EDITORIAL

As editor, I am indebted to Dr. F. F. Bruce for the opportunity of sharing with our readers the challenge he presented at our 25th meeting concerning "The Future of Evangelical New Testament Scholarship." May his words stimulate our consistency to more intensive research. S.J.S.

Evangelical New Testament scholarship has a wide open door before it today because evangelical Christians, almost by definition, are the people who preeminently continue to regard the New Testament as the norm of Christian faith and life in the contemporary world, and are therefore predisposed to give high priority to the investigation of its problems. It is a fact of experience that in biblical and theological research, as elsewhere, evangelical scholars can and do hold their own on equal terms with scholars of other traditions; and there is no reason why we who are called evangelicals should not in the coming generation make the major contribution to New Testament studies. We must, of course, be prepared to devote the patient and critical attention to detail for which these studies call. But in a number of vital respects this attention to detail already marks evangelical scholarship.

For example, because of our insistence on the authority of the New Testament text, we continue (unlike many others) to attach great importance to the mastery of Greek, and not only of New Testament Greek (if indeed such a thing exists), for what do they know of Greek who know only the Greek of the New Testament? Again, because of our concern to recover as far as possible the text "as originally given," we attach great importance to the minutiae of textual criticism. Moreover, because of our emphasis on the historicity of our faith, we attach great importance to the study of the historical background and content of the New Testament writings. And we attach specially great importance to accurate exegesis, without which Christian theology is like a house without foundations. We attach importance, that is to say, to areas of knowledge which involve more objective criteria than current fashions of philosophical thought or the climate of present-day opinion; and if, in due course, some speculation is called for, speculation is more likely to be fruitful and lasting in its results if it proceeds from a factual base.

I can think of three gaps in our evidence to which evangelicals might well pay attention in hope of making positive contributons to New Testament scholarship.

1) There is the gap between the historical Jesus and the apostolic

witness. This gap is neither so broad nor so deep as many suppose, and its closure is not at all impossible. Its closure depends partly on demonstrating the crucial relevance of the historical Jesus to the gospel and partly on establishing his continuity and identity with the risen Lord of the church's faith. Not only must we (in Dennis Nineham's words) "wring truth relevant to the history of Jesus from the increasing stock of remains of the Judaism of his time" but we must also pursue our examination of the internal evidence of the New Testament sources, whether written or oral, the more intensively (cf. D. E. Nineham, "Eye-witness Testimony and the Gospel Tradition," *JTS*, new series 11, 1960, p. 260). And if, in the process, something can be done to kill once for all the idea that Paul's depreciation of a knowledge of Christ "after the flesh" (2 Cor. 5:16) means the depreciation of an interest in the historical Jesus, a great step forward will be taken.

2) There is, again, the gap between the end of Paul's recorded ministry and the works of the earliest apostolic fathers. The New Testament itself provides evidence of a reaction against Paul when he was withdrawn from circulation: we think of the landslide away from his teaching in proconsular Asia (2 Tim. 1:15), recently the scene of his most intensive missionary activity (Acts 19:10). What caused this, and how was the situation retrieved? Had the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 anything to do with it? Could one of us write a counterpart to S.G.F. Brandon's *The Fall of Jerusalem and the Christian Church* (London: SPCK, 1951), evaluating the same evidence but, with no less scholarship, giving a more convincing interpretation of it? Did the ministry of "John the disciple of the Lord" in proconsular Asia do something towards the re-establishment of an understanding of the gospel in essential harmony with Paul's? Can more be done to determine a fairly precise life-setting for the Johannine writings and the other later, non-Pauline documents of the New Testament?

3) There is, lastly, the gap between the composition and circulation of the individual New Testament documents in the first century and the earliest approaches to the delimitation of the New Testament canon in the second century. So long as this gap remains, the temptation is strong to fill it with conjecture. For example, Morton Smith has recently described the New Testament canon as "a partizan collection, made to present and support the views of that party which became dominant within the Church in the late second century and finally triumphed in the third" (cf. M. Smith, *Clement of Alexandria and a Secret Gospel of Mark* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973, p. 252) adding that this has been "shown" to be so by Walter Bauer (cf. W. Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity,* E.T. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971). Is this a just description? Or does the New Testament collection present a fair picture of the unity and diversity of the Christian movement from the beginning of our Lord's ministry to the end of the apostolic age? How do we evaluate in this regard the abundant second-century Gnostic literature now at our disposal? The more we can fill the gap with rationally ascertained fact, the less room will it provide for uncontrolled fancy