In Memoriam: Paul S. Minear

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Abstract
Paul S. Minear was one of the pre-eminent American biblical scholars of the 20th century. He died just after his 101st birthday in February 2007. Minear retired as a professor in 1971 from Yale University Divinity School. He was a prolific author and a member of the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches; President of Studiorum Novi Testamenti Societas (1964-65); President of The American Theological Society (1965-66); and member of the committee that produced the New Revised Standard Version (1967-88). The summary of his life and commitments introduces his last article, written at the age of 100. It is followed by a comprehensive bibliography of his books and published articles compiled by Laura Sweat.

Keywords
Paul Minear, biblical interpretation

Paul Sevier Minear died at his home in Guilford, Connecticut, on 22 February 2007, five days after celebrating his 101st birthday. Then ended two lifetime dedications. One was his seventy-eight-year marriage to Gladys, who for their lifetime partnership received a Doctorate of Humane Letters (1997) from their alma mater, Iowa Wesleyan College. Minear’s death also drew to a close virtually seventy consecutive years as a publishing biblical scholar.1 His first article, “Current Issues in New Testament Studies” (1937), appeared in Garrett Tower (vol. 12: 1-6), a journal of his theological alma mater, Garrett Biblical Institute (now Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary). In the years that

1) A comprehensive bibliography of Minear’s published works has been compiled by Ms. Laura C. Sweat of Princeton Theological Seminary and is published elsewhere in this issue.

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“Two Secrets, Two Disclosures” is in some ways vintage Minear. Today’s scholar, wise in the ways of *Wissenschaft*, will be surprised, perhaps appalled, by the paucity of this article’s footnotes. This, however, was the man’s style, even in such weighty volumes as *Eyes of Faith* and

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2 Detailed appreciations of Minear’s career by two of his distinguished students at Andover-Newton Theological School, J. Louis Martyn and Leander E. Keck, stand as the Forewords to, respectively, *The Bible and the Historian* (2002) and *Images of the Church in the New Testament* (2004). It is altogether fitting that Minear dedicated the present article to Keck, Martyn, and Martyn’s wife Dorothy.
The Kingdom and the Power. Minear read practically everything, certainly anything worth reading, but was never enslaved to the custom of preening one’s erudition in tiny font. Of far greater consequence to him was demonstrating the internal theology of the biblical witness. Also characteristic of Minear is this essay’s seamless blending of literary and theological analysis. His prefatory identification in Matthew 11:25-30 of prayer, soliloquy, and promise, and the different audiences addressed by each, strike at the heart of the interpreter’s questions: How do these forms convey the comprehensive message of Jesus in Matthew? What purposes would they have served in the Evangelist’s community? For Minear, this segment of Matthew indicates “[d]ifferent mysteries…, yet one—a disclosure of historic and cosmic proportions.” That assertion chimes with its author’s lifelong exposition of the gospel as God’s alien, redemptive invasion of “three interlocking realms, which the cross has revealed to be one realm”: the realm of Jesus’ triumph over all adversarial powers; the realm of disciples who say “Yes” to the kingdom in which they have experienced new birth; the eschatological realm where Christ’s sovereignty assails all spiritual powers that yet bedevil this age. “Victory in any one of these realms carries with it a victory in all.”

The present article’s argument, however, rests not on its author’s antecedent conclusions: Of these six verses in Matthew, Minear in fact says little in his commentary on Matthew. In his centennial year this exegete had again returned to the biblical text, found himself grasped anew by its startling claims, and on that basis reconsidered the First Gospel in its entirety. The outcome, this article, was the latest of Minear’s exegetical “dispatches from the front”: an utterly original suggestion about the significance of a pericope too often dismissed as anomalous in Matthew: “the bolt from the Johannine blue.” As ever, Minear’s bequest to his students is not novelty for its own sake but the grace of a flexible fidelity: the capacity of the interpreter’s mind to be changed, radically and afresh, by the good news of God’s salvation to which all the biblical writers point.

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In the “Postlude” of his Death Set to Music: Masterworks by Bach, Brahms, Penderecki, Bernstein, Paul Minear made “One final point”:

[T]he more we restrict the term death to its lowest and most neutral common denominator, its meaning in medical terms, the less will we be moved to think or sing about it. Only when we begin to think with Shakespeare about the many deaths created by fear or with the Bible about the many kinds of dying or about our daily little deaths, will we be inclined to turn “passion into sound” and “sound into passion.” The more profound the passion, the more convincing the sound. 5

The richness of Paul Minear’s life and work reminds us that the more profound the passion, the more capacious our vision of horizons in biblical theology.

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