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## C. K. Barrett on Rudolf Bultmann as Symposiarch at the 1954 SNTS General Meeting in Marburg\*

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**This article calls attention to an unpublished account of the 1954 General Meeting of SNTS in Marburg, written by C. K. Barrett. The interesting part of Barrett’s account is its picture of Rudolf Bultmann who, after the evening sessions, with a group of colleagues withdrew to a pavement café at the Marktplatz and sat there ‘at the head in undisputed preeminence’.**

**Keywords:** C. K. Barrett, G.H. Boobyer, Rudolf Bultmann, SNTS, Marburg

The Ninth General Meeting of the Society of New Testament Studies (SNTS) took place at Marburg an der Lahn, Germany, from 7 to 10 September 1954. The minutes of the meeting, drawn up by the Secretary George Boobyer, were published in *New Testament Studies* 1 (1954–5).<sup>1</sup> They include various interesting particulars. Forty-three members and seven guests were present. The

\* I wish to thank Professor Dr Lukas Bormann (Marburg) and Professor Christopher Tuckett (Oxford) for their comments on an earlier version of this essay, Professor David Parker (Birmingham) for useful information, and Professor Andrew Clarke, Secretary of SNTS (Aberdeen), for consulting the archive of SNTS to verify the date of C. K. Barrett’s acceptance into SNTS membership.

1 G. H. Boobyer, ‘Studiorum Novi Testamenti Societas: The Ninth General Meeting’, *NTS* 1 (1954–5, no. 3, February 1955) 227–8. George Henry Boobyer (1902 Stoke Saint Gregory, UK – 1999); BA Bristol; BA, BD London; DTheol Heidelberg 1928, supervised by Martin Dibelius. Member of the Society of Friends (Quakers). In the 1930s and 1940s, Fellow and Extension Lecturer, Woodbrooke College, Selly Oak, Birmingham. From 1948, Lecturer in Divinity, University of Durham (Newcastle Division) and then, from 1961 at the latest, Senior Lecturer and Head of the Department of Divinity, King’s College (University of Durham), Newcastle. In 1963, when King’s College became the independent University of Newcastle upon Tyne, Boobyer became Head of the Department of Divinity in that University, until his retirement in 1967. Later on, theology teaching in Newcastle was discontinued and merged with that in Durham. Boobyer was the Secretary of SNTS from 1938 to 1955; according to a note in *NTS* 2 (1955–6, no. 3, February 1956) 216, he stood down at the Tenth General Meeting held in 1955.

President-elect for 1954–5, Dr Vincent Taylor (Leeds), was unfortunately unable to attend, so that the outgoing President, Professor Rudolf Bultmann, acted as Chairperson of the conference. Bultmann inducted Taylor to the presidency *in absentia*, and Taylor's Presidential Address, entitled 'The Origin of the Passion Sayings in Mark', was read by someone else; the minutes do not say by whom.<sup>2</sup> One of the main papers presented at this conference was that of Ernst Käsemann (Göttingen), 'Sätze heiligen Rechtes im Neuen Testament'.<sup>3</sup> C. K. Barrett (Durham) read a short paper on 'The Lamb of God' in John 1.29.<sup>4</sup> Werner Georg Kümmel, Bultmann's successor in Marburg since 1952, gave a paper on the state of New Testament research and teaching in the 1950s in Germany.<sup>5</sup> Twenty-five new members were admitted; among them were Professor Rudolf Schnackenburg (Dillingen (Bayern)) and Dr K. Stendahl (Harvard). During the conference, the first issue of volume 1 of *New Testament Studies* appeared and copies were distributed to the participants.<sup>6</sup>

One feature of the Marburg meeting is not mentioned in the official minutes: after the evening sessions, a number of participants would come together in the marketplace in the old centre of Marburg to have a drink and further conversation in an informal setting. In itself, this is of course nothing remarkable. During all scholarly conferences, participants come together in the evening in smaller or bigger groups for refreshments and continued discussion. Yet what happened at Marburg in September 1954 *was* something remarkable. This is an eyewitness' report:

2 Probably by the Secretary Boobyer, who had done the same two years before, in 1952, when the President of the Society, C. H. Dodd, could not be present at the Sixth General Meeting held in Bern, and his Presidential Address was read by Boobyer; see Boobyer's account of the Bern meeting in H. Clavier, ed., *Man in God's Design* (Valence-sur-Rhône: Imprimeries Réunies, 1953) 7. The text of Taylor's Presidential Address was published as 'The Origin of the Markan Passion-Sayings' in *NTS* 1 (1954–5, no. 3, February 1955) 159–67.

3 E. Käsemann, 'Sätze heiligen Rechtes im Neuen Testament', *NTS* 1 (1954–5, no. 4, May 1955) 248–60.

4 C. K. Barrett, 'The Lamb of God', *NTS* 1 (1954–5) 210–18.

5 W. G. Kümmel, 'New Testament Research and Teaching in Present-Day Germany' (delivered originally in German), *NTS* 1 (1954–5) 229–34.

6 The origin of *NTS* is closely interrelated with that of *Novum Testamentum* and was not without embarrassing and disappointing moments for the man who took the initiative for the founding of an international journal for New Testament studies, Jan de Zwaan. See L. Bormann and H. Kreß, "'Free from German 'Schulmeinungen' and Other One-Sidedness": Die Entstehungsgeschichte der New Testament Studies (1935–1954)', *NTS* 66 (2020) 21–50; on the appearance of the first issue of *NTS* in September 1954: p. 46. Its distribution at the Marburg conference is not mentioned here. The opening article of the first issue of *NTS* is the text of Bultmann's Presidential Address of 1953, 'History and Eschatology in the New Testament', *NTS* 1 (1954–5) 5–16.

[A]fter the evening sessions, a dozen or more members would withdraw to a *Wirtschaft* in the *Marktplatz*; tables and benches were pushed together in a ring, and at the head in undisputed preeminence sat Rudolf Bultmann.

The eyewitness was C. K. Barrett, Lecturer in Divinity at the University of Durham, UK, then thirty-seven years of age.<sup>7</sup> He was one of the younger members of the Society, elected into membership some time before September 1948, probably in 1947.<sup>8</sup> In any case, Barrett attended the First General Meeting held in Oxford in 1947. In the Third General Meeting, Oxford 1949, he was elected to join the Committee of SNTS.<sup>9</sup> He also participated in the first General Meeting of the Society held on the European mainland, at Bern in 1952.<sup>10</sup> When he was in Marburg in September 1954, Barrett had already completed the manuscript of his *The Gospel according to St John*, but this work would not appear until 1955.<sup>11</sup>

The man at the head of the table in the marketplace at Marburg, Rudolf Bultmann, had been President of the Society in 1953–4, and was now the acting Chair of the 1954 conference. He was emeritus Professor of New Testament at Marburg, now seventy years of age, Barrett's senior by thirty-three years.

7 Charles Kingsley Barrett (1917–2011). Study of mathematics and theology at Cambridge, Pembroke College (1935–9) and Wesley House (1939–42); influenced by E. C. Hoskins. Ordained as Methodist minister. D.D. Lecturer in Divinity at Durham 1945, Professor 1958. From 1953, several study leaves at German universities. Retired 1982. President of the editorial Board of *Novum Testamentum* 1979–94. See C. Breytenbach *et al.*, 'On the Occasion of C.K. Barrett's 90<sup>th</sup> Birthday', *NovT* 49 (2007) 311; J. Dunn (Barrett's successor at Durham), 'Charles Kingsley Barrett 1917–2011', *Biographical Memoirs of Fellows of the British Academy* 12 (ed. The British Academy; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013) 3–21; R. Morgan, 'C.K. Barrett and New Testament Theology', *JSNT* 37 (2015) 432–57.

8 In the archive of SNTS there is no clear statement as to when Barrett was elected into membership. His name first seems to appear in the list of members for the Second General Meeting, Oxford, September 1948, but not yet in that for the First General Meeting, Oxford, March 1947. (I owe this information to Professor Andrew Clarke, Secretary of SNTS, in an email of 18.8.2020.) Yet it is certain that Barrett attended the meeting of 1947; this is clear from his eulogy on Boobyer published below. The most plausible interpretation of these data seems to be that Barrett participated in the meeting of March 1947 as a guest, not as a member, for it is clear that the Secretary Boobyer did not know Barrett until he received a letter from him in March 1947 and misread his signature as 'Bennett' (see below). Barrett may then have been invited and accepted into membership, either orally during the meeting of March 1947 (which would explain the absence of any record of his election), or soon after, that is, soon enough for his name to appear in the 1948 list of members.

9 Professor Andrew Clarke, email of 18.8.2020.

10 Dunn, 'Barrett', 20. In September of the same year (1952), an 'ordinary' General Meeting, the Seventh, took place at St John's College, Durham, UK; see the minutes of this meeting in *Bulletin of the Studiorum Novi Testamenti Societas*, nos. I–III (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963) III.5. Barrett is not mentioned here.

11 C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel according to St John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text* (London: SPCK, 1955<sup>1</sup>).

Bultmann had taught in Marburg from 1921 until his retirement in 1951, during no less than thirty years. He had been the first German President of the Society (1953–4).<sup>12</sup> At the 1954 SNTS meeting, he played a home game. He was the *genius loci*. A year before, in 1953, he had completed the publication of his *Theologie des Neuen Testaments*.<sup>13</sup> The second edition appeared already in 1954. Bultmann's authority was indeed incontestable – among sympathetic colleagues.<sup>14</sup>

One would love to know what was said at that table in the marketplace. The papers given at the conference have been published, the table talk exchanged between Bultmann and his table companions has not. Barrett discloses nothing about the conversation carried on there. We have to content ourselves with his brief sketch of the late-night symposium – and are grateful to him for it.<sup>15</sup>

When and why did Barrett come to share these recollections and to put them on record? This occurred no less than thirty-four years later, at the Forty-Third General Meeting of SNTS, which was held at Cambridge from 8 to 12 August 1988, under the Presidency of Professor Morna Hooker (Cambridge). The minutes of that meeting report that, at the beginning of the conference, 'at a reception given by the University, the Jubilee of the Society was celebrated with a toast proposed by Professor C.K. Barrett, a former President,<sup>16</sup> and a response by Dr G. Boobyer, the first Secretary'.<sup>17</sup> The Jubilee mentioned was the fiftieth anniversary of the Society: the Society had been founded half a century ago during a conference of nineteen New Testament scholars, which took place at Selly Oak, Birmingham, from 14 to 16 September 1938, in the fourth session of this conference.<sup>18</sup>

The 'toast' proposed by Barrett was in fact meant as an introduction to a more substantial speech which was to be given by the former Secretary George H.

12 Bultmann had been elected into membership of SNTS in 1939; see L. Bormann, "Auch unter politischen Gesichtspunkten sehr sorgfältig ausgewählt": Die ersten deutschen Mitglieder der Studiorum Novi Testamenti Societas (SNTS) 1937–1946', *NTS* 58 (2012) 416–52, esp. 439–41.

13 R. Bultmann, *Theologie des Neuen Testaments*, published in three instalments (Tübingen: Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1948–53).

14 On Bultmann's life, work and significance, see now C. Landmesser, ed., *Bultmann Handbuch* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017).

15 For another notable encounter on a terrace during the General Meeting at Marburg, namely that between Walter Grundmann, formerly an active National-Socialist, later a secret informer of the Stasi in the GDR, and E. Käsemann, see Bormann, "Auch unter politischen Gesichtspunkten sehr sorgfältig ausgewählt", 450.

16 Barrett was President of SNTS in 1973 at Southampton.

17 D. R. Catchpole, 'The Forty-Third General Meeting: 8–12 August 1988', *NTS* 35 (1989) 296–7.

18 G. H. Boobyer, 'Studiorum Novi Testamenti Societas', *NTS* 1 (1954–5) 66–9. Here, on p. 66, one also finds the list of the nineteen founding fathers of the Society.

Boobyer.<sup>19</sup> The latter's contribution was probably a commemorative speech containing an overview of the origin and development of the Society during the first half century of its existence.<sup>20</sup> Barrett's task was just to introduce Boobyer and he did so in the form of a eulogy on Boobyer and his merits for the establishment and organisation of the Society in the formative period of its existence (1938–54). We know this from Barrett's allocution itself, for although its text was not published at the time, it has been preserved.<sup>21</sup> It runs as follows:

This is a year of Jubilee, and therefore a time for reminiscence. It is also the hour of the aperitif, and what I have to offer is no more than the aperitif to the diet of reminiscence that we shall hear from Dr Boobyer, whom it is a special delight to see once more among us. I am here simply to provide the cue for his speech; and I propose to do that – and I hope the Secretary will find some means of recording this – by pointing out how great is the debt the Society owes to its first secretary.

It was a distinguished group that met in 1938 and decided that there ought to be a New Testament Society,<sup>22</sup> but any such group needs a younger person who will record its decisions, remind its members of what they promised to do, and himself do all the things they said they would do, and forgot. In 1938, Dr Boobyer, not yet the well-known and distinguished New Testament scholar he was to become, was the young man.<sup>23</sup> He turned the resolutions of 1938 into fact. I have no doubt that he organised the abortive meeting of September 1939, abandoned because of the outbreak of war.<sup>24</sup> During the years of war, he – if no one else – remembered, and was ready when at

19 Given the administrative connections between Durham and Newcastle, and the fact that Boobyer's career in Newcastle (1948–67) overlaps with that of Barrett in Durham (1945–82), the two scholars must have had dealings with each other as close colleagues.

20 Boobyer had already published such an account several times. See his 'The Early History of Studiorum Novi Testamenti Societas', *Bulletin* 1, 7–10, also published on the website of the Society: [www.snts.international/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/SNTS-History-Boobyer.pdf](http://www.snts.international/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/SNTS-History-Boobyer.pdf); *idem*, 'Studiorum Novi Testamenti Societas', *NTS* 1 (1954–5) 66–9; *idem*, appendix to W. C. van Unnik's obituary of J. de Zwaan, *NTS* 4 (1957–8) 234–5.

21 Leiden, University Library, Special Collections, Correspondence deposited 2020, 46 letters from C. K. Barrett, President of the Editorial Board of *Novum Testamentum*, 1979–1996.

22 Barrett is referring here to the meeting of nineteen New Testament scholars (most of them British, e.g. T. W. Manson and Boobyer, but some from the European continent, e.g. J. de Zwaan) who gathered at Carey Hall, Selly Oak, Birmingham, from 14 to 16 September 1938. It was at the fourth session of this conference at Carey Hall, Birmingham, probably on 15 September 1938, that the decision to establish a New Testament Society was taken and 'from that moment the Society was actually in being'. See Boobyer, 'The Early History of Studiorum Novi Testamenti Societas', 8.

23 Boobyer (born 29 August 1902) was thirty-six at the time. When Barrett pronounced this eulogy on him at the Cambridge General Meeting of SNTS on 8 or 9 August 1988, Boobyer was eighty-six less three weeks.

24 For a detailed account of the preparations for, and cancellation of, the First General Meeting, planned for September 1938 in Birmingham, see Bormann, "Auch unter politischen Gesichtspunkten sehr sorgfältig ausgewählt", esp. 434–43.

length the possibility of a meeting arose. That he organised the meeting of March 1947<sup>25</sup> I have documentary evidence in a letter preserved (as a bookmark) in my copy of Strack–Billerbeck (which therefore does contain at least some genuine historical material).<sup>26</sup> It runs: ‘Dear Mr Bennett’ – a reflection on the legibility of my signature – ‘You are not too late to reserve accommodation at Christ Church for the meeting of the Society.’<sup>27</sup>

Before long it became clear that it would be wrong to restrict meetings of the Society to Britain. An extra meeting (in addition to the annual meeting) was held at Bern at Easter 1952,<sup>28</sup> and a regular meeting at Marburg in 1954. This was in all respects a memorable meeting. There were notable papers, such as Henry Chadwick’s ‘All things to all men’<sup>29</sup> and Käsemann’s ‘Sätze heiligen Rechtes’,<sup>30</sup> but what I shall remember longest is that, after the evening sessions, a dozen or more members would withdraw to a *Wirtschaft* in the Marktplatz,<sup>31</sup> tables and benches were pushed together in a ring, and at the head in undisputed preeminence sat Rudolf Bultmann.

It was in the same year that *New Testament Studies* began publication. The purpose of these recollections is to show that in seven years, 1947–1954, the whole of the fundamental structure of the Society had appeared: an annual meeting, already a rolling annual meeting which in due course would find a

25 This was the First General Meeting, held from 26 to 28 March 1947, at Christ Church, Oxford, under the Presidency of Johannes (Jan) de Zwaan. See Boobyer, ‘Studiorum Novi Testamenti Societas’, 66–9, esp. 68.

26 H. L. Strack and P. Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch* (5 vols.; Munich: Beck, 1922–8). Barrett refers to this work some twenty times in his first monograph, *The Holy Spirit and the Gospel Tradition* (London: SPCK, 1947, 1954<sup>2</sup>).

27 Barrett’s joke on Boobyer’s misspelling of his name is fine, but also revealing. It seems to indicate that Boobyer and Barrett had not exchanged letters previously and, consequently, that until March 1947, Barrett had not yet been invited and accepted into membership of SNTS. To judge by Boobyer’s misreading of Barrett’s name, Boobyer seems not yet to have known Barrett. This is understandable: Barrett, Boobyer’s junior by fifteen years, was obviously ‘not yet the well-known and distinguished New Testament scholar he was to become’.

28 The Sixth General Meeting of SNTS was held at Easter (10–14 April) 1952 in Bern; see *Bulletin* II, 6; III, 5; and *NTS* 1 (1954–5) 68–9. The papers of this conference were published in a special volume edited by H. Clavier (ed.), *Man in God’s Design* (Valence sur Rhône: Imprimeries Réunies, 1953). For a report on this meeting, see G. H. Boobyer, ‘Foreword’, in Clavier, *Man in God’s Design*, 7–8. In the absence of the President, C. H. Dodd, the ex-President H. Clavier (Strasbourg) acted as Chairperson of the meeting. Dodd’s Presidential Address, ‘Man in God’s Design according to the New Testament’, was read by the Secretary G. H. Boobyer. It was published in the conference volume *Man in God’s Design*, 9–20. On the conference in Bern, see also Bormann, ‘Auch unter politischen Gesichtspunkten sehr sorgfältig ausgewählt’, 451.

29 H. Chadwick, ‘“All Things to All Men”(I Cor. ix.22)’, *NTS* 1 (1954–5) 261–75.

30 See n. 3 above.

31 It remains unclear where precisely these meetings took place. Professor Lukas Bormann points out that ‘Bultmann hatte seinen „Stammtisch“ für regelmäßige Treffen mit Freunden und Kollegen in der Gaststätte „Zur Sonne“ am Marktplatz (<https://www.zur-sonne-marburg.de/>). Allerdings gab und gibt es am Marktplatz mehrere Wirtschaften, die in Frage kommen’ (email of 14.8.2020).

setting in many places in the Western world, and publications. And all this happened in the secretaryship of George Boobyer, who guided us through it all.

In a letter written on 28 January 1989, four months after the meeting in Cambridge, Barrett explained that he had spoken there from manuscript notes, but made a fair copy of what he had said within a few days. He had now typed out his fair copy and he enclosed the typescript ‘with this letter’.<sup>32</sup>

Barrett’s allocution remained unpublished, mainly because its text lacked a suitable introduction explaining on what occasion and for which purpose he had composed and pronounced it. However, it seemed worthwhile to provide it with such an introduction so that at last Barrett’s text could be published. The information it contains is too fascinating to be relegated to oblivion. We have here not only an eloquent and well-deserved tribute to the first secretary of SNTS, G. H. Boobyer, Secretary from 1938 to 1955, but also a succinct, correct survey of the Society’s genesis, viewed from a certain distance in time.<sup>33</sup> We find here an account of the first steps of SNTS outside the UK, to Bern (‘an *extra* meeting *in addition to* the annual meeting’ at Durham! (emphasis added)) and Marburg. We also get here some glimpses of Barrett’s wit and sense of humour. Most of all we have this priceless image of a group of conference participants, talking and drinking late in the evening on the Markt of Marburg, with, at their head, in undisputed pre-eminence, Rudolf Bultmann.

32 Leiden, University Library, Special Collections, Correspondence deposited 2020, letter from C. K. Barrett, dated Durham, 28 January 1989: ‘I did not write out the speech; I thought it out rather carefully but it was to be brief and I contented myself with notes. At the meeting several people, including the President [Professor Morna Hooker], said that it ought to be written down ... By the end of the week, when I had written down what I could remember, everyone seemed to have forgotten about it ... I will type a copy and enclose it with this letter.’

33 For one thing, Barrett has the date of the founding of SNTS correct: 1938. More precisely, it was 14 or 15 September 1938; see n. 22 above. Surprisingly, the date is given wrongly on the home-page of SNTS on the Internet, <http://snts.international>, where it is stated that ‘SNTS is an academic Society founded in 1939’ (accessed 18 August 2020).