

In Gratitude for My Diamond Jubilee

The time of my Diamond Jubilee raises questions I need to answer. Why has God given me such a long life, why seventy-five years as a religious? I think of my Uncle Harold, who died at age sixteen in a lake-shore swimming death; we thought it was a drowning, but he might have had a heart attack. I ask, "Dear God, what have I given you (or anyone?) in return for so full a life?"

I now give you, Lord, an account of what I have done in your service because my life in choir is as much your gift to me as it is worship to you, as noted in the Canon of the Mass.

There was nothing intellectual in my background. My parents encouraged me to study, though they were largely unschooled. So, my education is a great gift. Despite not being promoted in first grade, progress came later. Avondale Grammar School, in Chicago, was well run, and Lane Technical School provided good schooling, though it was chosen by my parents so I could learn a trade, their having no hope I would win a college scholarship. In fact, I did competitively gain a call to be an Army Air Corps cadet, which led to solid learning in many areas normally covered in college, and that was followed by several months of study at George Peabody College in Nashville, Tennessee. Between leaving military service and coming to the St Anselm's, I had one semester at DePaul University, Chicago, with heavy concentration on Latin to refresh my year and a half of Latin at Lane (taken because I had already begun thinking about becoming a priest).

My serious education, aside from monasticism, continued at The Catholic University of America, which I began during my postulancy and continued after the novitiate to acquiring a BA. This education was funded by the GI Bill of Rights, which continued to pay for my tuition and sustenance through my studies in Rome and back at CUA. Shortly after solemn profession, I was sent to the Benedictine athenaeum Sant'Anselmo in Rome. This was a blessing because incorporation into an international student body under an international faculty was a blessed, mind-opening experience. I studied for four years of dogma under Cyprian Vagaggini, who later became a darling of the Fathers of Vatican II, and Augustine Meier, who later became Cardinal Pro-Prefect of the Congregation of the Sacraments. The curriculum at Sant'Anselmo required learning Hebrew, which opened to me the riches of the Old Testament and earned the degree of STL.

Returning to St Anselm's, I began teaching in our school, in which I continued for ten years; I also continued advanced studies in the Semitics Department at CUA, under Patrick Skehan, Louis Hartman, and others. After my one year of those studies, our Fr Gregory Stevens conceived the idea of having our own seminary. We had four younger monks ready to begin priestly studies, and other monks with advanced degrees who

could teach requisite courses. So, rather than sending them to Catholic University, we began teaching them ourselves. Fr Gregory asked me to teach Scripture, for which I am eternally grateful. Teaching Scripture forced me to learn it more thoroughly than I would have otherwise. We continued running the seminary for nine years; our students' examinations went to the EBC Master of Studies in England for quality control.

Patrick Skehan recommended me to Gerard Sloyan for an empty teaching slot in his Department of Religion and Religious Education, for which I was already well prepared. Father Sloyan recommended me to Allyn and Bacon, which was beginning to publish a series of college textbooks. In response to their invitation, I produced *God's Word to Israel* (1968), which continues, in various editions, to the present. My teaching at CUA began with undergraduates and continued through graduate classes and doctoral seminars until 2018. In the meantime, because Rome required those who taught Scripture in seminaries to have a degree in Scripture from the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome, I took a year's leave of absence. Having made an agreement with the PBI to go through the SSL in one year (because of my many graduate credits at CUA), I went there in the fall of 1967. To be remembered especially were Dr Alonso Schokel and Cardinal Albert Vanhoye, rector of the PBI. Under the former I took a seminar in Wisdom literature and did a paper which prepared for my dissertation at CUA. Back at Catholic University, because of my many graduate credits I needed only my dissertation to obtain my PhD. Patrick Skehan directed my dissertation, "Tora in Isaiah and His Debate with the Wisdom Tradition," which was later published in the Catholic Biblical Quarterly's monograph series. With all this as background, I feel God was preparing me for a new field of apostolic work.

In 1970 I was elected executive secretary of the Catholic Biblical Association and was reelected each year through 2012. In this position I suggested and worked to launch *Old Testament Abstracts*, a magazine which involved seeking and obtaining a government grant to support its publication for years until expenses were covered by subscriptions. This was also made possible through the labor and ingenuity of Bruce Vawter, its first editor. My position as executive secretary also entailed involvement with ultra-conservatives who objected to the historical-critical approach to biblical studies. This often took the form of attacks in print against excellent scholars, most especially Raymond E. Brown, accusing him of Modernism. In response, we appealed to the bishops for help, which led them to encourage the formation of the Council of Societies for the Study of Religion, of which I was treasurer (1970-78) and vice-chair (1992-94).

It must be candidly admitted that Catholic Biblical scholarship lagged for long, partly because of opposition

to modern historico-critical methods, even after Pope Pius XII's excellent encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu* (1943). In those days the Bible was often translated from the Latin Vulgate instead of from original languages. The Bishops of the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine set up a committee, largely owing to the efforts of Bishop Edwin O'Hara, which produced a New American Bible in 1970. But, as pointed out in its preface, "New translations and revisions of existing translations are required from time to time for various reasons," which were then explained in great detail. The CCD, having determined that the Psalter of this Bible needed to be revised, named a committee of six scholars, including myself, to do this work. At our first meeting I was chosen as chair. That work was completed and approved in 1991. Some years later it was decided to undertake a revision of the rest of the Old Testament. Ten scholars were chosen to be a board of editors. Again, I was asked to chair the group. The procedures were much more complex, requiring more steps, and bishops were more closely involved in final approval (1994-2012).

Also, during my tenure as CBA executive secretary, I was largely responsible for our finances. With the help of new arrangements with the CCD for royalties on the NAB, which now was selling very well, the CBA portfolio went from a few thousand dollars in scattered bank accounts to millions with investment companies. This prosperity allowed us to provide scholarships and research grants to our members, fund archaeology digs, give 15% of our income to famine relief (through the Catholic Relief Society), and support visiting professorships to the PBI and the Ecole Biblique. We distributed free Bibles, personally signed by me, to prisoners. This often led to correspondence and counseling with them. I was striving to live according to your word in your Bible, dear Lord, concerning the least of your brethren, the prisoners.

Once our monastic community had decided to adopt the Revised NAB Psalter for our Divine Office, books

Books

God's Word to Israel. Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1968. Revised editions, Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1982, 1986.

The Use of tôrâ by Isaiah: His Debate with Wisdom Tradition. CBQMS 3; Washington, DC: The Catholic Biblical Association, 1973.

Isaiah 1-39; Old Testament Message 8. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1984.

Ethical Dimensions of the Prophets. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2006.

God's Word to Israel. New and Augmented Edition. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2021.

were needed to replace those we had been using, so I made new books from scratch: first for the morning office (a four-year cycle, with supplementary sections for Advent, Christmas, Lent, and Paschaltide); individual booklets for each saint; other booklets for commons of monks, martyrs, etc. and for the Sundays of Advent and the other liturgical seasons—enough for all the monks plus extras (thousands of booklets all told).

My work for the abbey included serving as the prior under Abbots Alban Boulwood, James Wiseman, and Apostolic Appointee Leonard Vickers, teaching Scripture to postulants and novices, and holding Bible classes for oblates and other adults. This was both before my stint in Rome and afterwards.

Dear Lord, I pray that my teaching in so many classes and apostolic works has helped to spread and illumine your holy word. I pray also that my written words in books and articles, listed as follows, will do the same thing.



I rejoice at the approval of your vicar expressed in the bestowal of the Papal Benemerenti Medal, 1983, and pray it reflects your approval, also.

JOSEPH JENSEN, OSB

Articles

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"The Age of Immanuel," *CBQ* 41 (1979) 220-39.

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"Human Sexuality in the Scriptures," in *Human Sexuality and Personhood: Proceedings of the Workshop for the Hierarchies of the United States and Canada, Dallas, Texas, February 1981*, 15-35. St. Louis: Pope John Center, 1981.

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"Mount Zion and Armageddon: A Tale of Two Eschatologies," in *Sin, Salvation, and the Spirit: What Are They Saying about Armageddon? Currents in Theology and Mission* 13 (1986) 292-301.

"Prediction-Fulfillment in Bible and Liturgy," *CBQ* 50 (1988) 646-62.

"Eighth-Century Prophets and Apodictic Law," in *To Touch the Text: Biblical and Related Studies in Honor of Joseph A. Fitzmeyer, S.J.* (ed. Maurya Horgan and Paul Kobelski), 103-17. New York: Crossroad, 1989.

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