

Leon Morris Funeral Oration

Over ninety years of life in five minutes of reminiscence! All I can give you is a series of glimpses, a cameo of snap-shots. You must supply the picture in your own mind's eye

Leon in a small car driven by Mildred in outback South Australia. He is an itinerant minister of the Bush Church Aid Society. But he is also preparing for a life-time of scholarship. He is reading his theological texts. He has a Bachelor of Science degree from Sydney. He is to get a Bachelor of Divinity degree from London, and follow that up to become a Master of Theology. He will soon be Vice-Principal of Ridley College. He remained always valiant for truth.

Leon in a Lecture-room of the old Arts building at the University of Melbourne. He is giving one of the weekly Bible Studies of the Melbourne University Evangelical Union that nourished a generation of students in the Word of God. Here amongst other things they will hear the beginning of his research into the nature of the atonement, central to the Person and Work of Christ. These lectures are given not without whimsy. On the evidences for the resurrection, at 1 Corinthians 15.6: "he appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time." the comment came "Five hundred Brethren can't be wrong!"

Leon visiting his solicitor friend Harold McCracken. Stuart Barton Babbage was now Principal of Ridley College and Leon his right hand. But Stuart was not allowed to teach Church History because an agreement with the Bishops of Victoria was being used by the Bishops to prevent it. Leon procured an opinion that the bishops were party to an offence under the Companies Act. They retreated and Stuart took the subject in which he was highly qualified. It was the beginning of new life for Ridley College.

Leon in Cambridge. Intersociety Fellowship, the Anglican Evangelical Trust, and others provided a scholarship for Leon to undertake doctoral studies, under Newton Flew. Having acquired his doctorate, part of which appeared in journal articles, his first major work *The Apostolic preaching of the Cross* was published in 1955. He crossed swords with C. H. Dodd, who sitting next to him at a dinner spoke exclusively to the guest on the other side. By this stage Frank Andersen was at Ridley College. Leon became Warden of Tyndale House Cambridge.

Leon in Coburg. Leon and Mildred bought their first home at 25 Goleen street North Coburg. I became his attorney in 1959 and looked after this small property for him while he was overseas. Years later, on his ninetieth birthday, searching for a subject that may bring recollection to a mind already laid waste by Alzheimer's disease. I mentioned 25 Goleen street. I struck a chord. His eyes fixed on me. The look was quizzical. But the chord faded.

Leon in his Library. First of all it was in his study at Ridley College, when he became Principal. Not all of it, because he was addicted to the novels of Agatha Christie and her ilk, and they were elsewhere. On his retirement a large house on a double block at East Doncaster was required to accommodate it. It was a working library, reflecting the particular book of the New Testament on which he was writing a commentary from time to time. It is fitting that his books went to the Library named for him at Ridley College.

Leon outside the Anglican Church. He identified with many interdenominational organizations such as The Inter-Varsity Fellowship, The Tyndale Fellowship, The Scripture Union, The Overseas Missionary Fellowship, The Evangelical Alliance, Tear Fund, and The Overseas Council, to mention only those in which my path crossed his. After the disruption in the Presbyterian Church in 1974 he lectured students of the Presbyterian Theological Hall continuing. He was a good friend of theologians such as Klaas Runia, Herman Sasse and Robert Swanton. Leon was General Editor of the *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*.

Leon's mannerisms and eccentricities. I mention several. At a dinner table, if there was a lull in the conversation, particularly if Leon had just scored a bull's eye with some deft aside, a gentle humming could often be heard, a sort of *sotto voce* cry of triumph. Sitting in a chair with his legs crossed, one leg never stopped moving: it actually became A Restless Leg Syndrome. He enjoyed gardening on his large allotment. Although in the United States he often drove a yank tank, he did not drive in Victoria: if you wanted him to address a meeting you provided the transport! As one who worked on the New International Version of the Bible, he persuaded a translation team to use the Australian word boomerang as a verb to translate a Greek verb. He won the first round but was knocked out on appeal because the English dictionary did not yet show that the noun boomerang had become a verb. It had been used in Australia as a verb since 1891.

Leon and Mildred. They had no children of their own. Mildred was a mother in Israel to scores of students who passed through Ridley College. She feared that she would not survive Leon, as she did not. She wanted to see him settled in a caring environment. This he not altogether wanted to do. But she had her way. Several times as a result of the Sun-down Syndrome Leon escaped from custody, and even with his diminished understanding made his way back to Ridley College or East Doncaster. He was returned dishevelled to her care.

The union of Leon and Mildred is perpetuated in The Leon and Mildred Morris Foundation Limited. It is a charitable body with purposes that closely identify with their life work. It was Mildred's selflessness that enabled Leon, long into retirement, to work at his desk by day and by night. It made life lonely for her, but she was happy that he was about the Lord's business. An Australian author of fiction with a large print run will be noticed in the secular press. Leon's books number over 50; the print runs are huge, an amazing thing for books of academic and theological content. With the royalties that flowed in, Leon and Mildred invested astutely. Their foundation has an endowment of five or six million dollars.

With such vignettes as these we say goodbye to Leon. We all have our reminiscences and I am grateful that I was asked to tell mine. We do not weep for him. We do not need to weep for his family. We only rejoice that he is in the presence of the Lord of Glory and that his words and works continue here by the grace of God.

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