
Introduction

The Career and Contribution of Paul Livermore

————— DOUGLAS R. CULLUM AND J. RICHARD MIDDLETON

THIS VOLUME CELEBRATES THE life and ministry of Professor Paul W. Livermore. Its pages are written by friends, colleagues, and former students in recognition of Professor Livermore's many contributions to the church and academy. The chapters to follow represent the broad trajectory of influence that Professor Livermore has had on our lives and in the honing of our own varied practices of scholarship on behalf of the church. They testify to Livermore's commitment both to an ecumenical orthodoxy and to an orthopraxis that embodies faithfulness to Christ.

Professor Livermore's long tenure at Roberts Wesleyan College and Northeastern Seminary was unflinchingly tied to twin commitments that characterized the whole of his vocation: He was and is a pastoral theologian, a scholar on behalf of the church. In the church, he consistently served as a *resident theologian*. In the academy, he faithfully serves as a *churchly scholar*. These two pillars of Livermore's identity and calling encapsulate the unique, enduring, and extraordinary contribution he made throughout his career.

Livermore's career, of course, would not have been possible without Alice—a name that every one of Paul's students over the years has heard many times. Paul and Alice first saw each other in Mound Valley, Kansas, when Paul's father, the Rev. Dr. Harry Livermore, took the family with him on one of his visits as a Free Methodist conference superintendent to the church where Alice's family worshiped. Paul and Alice were three years old. A decade later, Alice's family moved to McPherson, Kansas, and Central College, where Paul and Alice met again. They were married seven years later at the tender age of twenty.

In 1966, Paul received his bachelor's degree from Greenville College (a Free Methodist College in Greenville, Illinois) with a double major in two double fields of study: History and Political Science; and Religion and Philosophy—a true liberal arts education! While at Greenville, Paul and Alice pastored Zion Free Methodist Church in

INTRODUCTION

Durley, Illinois (1964–66). Also, in 1966, their oldest child Geoff was born, and Paul was ordained deacon in the Kansas Conference of the Free Methodist Church.

From 1966 to 1969, Paul and Alice were in Wilmore, Kentucky, where Paul pursued his MDiv degree at Asbury Seminary. Their pastoral ministry continued as Paul and Alice pastored the New Columbus Methodist Church in New Columbus, Kentucky, during seminary days (1967–69). After seminary, the Livermores moved to the Central Illinois Conference where they pastored at Aldersgate Free Methodist Church, in McComb, Illinois (1969–72). Their daughter Alicia was born there. And Paul was ordained as an elder in the Central Illinois Conference in 1970.

From 1972–1976, Paul and Alice were at Princeton where Paul would earn both the ThM and PhD degrees. During these years, their pastoral engagement continued as they served a two-point United Methodist circuit in Broadway and Montana, New Jersey (1972–75).

Paul's doctoral program at Princeton involved the study of Second Temple Judaism and the dialogue between early Christianity and Judaism. While working on his PhD, Paul served as a graduate assistant to Bruce Metzger, well known for his text-critical work on the New Testament.

In 1976, Paul was invited to join the faculty of Roberts Wesleyan College, where he served initially for five years, as well as serving 1980 to 1981 as interim pastor at Buchanan Park Free Methodist Church, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada. In 1981, Paul and Alice responded to the call to serve the Ransomville Free Methodist Church, where they served for four years until returning to Roberts Wesleyan College in 1985. Paul returned to the faculty as the George L. Skinner Professor of Religion.

Professor Livermore's career at Roberts Wesleyan College was stellar. It included his nearly decade-long tenure as chair of the Division of Religion and Humanities (1990–99) and consistent involvement in the articulation of the mission and vision of the College for the late-twentieth century. At the same time, Paul's commitment to serve as a scholar on behalf of the church continued unabated. Over the years, his academic endeavors were applied to the needs of the church through service on the Genesee Conference Commission on Ministry (1978–1989), the Board of Ministerial Education and Guidance (1978–1998), the Study Commission on Doctrine of the Free Methodist Church USA (1979–2015), delegate to the General Conference (1985, 1989, and 1999), and council member at the Seventh World Methodist Conference in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (1996). In addition, Dr. Livermore served as interim pastor, pulpit supply, and member of the adult curriculum committee for the denomination.

Professor Livermore's role in the founding of Northeastern Seminary at Roberts Wesleyan College cannot be understated. It was his vision and passion for theological education that launched the generative conversations that resulted in the birth of a new institution. Livermore's seminal insight was then matched with founding Dean Dr. Wayne McCown's administrative skill and the support leadership of and President Dr. William Crothers and Provost Dr. John Martin. It was an incomparable

combination. Apart from Dr. Livermore's vision and prophetic imagination it is unlikely that Northeastern Seminary would exist today.

Professor Livermore's scholarly contributions in the classroom and in writing have made their mark. Although he started out teaching primarily biblical studies, his expertise has expanded to include patristic Christianity and the theology of John Wesley. In his capacity as a member of the Study Commission on Doctrine of the Free Methodist Church., he authored *Foundations of a Living Faith: The Catechism of the Free Methodist Church* and the first of a two-volume systematic theology, *The God of Our Salvation* (1995). He has also authored journal articles and book chapters on the New Testament, early Judaism, patristic Christianity, and John Wesley.

Livermore continues to work on a fresh, systematic re-formation of the Christian message for the twenty-first century. The need for his work amid the rapidly changing context of evangelicalism in North America cannot be overstated. His deep grasp of both Scripture and the development of Christian theology gives his work a depth of perspective that is often lacking in our day. His work provides a breathtaking, balanced response to the often shrill and un-nuanced pronouncements of those theologies that lie at either end of the theological spectrum.

While Livermore's work is deeply rooted in both Scripture and the historical church, the reader immediately recognizes that she or he will not be expected to "check one's brains at the door," ignoring the insights of the best of scientific study in order to track with Livermore's treatment of a vibrant Christian faith. Professor Livermore's ongoing research seeks to take seriously the insights and implications of science—whether evolutionary biology or neuroplasticity—for theology and the Christian life. His work is precisely the sort of theology that many young evangelicals are yearning for, but too often find unavailable in today's polarized church and commercialized culture.

The Essays in This Volume

The essays in this volume testify to the various areas of scholarship with which Paul Livermore has been engaged throughout his career.

Part 1 contains eleven chapters on Scripture and its interpretation, beginning with six specifically on the Old Testament. Whereas Joseph Coleson digs beneath "covenant" to find its basis in God's love and faithfulness, Karen Winslow offers a veritable history of early Jewish interpretation of the binding of Isaac (Genesis 22), and Frank Spina dares to read Joshua positively as Christian Scripture. J. Richard Middleton explores a missional, yet non-supersessionist, interpretation of the call of Abraham, Louis Stulman reads the Hebrew Bible as literature of trauma and resistance, and T. L. Birge suggests that Jeremiah helps us understand how false worship leads to injustice in human relations.

INTRODUCTION

The next chapter addresses the Apocrypha, followed by four chapters on the New Testament. Eugene Lemcio proposes an eschatological reading of the addition to Daniel found in *Bel et Draco* (Bel and the Dragon), while Margaret Flowers defends Paul's use of the botanical metaphor of the olive tree in Romans 11 against its detractors in the commentary tradition, and Timothy Dwyer explores Jerome's understanding of a crucial Pauline phrase in Galatians 3. Finally, Wayne McCown and James Sweeney discuss aspects of the interpretation of the letter to the Hebrews—its function as a pastoral letter (McCown) and its complex literary structure (Sweeney).

Part 2 contains eleven chapters that mine the history of the church for theological and ethical insights. Douglas Cullum examines the extensive reading program of B. T. Roberts, the founder of the Free Methodist Church, after whom Roberts Wesleyan College is named, while Rebecca Letterman explores the role of the body in the ascetic practices of the early medieval text, *The Ladder of Ascent*, and Linda Schwab turns to Athanasius, the fourth-century bishop of Alexandria, for his profound understanding of the place of humanity in a complex cosmos held together by the divine *Logos*. Elizabeth Gerhardt examines the significance of Medieval and Reformation poor relief for the church today, while John Miller draws parallels between spiritual direction in early Eastern Orthodoxy and twentieth-century Pentecostalism, and David Belles proposes John Wesley's appeal to *theosis* in the Eastern Fathers as a model of contextualization. Next, Suzanne Pearson draws on the Church Fathers for insights about aging in the light of Christ, while Mark McMonagle explores the meaning of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil among the Eastern Fathers, and James McNutt critiques the myth of Jewish legalism perpetuated by the influential biblical scholar Adolf Schlatter.

Part 3 contains six chapters that range beyond biblical interpretation (Part 1) and church history (Part 2). Philosopher David Basinger analyzes the phenomenon of significant disagreement in biblical interpretation among Christians, Jeffery Altman applies insights from cognitive and developmental psychology to the transformation of the person enjoined in Romans 12:2, and pastor-poet Thomas Worth explores the place of literary imagination in pastoral ministry. Joel Hunt turns his expertise in ancient Near Eastern languages and literature to the interpretation of an ancient Mesopotamian prayer, and Donald Bastian reflects on the continuing role of pastoral visitation in the church today.

These essays, from a wide variety of disciplines and perspectives, testify to the wide and diverse impact of Paul Livermore on his colleagues, friends, and students. They are offered with deep appreciation and admiration for his outstanding life and ministry.