

# STUDIORUM NOVI TESTAMENTI SOCIETAS

## THE EARLY HISTORY OF STUDIORUM NOVI TESTAMENTI SOCIETAS

When and how did SNTS come to be? Who were the people behind it? And what were its original intentions? The answers to these questions are not widely known; and it may therefore be of interest and value to record them in this first issue of the Bulletin of New Testament Studies.

Before historical events, march ideas. Many may share those ideas; but it is often in the mind of one man that they come to a focus in away which impels him to take the initiative in translating thought into action. It was so in our case; and the man was J de Zwaan of Leyden. He was responsible for the first visible step in our history and it was taken during the Faith and Order Conference at Edinburgh in 1937. A few New Testament scholars, who were attending the conference, met for lunch in a private room of an Edinburgh restaurant; and there, amidst the cheerful and companionable informality of a meal, de Zwaan unfolded his concern.

From this piece of oral tradition we may turn to the first documentary source for our history—a letter sent to a limited number of scholars by G. S. Duncan on 8th March, 1938. It reads: "During the Faith and Order Conference at Edinburgh in August, a small, informal group met together to consider the possible formation of a New Testament Society. The moving spirit was J.

de Zwaan, Leyden. The others were C. H. Dodd, H. L. Goudge . T. W. Manson ; H. G. Wood and G. H. Boobyer of Woodbrooke: W. Manson, Edinburgh; E. P. Dickie and myself from St. Andrews, H. Clavier, Montpellier; E. G. Gulin, Helsingfors; H. L. MacNeill of Hamilton, Ontario. It was strongly felt that such a Society was desirable; and various opinions were mooted regarding the form it ought to take." J. de Zwaan had in mind a Society including continental scholars, but with British scholars taking an especially, active part. He also hoped that the Society, would try to issue a new International Quarterly for New Testament Study. The letter then continues: "As time was lacking for a more detailed discussion, it was suggested at Edinburgh that an attempt should be made to get a few interested people to meet together in England, say, in September, 1938."

The response to G. S. Duncan's letter was encouraging; and a meeting was arranged to take place at Carey Hill, Selly Oak, Birmingham, from 14<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> September, 1938. Those who attended were: G. H. Boobyer, H. Clavier, F. B. Clogg, J. R. Coates, J. M. Creed, J. M. C. Crum, C. H. Dodd, W. F. Flemington, P. N. Harrison, W. F. Howard, Gerhard Kittel, T. W. Manson, William Manson, H. G. Meham, H. F. D. Sparks, A. Stumpff, H. G. Wood, B. L. Woolf and J. de. Zwaan There were apologies for absence from A. J. Wensinck, J. Pongracz, G.H.C. Macgregor, B.T.D. Smith Dean Bate, R.H. Lightfoot, A. Barr, J.A. Findlay, C.A.Scott, K.G. Gotz, A. Fridrichsen, G. S. Duncan, Hans Lietzmann, R.H. Strachan, C.J. Cadoux and R.Newton Flew. The proceedings were opened by J. de Zwaan; J. M. Creed was elected conference chairman and G. H. Boobyer conference secretary. Papers were read by J. de Zwaan, T. W. Manson and W. F. Howard ; and C. R North (then a secretary of the Society for Old Testament Study) came by special invitation to speak at one of the sessions. T. W. Manson's paper, "The Idea of a Society for N.T. Studies", suggested some possible functions which such a body could perform. In addition to being a means of bringing scholars together

for the personal exchange of ideas, he thought it might be "a clearing house for N.T. research by preventing overlapping", or that it might take responsibility for the organization of projects like "the production of a critical edition of the N.T. text".

At the fourth session of this Carey Hall conference, there came the first really decisive event of our early career. C. H. Dodd proposed and H. G. Wood seconded the proposition, "that we do form ourselves into a New Testament Society having for its object the furtherance of our New Testament studies". The proposition was carried unanimously, and from that moment the Society was actually in being. The fifth session of the meeting then appointed its Provisional Committee consisting of J. M. Creed, J. de Zwann, T. W. Manson, Gerhard Kittel, W. F. Howard and G. H. Boobyer. The committee was empowered to co-opt other committee members, if necessary, and was charged with the responsibility of building up the Society by inviting other scholars into membership, drafting a constitution and preparing a first General Meeting to be held in Birmingham during September, 1939.

On the closing day of the Carey Hall meeting, the Provisional Committee at once got to work. It elected J. M. Creed as its chairman and G. H. Boobyer as secretary; co-opted G. S. Duncan as an additional committee member; and nominated J. de Zwaan to be the first president of the Society for the year which would begin with the proposed General Meeting in September, 1939. It was at this same committee meeting that the Latin name of the Society was adopted.

On December 20th , 1938, the Provisional Committee met again - this time at the offices of the Presbyterian Church of England, Tavistock Place, London, W.C.I. There, in addition to electing W.F Howard as Treasurer, dealing with the membership of the Society and the shaping of a Constitution, it made plans for the holding of a First General Meeting- at the College of the Ascension, Selly

Oak, Birmingham, from 20th to 22nd September, 1939. The programme suggested for this General Meeting was subsequently arranged. M. Creed was to conduct the opening worship and chair the business session; and there were to be papers by J. de Zwaan, Hans Lietzmann (it would have been his first visit to England!), William Manson and W. L. Knox. By this time the Society had acquired a membership of seventy, of whom twenty-five were continental scholars; and to all these, printed programmes for the General Meeting, together with a draft constitution, went out in June, 1939. We were well set for the raising of the curtain on the first full act of our play; but alas, instead September 20th saw us not in conference in Birmingham but shut up in our own countries, debarred from contact with-one another by "the dread arbitrament of war".

What would now happen to the infant organisation which had started life so promisingly? We wanted to keep it alive; accordingly in 1940 a circular letter went out to all members of the Society residing in the British Isles, in order to explore the practicability of their coming together for a meeting in September, 1940. But the international conflict was growing in fury, and it was the general opinion of British members that we must resign ourselves to the necessity of leaving the Society's arrangements where they were "for the duration" - to use a wartime phrase. It meant that the Provisional Committee was to remain provisional for a much longer period than was ever intended; but, however long it might prove to be, that committee had no intention of abandoning its commission. It held on, and held together, until the skies cleared.

This time of waiting brought a sudden and grievous loss, early in 1940, through the death of our chairman, J. M. Creed. This was a misfortune that we could ill afford, for by his wisdom and good-natured friendliness, J. M. Creed had already done much, and would have done much more, to make the Society a real fellowship

for the nurture of sound learning. For a successor, the committee turned to T. W. Manson, and no better choice could have been made. The Society is greatly indebted to him for all the guidance which he gave when the time came for the committee to pick up the threads of its task again.

The next date of historical importance is 23rd April, 1946, when the British members of the Provisional Committee met again in London at St. Dionis Hall in Lime Street, E.C.3. The minutes of the meeting read: "There were present T. W. Manson (chairman), C. H. Dodd, W. F. Howard, John Lowe and G. Boobyer. Apologies for absence were received from J. de Zwaan and G. S. Duncan. The minutes of the last meeting held on December 30th, 1938, were read and signed." The course of events down to the stillborn General Meeting of September, 1939, and thereafter, was then recalled; W. F. Howard, the Treasurer, reminded us that £17 19s. 0d. still survived the war in our account at the bank; T. W. Manson reported that J. de Zwaan had once more returned to his post at Leyden; but the main business before the meeting was the issue of a further batch of invitations to membership of the Society and the arrangement of a First General Meeting. It was agreed to prepare for a General Meeting to be held from the 26<sup>th</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup> March, 1947, and, if possible, in Oxford.

This time our plans went forward without let or hindrance; and, on the appointed day, thirty-eight members of the Society assembled in Christ Church Oxford, for the First General Meeting. Papers were given by J. de Zwaan, Anton Fridrichsen, William Manson and A. E. J. Rawlinson. T. W. Manson took the chair at the first business session; but at 8 p.m. that evening, 26th March, 1947, he handed over the leadership of the Society to its first pioneer by inducting J. de Zwaan to the Presidency for 1947-8. Thus did *Studiorum Novi Testamenti Societas* begin its fully established course; and from that point onwards the circulated minutes of General Meetings take the story down to the present day.

G. H. BOOBYER.