

Introduction

With this specially prepared volume of *ARC, The Journal of the Faculty of Religious Studies, McGill University*, we celebrate, on the occasion of his retirement as Professor of New Testament, the person, scholarship, and committed teaching of Frederik Wisse. A highly respected and important scholar in New Testament textual research, Professor Wisse generously shared his time, insights, and gifts with colleagues and students in the Faculty of Religious Studies at McGill University for over twenty years. This volume, prepared as a tribute to him, includes contributions which reflect the much larger circles of scholarship in which his influence is gratefully acknowledged. They touch upon his areas of expertise in New Testament textual criticism and research methodologies, ethics, theology, and Gnosticism and Nag Hammadi studies. In addition they witness to his many international contacts spanning a career of nearly four decades in Grand Rapids, Claremont, Tübingen, Münster, Hamilton and Montreal.

A volume such as this is often called a *Mélanges* in French, while Germans refer to it as a *Festschrift*. The German term *Festschrift* stresses the happy and festive circumstances which bring such a publication into print, while the French name emphasizes the variety, even incongruity, which gives any collection of essays its interest. This issue of *ARC* is both a *Festschrift* and a *Mélanges*. Indeed, the broad assortment of topics covered herein attest to Professor Wisse's varied interests, including, in addition to the areas mentioned above, Coptic literature, homiletics, Presbyterian history and theology, and the more general area of early Christian history and literature (not to mention a non-scholarly interest in gardening). In sum, the eclecticism of this volume mirrors the dynamic career of our honoured himself, Fred Wisse.

Given Professor Wisse's long and distinguished career at McGill, it seemed right that the Faculty's own journal should coordinate this volume in tandem with a representative sample of his friends and admirers. The project was publicly announced at a special dinner held in Professor Wisse's honour on the fourth of May in the year 2004 in the Birks building, where the Religious Studies faculty has its home. It began as a surprise gift for his sixty-fifth birthday, which has since come and gone. Although he has now retired from teaching at McGill,

he continues with his work, both in research and in actively supervising graduate students.*

Frederik Wisse was born on October 22, 1938 in the city of Breukelen in the Netherlands (mother-city of a more famous Brooklyn). Early in life he demonstrated an aptitude for mathematics and technical analysis that would carry over into his career in Biblical studies. As a young man he trained to be a civil engineer, earning an H.T.S. degree with the Engineering College of Utrecht in the Netherlands. He then moved to the United States to study at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan. He obtained a B.A. in Classics in 1962 and, three years later, completed a Bachelor of Divinity degree at Calvin Theological Seminary.

In 1965 Wisse began his graduate studies at Claremont Graduate School of Theology in California, well known for its highly technical work in the area of Biblical textual criticism. During the summer of 1966 Wisse volunteered for the International Greek New Testament Project under the supervision of Ernest Cadman Colwell, a prominent scholar of Jesus and the Gospels and author of the influential *Studies in Methodology in Textual Criticism of the New Testament*. During his work on the project Wisse received expert advice and criticism from Colwell, who was his academic advisor, as well as other Biblical scholars such as James Robinson, Eldon Epp, and Ernest Tune.

Wisse contributed to the IGNTF by selecting test readings and by studying, profiling, and classifying hundreds of manuscripts. These efforts led to his Ph.D. dissertation, completed in the Spring of 1968 and entitled *The Profile Method for the Classification and Evaluation of Manuscript Evidence as Applied to the Continuous Greek Text of the Gospel of Luke*. Wisse describes his work at the IGNTF, as well as his collaboration with fellow graduate student Paul R. McReynolds, in the introduction to the published version of his dissertation (Eerdmans, 1982).

After completing his doctoral work Wisse developed contacts in the scholarly communities of both Europe and North America. He began his professional career in 1968 with a one year post-doctoral fellowship at the University of Münster in Germany. Between 1969 and 1972 he served as an assistant professor at Yale Divinity School in New Haven, Connecticut. He returned to Germany in 1972 and,

* The following biographical sketch is largely provided by Michael Pettem, clerk of the Presbytery of Montreal, PCIC, former student and long-time colleague of Professor Wisse.

for the next four years, worked as a research associate with teaching responsibilities at the University of Tübingen. From 1976 to 1978 he taught religion at Emmeloord in the Netherlands. In the autumn of 1978 he accepted a position as a research associate at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario, where he remained for two years.

Wisse joined the Faculty of Religious Studies at McGill in 1980, serving as an associate professor of early Christian history and literature until 1988. His colleagues in the Faculty of Religious Studies during this time included distinguished scholars such as N.T. Wright, who is today the Bishop of Durham in the Anglican Church. Wisse continued as a full professor at McGill from 1989 until his retirement in 2004. Throughout these years he was also a dedicated faculty member (and sometime Acting Principal) of The Presbyterian College, Montreal. Mention should also be made of the fellowship awards he received for his scholarship at McGill and the numerous graduate students, undergraduates, and seminarians whose careers he influenced.

The impact of Wisse's scholarship can be appreciated by looking at his many contributions to several overlapping but not always communicating fields: New Testament exegesis and textual criticism, early Christian history, papyrology, and Coptic and Gnostic studies. He established a highly respected reputation with groundbreaking work in Gnostic studies in the 1970s. With Michael Waldstein and Alexander Boehlig he co-authored books in the area of Nag Hammadi studies, and, with Tito Orlandi, he co-edited *The Acts of the Second International Congress of Coptic Studies*. In addition, essays and scholarly papers authored by Wisse appear in over twenty different books in the field of New Testament studies, as well as journals such as the *Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists*, *The Journal of Biblical Literature* and *New Testament Studies*.

Wisse has also enriched the scholarly community in his capacity as supervisor and mentor to generations of doctorands presently serving in lecture halls and pulpits across North America, the authors of a family of dissertations that often challenged received methodologies in New Testament studies and early Christian history. Past students recall that Wisse avoided over-theologizing approaches to the study of early Christianity. He espoused 'correct practice' rather than 'correct doctrine' as a more appropriate descriptive term for the early stages of Christianity, 'orthopraxis' rather than 'orthodoxy'.

A rather different audience will be aware of another, complementary side of Wisse's scholarly vocation—that of author, deliverer, and occasional publisher of sermons that model the integration of faith, wit and learning. We are proud that the studies by friends, students and colleagues which make up this *Mélanges* reflect the diversity of Fred Wisse's own scholarship, as well as the range of his influence. Nearly all were written especially for this occasion and are here published for the first time.

This volume is arranged into three broadly thematic sections. The first section features articles dealing with early Christian history and literature. In particular these papers represent the work of experts in the fields of Gnosticism and Nag Hammadi studies and Coptic studies. Section two presents papers on various aspects of the canonical New Testament: Biblical rhetoric, historical details relating to the Gospels and the Pauline letters, and links between the New Testament and the Old Testament. The third section includes papers on theology and the philosophy of religion. Here the reader will find essays on religious ethics, homiletics, systematic theology, Church history, and hermeneutics. In a fitting conclusion, Michael Gilmour catalogues Professor Wisse's scholarly contributions.

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Warren Kappeler
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