire once again into obscurity, with the earnest hope that the trustees will not feel that they can manage without a President for several more years, I look back on my time with the Society as one of the many enriching experiences of my retirement. My eight years have coincided with the chairmanships of Douglas Scott and Clive Dilloway, and part of the leadership roles of Neil Crosbie and James Catford. My contribution has been minimal, as befits someone who is designated “Honorary”. I have received – and read – copious minutes. I have been consulted as to the best way to get on the right side of Deans and Diocesan Bishops. I have shown up briefly at the Annual General Meetings of the Trustees to ensure that the chairman is re-elected in a constitutional way. But my chief delight has been to spend a full day each year in wandering round the offices at Swindon (unescorted!), chatting to the staff who do such splendid work and who devote themselves not only to making the wheels turn but who also contribute their own ideas about how the work can go forward. They are the heroes and heroines of the operation and they see it less as a job and more as their calling in the service of God. Indeed, some of them regularly contribute to the work by fasting as well as by prayer, and I have found it a privilege to chat with them and get to know them as brothers and sisters in Christ.

You could describe a set-up like the Bible Society as one big communication factory, with its massive programme of biblical distribution, its constant efforts to influence both church and society with the teaching and wisdom of Holy Scripture and its widespread network of like-minded supporters who share its vision and give to its work. As someone who sets great store by the importance of communicating the Word of God in simple accessible terms, I never fail to be impressed by the Society’s genius for getting it right. The quality and clarity of its print output, from ephemeral flyers to

annual calendars, from its annual reporting to publications like *TransMission*, all testify to the significant attention that is given to producing good words, well-expressed ideas and visually challenging information. No mailing ever disappoints: it is usually in a class of its own.

*TransMission* is a case in point, and I have little doubt that this issue will maintain the standard. It is read, deservedly, by a large cross-section of clergy and ministers. It is variously affirming, challenging, enlightening and occasionally quite deliberately irritating. It is awash with new thoughts and serious research. It is designed to make us think – and in my, maybe partisan, view it is successful. So to end my eight-year term of office with this final envoi to its readers is a particular pleasure.

Those who are about to pass into oblivion are usually allowed the chance to say a few words to any who will listen to them, so let me take advantage of my privileged position. My wish for the Bible Society is threefold. The first is that it will never waver in its firm belief that the Holy Scriptures are the Word of God and not just the wise words of good men (which is as much as the average postmodernist would allow them to be). It follows that every effort must continue to be made to enable this Word to be available to all and sundry the whole world over. As God’s Word, it has a unique converting power. It will for ever be accompanied by the miraculous, in its life-transforming effect on lives and on communities. We need to believe this as an article of faith, and pray and act appropriately.

Secondly, we must not be content with distribution when there is no discernment. The task of making the Scriptures credible as well as available is one which occupies the mind of the whole Church, especially in the Western world. The Bible Society is uniquely placed to undertake this task, not on behalf of the churches, but in collaboration with the churches, for it is beyond the resources let alone the expertise of any one organization. So the combination of encouraging research, initiating hermeneutical projects, working with the academy, is one small way in which this task can be carried forward. Through its programme of partnerships (and how carefully they need to be selected!) and in collaboration with the best thinkers and the liveliest communicators, the Society needs to use its resources strategically to achieve this end, a goal which can never be reached but which must always be aimed at.

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► And thirdly, I long to see the impact of the Scriptures on Western society at every level, from the street to the stratosphere, from the Palace of Westminster to Albert Square, from the Tate Modern to the National Gallery, from primary schools to our professional institutes, from the *Sun* to the *Higher Education Supplement* of *The Times*. The good news is that the gospel has many friends scattered among these institutions, and they need to be cultivated and encouraged to see what they can do to help the cause of bringing the Bible to life and placing it not only by hospital or hotel beds, but in people's hearts where it can bring healing, direction and wholeness.

It is an impossibly difficult task, but not an impossible one. It is a never-ending task, but not completely daunting. The Bible Society has set its sights on these goals. May the coming years see a real measure of success. Hear us, good Lord! ■

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John B. Taylor". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath the name.

President of Bible Society

Our congratulations go to Ann Holt who has been awarded an OBE for services to education. Before joining Bible Society as Partnership and Development Executive, Ann was the director of Care for Education. A former teacher, she has written several books on school governance and frequently advises the government and local education authorities around the country.