

A Heritage of Biblical Scholarship

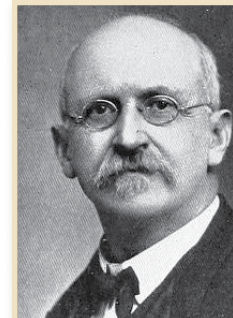
The biblical scholarship so much in evidence at Union University in the present day has its roots in a longstanding tradition of excellence.

For generations, Union has produced graduates who excelled in their studies of the Scriptures. It has employed faculty members who made significant contributions to global understanding of the Bible. Nearly all of them shared this knowledge from the pulpits of churches they pastored, or from lecterns in the halls of higher education. Some did both.

To prepare a comprehensive guide to the work of every biblical scholar with a connection to Union would fill volumes. What follows (in chronological order) is a brief look at the work of a few scholars and practitioners who typify Union's time-honored institutional commitment to outstanding, authentic biblical scholarship.

George M. Savage (1849-1938)

A graduate of Union University Murfreesboro in 1871, Savage devoted most of his professional life to Southwest Baptist University (which became known as Union University in 1907) as a faculty member and as president.



Savage served three separate terms as Union president: 1890-1904; 1906-1907; and 1915-1918. Union's chapel is named in his honor.

University historian James Alex Baggett describes Savage as "Union's Grand Old Man" in his book *So Great a Cloud of Witnesses*. Baggett writes that when Savage was not

talking with family or friends, "he could most often be found reading his Greek *New Testament*, which he read through more than 50 times, or cultivating the roses in his backyard."

Baggett also writes that as a professor, Union students remembered Savage's "insistence on the highest type of recitation." Savage discovered his love for teaching as a student, when he served as a tutor. According to Baggett, the Union faculty recognized Savage as a "popular and successful teacher."

Savage was the first professor to be named the J.R. Graves Professor of Theology and Moral Philosophy at Union, a job title he held from 1908-1934.

Charles B. Williams (1869-1952)

Charles Williams is one of the best-known biblical scholars associated with Union University. His Williams translation of the New Testament, first published in 1937, became a favorite in many churches around the world and was published as he was serving as professor of Greek and ethics at Union.

Ray Van Neste, assistant professor of Christian Studies and director of the R.C. Ryan Center for Biblical Studies, has done extensive research on Williams and delivered a Founders Day address about the scholar in 2009. (A podcast of his address is available online at www.uu.edu/audio/detail.cfm?ID=365)

Van Neste recounted how as a youngster in

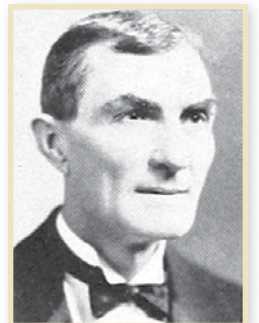
North Carolina, Williams would read and study Latin in the fields from a book tied to his plow. Unable to attend the local school because he was needed to work on the family farm, Williams would study the week's lessons in spare time and recite them each Friday to the teacher. This process actually resulted in early graduation, and by the time he was 15, he was teaching in the local school. He later worked his way through Wake Forest University, graduating at the top of his class.

The Williams translation paid particular attention to the Greek verb tenses, something Van Neste notes had been a special interest of the scholar for many years. About 20 years in the making, Van Neste observes that one of Williams' students might have provided the spark that started this work: "Apparently a student had heard him criticize one of the standard translations and the student suggested he 'turn out a better one!' So he set out to do just that."

Van Neste concludes that Williams was ahead of his time as a translator, making use of idioms rather than attempting the word-for-word translation technique that was common practice at the time.

"The work of Williams was really the beginning of what we have as a heritage of contributing to English Bible translation here at Union," Van Neste concluded in his address. "In 1991, Union graduate Barclay Newman (profiled below) produced the contemporary English version, and in more recent years the work of Gary Smith (now retired) and George Guthrie."

Williams retired from Union in 1939 after serving for 13 years. A scholarship in his honor was established at the University in 1986, and in 2004, his family commissioned and donated a portrait of Williams that now hangs in the Ryan Center in Jennings Hall.



Fred M. Wood '44

Wood produced resources for Southern Baptist churches for about half a century. He specialized

UNION'S INVESTMENT IN Biblical Literacy



in Old Testament study and Hebrew, earning a doctorate in those areas from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

He earned a bachelor's degree from Union in 1944, and the University later gave him an honorary Doctor of Divinity degree. He was a professor of religion at Union and a visiting professor at four

different Southern Baptist seminaries.

Wood also served as pastor at Eudora Baptist Church in Memphis for more than 30 years, but made time in his schedule to deliver conference messages at Southern Baptist retreat centers Ridgecrest (N.C.) and Glorieta (N.M.).

He wrote 15 books, including a commentary on Amos published by Lifeway in 2009 and a widely regarded book entitled *Jeremiah-Fire in my Bones* (Baptist Sunday School Board, 1981).

Among his many honors, Wood was president of the Tennessee Baptist Convention (1972-1975) and was named to *Who's Who in Religion*.

Curtis Vaughan '46 (1925-2005)

Curtis Vaughan served the faculty of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary from 1950-1995, and continued to teach classes five years after his official retirement. He authored Bible study commentaries on Ephesians, Galatians, Colossians and Philemon, Acts, James and 1, 2, and 3 John. In addition, he co-authored commentaries on Romans, 1 Corinthians, Jude and 1 and 2 Peter.

Following his death in 2005 at the age of 80, Union President David S. Dockery remarked that Vaughan was "one of Union's great graduates," and "a model of scholarship and churchmanship for Southern Baptists everywhere."

In addition to his books, Vaughan contributed numerous articles to the *Southern Baptist*

Encyclopedia, *Broadman Teacher's Commentary*, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* and *The Southwestern Journal of Theology*. He was a member of the executive editorial committee for the New King James Version of the Bible, and served on the editorial advisory board of Zondervan Publishing House.

After graduation from Union, the native of Humboldt, Tenn. earned graduate degrees at Southwestern Seminary and also studied in Great Britain at both the University of Manchester and the University of Edinburgh.

Robert L. Hamblin '50

Robert Lee Hamblin's work as an author and evangelist is widely recognized, and Union

awarded him an honorary doctorate in 1983 to go along with his bachelor's degree earned here in 1950. Hamblin served six years on staff with the Southern Baptist Convention's Home Mission Board (now North American Mission Board), retiring as Vice President for Evangelism in 1988. He was also professor of evangelism for two years at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. In addition to serving as an evangelist, Hamblin was pastor of Harrisburg Baptist Church in Tupelo, Miss. for 22 years and also pastored Elliston Baptist Church in Memphis.

Hamblin was a prolific writer, dedicating himself to preparing materials that could aid in evangelism or further understanding of scripture. Among his many works were *Triumphant Strangers: A Contemporary Look at First Peter* (Broadman Press, 1982) and *The Doctrine of Lordship* (Convention Press, 1991).

Barclay M. Newman '53

Newman discovered his love for translation while taking Greek at Union University as an undergraduate. That initial interest blossomed into a 42-year career with the American Bible Society, where he worked on the *Contemporary English Version* that was released in 1995.

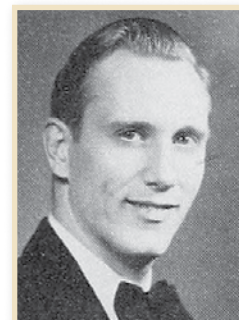


In many cultures, there is a need for the simplest of translations – those that can be read aloud easily. "The CEV is an ear-oriented text," Newman told the Missouri Baptist newspaper *Word & Way*. He retired from ABS in 2005 but remains active in his writing and research.

Among his many noteworthy books are *A Concise Greek-English Dictionary of the New Testament* (Hendrickson Publishers), a work originally released in 1971 but continually revised, and the *Running Greek-English Dictionary of the New Testament* (German Bible Society).

Thomas G. Smothers '55

A highly respected Old Testament scholar, Smothers retired from the faculty of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary after many years of service. He was also on the faculty of Palm Beach Atlantic College. Some of his best-known scholarly work focuses on the Old Testament book of Jeremiah.



Smothers wrote for the *Word Biblical Commentary* series, which was produced for both the serious scholar and the busy pastor. Smothers gained a reputation for helping both groups think about the most difficult passages in Jeremiah.

A volume in that series on Jeremiah 26-52 that Smothers co-authored with Gerald Keown and Pamela Scalise frequently turns up on short lists of recommended commentaries for that section of scripture. Given that Jeremiah has attracted much scholarly attention in recent decades, the consistency with which this volume turns up on these short lists is noteworthy.

Peter Rhea Jones '59

Few Southern Baptists have earned more respect for their work on the teachings of Jesus than Peter

Rhea Jones, a Dyersburg native and Union graduate who went on to teach for many years at both the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and Mercer University.

Jones wrote *Teaching of the Parables* (Baptist Sunday School Board, 1981) and *Studying the Parables of Jesus* (Smyth & Helwys, 1999).

The back cover of the latter book includes this comment from Furman University professor John C. Shelly: "Marked by a rare blend of sterling scholarship and pastoral insight, *Studying the Parables of Jesus* is an excellent book, freeing the parables from stifling familiarity to challenge our pretensions, subvert our comfortably settled opinions, and goad our religious imagination on matters of life and faith and the kingdom of God."

In addition to his academic positions, Jones served extensively as a pastor. Many believe Jones' insights were honed by this experience, which included five full-time positions and nine interim pastorates.

Bob R. Agee '60

Prior to his distinguished 17-year term as president of Oklahoma Baptist University, Bob Agee served at Union as vice president for religious affairs, professor of practical studies in the religion department and as special assistant to the president for institutional planning.

Agee wrote a commentary on the book of Acts for the Bible Book series in the late 1970s; the book was widely used in Sunday school classes throughout the Southern Baptist Convention. Agee wrote at least one series of Sunday school lessons each year from 1970-2004 for Convention Uniform, Life and Work, Bible Book, and Senior Adult Quarterly. 📖

