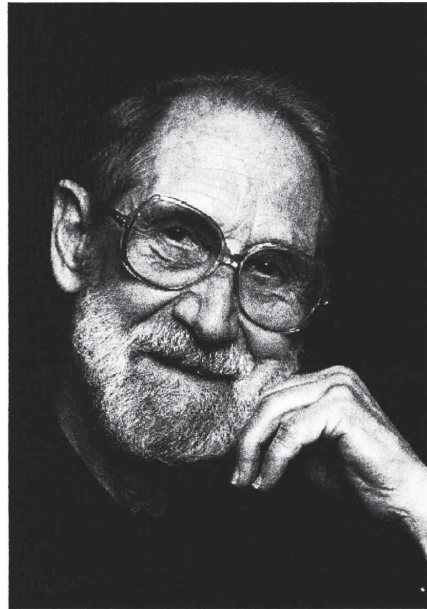


Joseph Jensen, O.S.B.:
A Tribute on the Occasion of His
Retirement as Executive Secretary
of the Catholic Biblical Association

Good evening, my CBA colleagues, and most especially Joseph Jensen: *Laetatus sum*, I rejoiced when they said to me (cf. Ps 122:1), or more precisely when our president asked me, if I would speak in appreciation of Joseph Jensen on this occasion of your retirement as Executive Secretary of the CBA. I am honored to offer these words as a token of the CBA's high esteem for you and of our deepest gratitude to you.¹ I also add warm congratulations from Abbot James and your brother Benedictines at Saint Anselm's Abbey.



Born on November 22, 1924, in Mannheim, Illinois, Norman Jensen graduated from Lane Tech High School in Chicago. He joined the Army Air Corps in January 1943 at the ripe age of nineteen years and was commissioned second lieutenant in May 1945. Little more than a year later, Joe entered Saint Anselm's Abbey in July 1946; he professed first vows on February 10, 1948, the feast of Saint Scholastica, and he was ordained on August 15, 1954, the feast of the Assumption.

University studies had Joe commuting between Washington and Rome through the 1950s and 1960s. He received his B.A. from Catholic University in 1951; then off for four years for the S.T.L. in 1951–1955 from Collegio di Saint' Anselmo, the beautiful Benedictine monastery overlooking the Tiber River; back to Catholic University for studies in Scripture and Semitics in 1957–1959 and 1961–1963; back again to Rome for the S.S.L. from the Pontifical Biblical Institute in 1967–1968 (not counting two months spent in Jerusalem mostly at the Dormition Abbey²); and finally returning home to Washington, receiving the S.T.D. from Catholic University in 1971, under the direction of Monsignor

¹ The following details draw on Joseph Jensen's *curriculum vitae* and his essay, "My Fifty Years at Catholic University," *The Newsletter of St. Anselm's Abbey* (Advent 2011) 15-18; and Frank J. Matera, "Joseph Jensen, O.S.B.: A Tribute to His Life and Work on the Occasion of His Eightieth Birthday," *CBQ* 66 (2004) 513-18. I have also been aided by Maria Nazarczuk and Violet Halton, whom I wish to thank not only for their help on information for this piece but also for their long and loyal service to the CBA.

² Jensen, "My Fifty Years," 16.

Patrick Skehan (1909–1980). As many of you know, Monsignor Skehan was arguably the single greatest American Roman Catholic scholar in Old Testament³ and one of the original eight editors of the international team charged with publishing the Dead Sea Scrolls.⁴ Joe's dissertation, *The Use of Tôrâ in Isaiah: His Debate with the Wisdom Tradition*, a model of analysis and judgment, became the third volume in the CBQMS.

As if your doctoral studies were not enough work, Joe, you served as professor of Scripture for the Saint Anselm's Abbey Seminary in 1956–1965 and as a teacher at the Saint Anselm's Priory School, as it was known in 1955–1962. I hasten to add your own stated opinion about the Saint Anselm's Abbey School: "the best prep school in the city, one of the best in the country."⁵ You and your brother monks made it great.⁶ Despite your many duties at Saint Anselm's, you began teaching at Catholic University in 1959 as a lecturer at the invitation of Gerard Sloyan, then the chair of the Department of Religion and Religious Education⁷ and himself a CBA member since 1953. In the years since, you have attained the rank of full professor, and your teaching career continues at Catholic University *'ad hayyôm hazzeh*, unto this very day. In addition to your teaching at Catholic University, you also held a visiting lectureship at Princeton Theological Seminary in the spring of 1983.

Over your teaching career spanning fifty-six years—and counting—you have produced four books, most recently in 2006, *Ethical Dimensions of the Prophets*, published by

³ There is not to denigrate other wonderful Roman Catholic scholars who have worked on the Old Testament, such as Edward P. Arbez, S.S. (the first president of the CBA, 1881–1967), Louis F. Hartman, C.S.S.R., George S. Glanzman, S.J., Bruce Vawter, C.M., Roland Murphy, O. Carm., Dennis McCarthy, S.J., John J. Collins, or Michael Patrick O'Connor; on the contrary. Perhaps consideration on this score should be given to Henri Hyvernât (1858–1941), the renowned founder of the Department of Semitic and Egyptian Languages and Literatures at Catholic University, and particularly a brilliant Egyptologist; in any event, he was a Frenchman and classmate of Marie-Joseph Lagrange at Issy (so Gerald P. Fogarty, *American Catholic Biblical Scholarship: A History from the Early Republic to Vatican II* [San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989] 39, 96). By the way, it is little known that William Foxwell Albright, the American doyen of biblical studies at The Johns Hopkins University, aired the idea of converting to Catholicism, following the lead of his wife, Ruth Norton Albright (so Leona Glidden Running and David Noel Freedman, *William Foxwell Albright: A Twentieth-Century Genius* [Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1991; orig., 1975] 426). Albright thought so well of Skehan that the latter served as a sabbatical replacement for Albright between 1947 and 1956 at what was then called the Oriental Seminary at Hopkins. In his eulogy for Skehan, Roland Murphy recalled what Skehan said when first asked to teach at Hopkins: "Yes. After all, it's like being asked to pinch-hit for Baby Ruth" (for this anecdote as well as a sketch of Skehan and his work, see Alexander A. Di Lella, O.F.M., "Patrick William Skehan: A Tribute," *CBQ* 42 [1980] 435–377, and <http://archives.lib.cua.edu/findingaid/patsk.cfm>).

⁴ For Skehan's role in the Dead Sea Scrolls, see Weston Fields, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A Full History* (Leiden: Brill, 2007). In addition to Skehan's published work, The Catholic University of America has five boxes of his papers; see <http://archives.lib.cua.edu/findingaid/patsk.cfm> (accessed July 11, 2012).

⁵ Jensen, homily delivered at Sunday Mass on March 1, 1998, published in *The Newsletter of St. Anselm's Abbey* (Winter 1998) 13.

⁶ See <http://apps.washingtonpost.com/local/highschoolchallenge/schools/2012/list/private/> (accessed July 14, 2012).

⁷ Jensen, "My Fifty Years," 15.

Liturgical Press, and you collaborated on a fifth well known to our membership, *The Revised Psalms of the New American Bible*, which appeared in 1991.⁸ Your approximately twenty-five articles include five alone in the *CBQ*, and this count does not include the many pieces that you produced for six encyclopedias and collections. None of this gives proper appreciation to your work on the *New American Bible* committees; nor does it include either your publication of the volumes of Supplements to the *CBQ* in 1987, 1992, and 1997 or the many presentations at professional meetings, including ours. And while we members of the CBA may think of your career as centered at Catholic University in these years, your service to Saint Anselm's hardly abated: you served as prior of the Abbey in the early 1970s (when I first met you when I was a student at the school) and then again in the early 1980s. You have served on the Abbot's Council any number of times. The Abbey has been home. As you put it when you celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of your monastic profession: "I've never wanted to be anywhere else, never had a doubt that this is what God called me to. Every morning I give thanks for the joy and privilege of consecrating the first fruits of the day through morning office, meditation, and mass."⁹ In the same sermon, you also stated: "I have already promised Fr. Abbot that I will be a better monk for the next fifty years than I have been the last fifty."¹⁰

Most of the CBA membership has perhaps known you best for your tireless service on behalf of the association. We may think first of your long and dedicated service as Executive Secretary, beginning a matter of days before the CBA meeting in 1970,¹¹ but we would do well also to recall that you had joined the association already in 1957, only twenty-one years after the founding of the CBA in 1936. To put your CBA years in perspective, over the history of the association that we celebrate at this year's meeting, you have been a member for fifty-five of its seventy-five years. Already in 1964–1966, well before you began your tenure as Executive Secretary in 1970, you served as Assistant Scripture Editor under Louis Hartman for the *New Catholic Encyclopedia*.¹² We celebrate your long labors year in and year out as Executive Secretary, a position that incurred a massive number of tasks, including: organizing our annual meetings; administering grants and fellowships; overseeing investments and other financial matters; handling membership applications; preparing agendas and reports to the Executive Committee and interacting on various matters with the USCCB; and serving on the Board of Trustees, the Committee for Credentials, and the Program Committee. Together with Bruce Vawter, you established *Old Testament Abstracts*, and you served as the *Old Testament Abstracts* publishing editor from 1977 to the present. You also were Secretary for the Joint Committee of Catholic Learned Societies and Scholars (1977–1982);¹³ chair of the *New American Bible* Psalter Revision Committee, 1985–

⁸ *The Revised Psalms of the New American Bible* (New York: Catholic Book Publishing Company, 1991). For Jensen's record of publication, see Matera, "Joseph Jensen, O.S.B.," 516–18, to which may be also added "Immanuel," in *ABD* 3:392–95; and, "My Fifty Years at Catholic University," *The Newsletter of St. Anselm's Abbey* (Advent 2011) 15–18.

⁹ Jensen, homily of March 1, 1998, 12.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Jensen, "My Fifty Years," 16.

¹² *Ibid.*, 15.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 16.

1991;¹⁴ Treasurer, Secretary and Vice-Chair of the Council of Societies for the Study of Religion (beginning in 1970); and chair of *New American Bible* Old Testament Revision Committee, 1994–2008.¹⁵ And as I can personally attest, you have been an immense help to the CBQMS, and you were instrumental in the CBA's agreement with the CCD concerning the *NAB* royalties. As the Rule of Saint Benedict would say, *laborare et orare*, indeed.

In his presidential address of August 18, 1975, which surveyed the CBA's history,¹⁶ Monsignor Francis S. Rossiter listed the Executive Secretaries up to his time: Edward H. Donzé, S.M. (1936–1942); Joseph L. Lilly, C.M. (1942–1948); Louis F. Hartman, C.S.S.R. (1948–1970); and the then-current executive secretary, Joseph Jensen, O.S.B. (1970–).¹⁷ Monsignor Rossiter praised all four “for their scholarly achievements” as well as their “administrative skills, great patience, and a sense of humor.” Joe, you possess all of these in abundance. Echoing the New Testament's high number of citations of Isaiah, the heart of your scholarly achievement has come with this prophetic book. You've proven your administrative skills and your patience (consider the underlying meaning of Latin *patior*), and you certainly have shown your good humor year in and year out. In his comments, Monsignor Rossiter especially praised Louis Hartman for his lengthy term of office from 1948 to 1970, but Monsignor Rossiter could not predict that your term, now come to forty-two years, would outlast Fr. Hartman's term by a mere two decades. What Monsignor Rossiter's comments do not capture is the even lengthier term of teaching, from 1955 to the present, which has run the entire gamut of the Old Testament. I know you are devoted to teaching, as I have heard testimonies to your instruction, or I should perhaps say, your *torah*—to allude to your first book.

Many of these particulars represent the external facts of your life, and they do not do full justice to your person. Over the years from when I met you, first in the early 1970s when I was a high school student at Saint Anselm's and then again when I joined the CBA in 1979 as a graduate student at Catholic University, I have watched, I have seen, and I have learned from you. You have a realistic understanding of human nature, yet a most generous sensitivity and warmth for your fellow human beings. You are unfailingly generous in your praise of others; you are friendly and particularly solicitous of new faces at the CBA meetings. Few know of your outreach work to prisoners. Joe, you are the epitome of the CBA Constitution's express goal of “encouragement and support” (Article II, section 3). Your soul is truly a Benedictine soul, a liturgical soul, a person fully taken in prayer and praise from day's dawning to after its sunset. As you put it in one of your sermons given at the Abbey in 1998: “To pour out such prayers to God in early morning, while most of the city is still asleep, gives a sense of contributing to its well-being.”¹⁸

¹⁴ Ibid., 17.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Francis S. Rossiter, “Forty Years Less One: An Historical Sketch of the C.B.A. (1936–1975),” *CBQ* 39, Supplement (1977); reprinted in *CBQ* 49, Supplement (1987); *CBQ* 54, Supplement (1992); and *CBQ* 59, Supplement (1997) 2. For an appreciation of the CBA, see also Fogarty, *American Catholic Biblical Scholarship*, 222–80.

¹⁷ Fogarty (*American Catholic Biblical Scholarship*, 223) lists Donzé as “corresponding secretary” and John F. Rowan as “executive secretary.”

¹⁸ Jensen, homily of March 1, 1998, 13–14.

This is your biblical life—and I should say, ours. To our great benefit, the years of your work and life have also been marked by your *lēbab hokmā*, your heart of wisdom (Ps 90:12), and especially in recent years your voice has been imbued with a serious critique of matters around us that biblical prophets would appreciate. We in the CBA have come to rely on all of these wonderful qualities of yours. The Preamble to the CBA Constitution drafted over the year of 1936 to 1937⁹ declares the purpose of our founding: “In keeping with the love and veneration which the Church has ever had for the inspired word of God, and in obedience to the desires of the Holy See for a deeper study and a wider knowledge of the Sacred Scriptures, we, who are especially devoted to biblical studies, have united, under the patronage of Saint Jerome, to form this Association.” For fifty-five years you have been the living expression of the CBA’s stated ideals.

I began tonight with an echo of Ps 122:1, and I end with the next verse: “Our feet are standing within your courts” We are pilgrims on the way to God’s house, going, in the words of the psalmist, from strength to strength (Ps 84:8). In our time, we strive with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our might to contribute to God’s glory; in this effort no one in our time has done more than you to help us build up this house wherein we offer the praise of our life’s work to the living God. *Ad multos annos*, Joseph; *ad maiorem Dei gloriam*.

—Mark S. Smith

⁹ Fogarty (*American Catholic Biblical Scholarship*, 223) gives April 11, 1937 as the date of the constitution when the first CBA officers met with Bishop Edwin V. O’Hara at the Sulpician House (now Theological College) near Catholic University.