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Irish Bible Institute



It is twenty-five years this autumn since the Irish Bible School [IBS] opened its doors to students in Coalbrook, Co. Tipperary. Founded by Warren Nelson and run with the help of a committed team of staff and teachers from all over Ireland, IBS operated as a residential training school until 2000 when it merged with The Leadership Institute in Dublin and Irish Bible Institute was formed. Since 2007 is in a real sense also IBI's 25th anniversary, we thought this a good time to ask Warren to reflect back on the last quarter of a century.

## The Way We Were

by Warren Nelson



The milestone of twenty-five years serves as a good place from which to look back at the way we were all those years ago when Irish Bible School [IBS] began; although strictly speaking we had some connections with the Dublin Bible College which went back

to about 1947, sixty years ago.

We were smaller then and in a very different Ireland. Perhaps we came in at the end of 'old Ireland'. The theological and biblical questions of the day were studied against a back-drop of the centuries-old traditional religions of Ireland, whether they were Catholic or Protestant, rather than against the post-modern couldn't-care-less-ness of today. There was a sense then that everybody knew everybody, by which I mean we drew from a smaller pool of students and lecturers.

Evangelical scholarship was not as strong, as varied, or as proficient in what we now call 'issues'. There was not much in the way of resources for the study of medical ethics, science, or for involvement in the media and world politics. Indeed looking into questions of the environment or world debt were frowned on by some

as a diversion from 'the real work' of evangelism. When I see the many excellent study tools available now, both in print and in electronic format I think of how limited the range of books we had then was. Back then not a few of our basic books were from scholars who flourished at the end of the Victorian era. When I look at bibliographies today I can see that anything that was published in the 1980s, when IBS began, has probably already been replaced or updated. Where we had one or two good series of bible commentaries we now have an embarrassment of commentaries, concordances, handbooks and specialist studies to choose from, let alone the innumerable resources now available on the internet. Also many of the books we used, though excellent in their own way, were general and wide-ranging in their treatment of biblical questions, today specialisation in scholarship means we can access comprehensive information on even the most, seemingly, obscure aspects of Bible Studies.

I must, here, enter a caution or two. The evangelical scholarship of the mid-twentieth century was more 'devotional', whereas today's scholarship tends to be more technical. At IBS we had always believed that as well as informing the mind we should also warm the heart. Another caution is that sometimes through specialisation we lose sight of the fuller picture of the totality of God's revelation of himself in both Old and New Testaments. We can be so immersed in the footnotes of biblical study that we lose sight of the world of lost people to whom we are to be light, salt, and a clear witness.

While the word 'progress' should not be used as an excuse for jettisoning the great truths and treasures of the past, it is good to see the genuine progress IBI has made. Better, warmer (bearing in mind the students who wrote home and deliberately mis-spelt Coalbrook as Coldbrook!!) more central premises make for easier study. Computerisation



IBI digest

Summer 2007

## The Way We Were (cont.)

makes information more readily available. And the ability to take students through to Degree level is a reality which was only a dream when we opened. It is right and proper that in a time when students at secular Colleges can gain degree recognition for, sometimes, the most lightweight of courses, our students should get full academic recognition for hard work in a subject that was once known as 'The Queen of Sciences'.

The secondary school which I attended, (most of the time!) had the one word motto 'Floreat' meaning 'May it flourish'. (To those who studied Greek with me that's a Latin subjunctive). At the end of the first twenty-five years I am happy to look back at the changes and the progress IBI has made under God . . . . and to pray Floreat.

Warren Nelson

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## “Traduttore traditore”



“Traduttore traditore”

This Italian phrase, which can be translated as “a translator is a traitor”, highlights the fact that sometimes there is only a small difference between truth and error. In the Italian phrase it is just two letters! Anyone who has ever attempted to “translate” the Bible into the modern world will know the tension all too well. To

“translate” responsibly to avoid being a “traitor” is something worth working at.

That was one of many illustrations that Dr Craig Blomberg of Denver Seminary used as he taught the Developing Biblical Interpretation course to the MA students during the first week of May.

It was a very good week, with lots to learn and to get our minds round. It seemed like the more we grappled with the skills of interpretation the more we discovered how little we actually knew! By the end of the week our minds were full of ‘textual criticism’, ‘grammatical analysis’, ‘lexical analysis’, ‘semantics’ plus a lot more besides. One of the highlights of the week was that Craig communicated a love for the Bible and a deep concern to interpret it responsibly since it is God’s Word. All of these ‘tools’ that he taught us for our ‘interpretation toolbox’ may not get an airing every week, but it is reassuring to know they are there - and even more reassuring to know that they can be used to unlock more of the Bible’s message for the 21st century.

All that remains to be done is to use the tools that were taught to write an interpretation paper!

It was great to have Craig Blomberg back with us again. This was his second time to teach on the MA Programme. We are looking forward to having him around for a longer stretch of time in 2008 when he is planning to spend his sabbatical at IBI during the autumn of 2008. As well as working on his own research projects, Craig will be teaching some courses at IBI (and it is definitely worth watching out for them!). We will be announcing further details in due course.

If you would like to get your hands on some of the things that Craig was teaching (and get a ‘taster’ of the course), then get a hold of the book Craig has written co-authored with W W Klein and R L Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, revised (Thomas Nelson, 1993).

Steven Singleton  
MA Programme Director

## Church Planting



For the last 5 years, IBI and World Harvest Mission have co-hosted "The Gathering". Its purpose is to provide an opportunity for couples who are working at the coalface of church planting to enjoy a break while having fellowship with other church planters and also to benefit from biblical teaching and discussion. This April, in Thurles, we had 12 couples participating, benefiting from the teaching of

Declan Flanagan and enjoying each other's company. Declan leads Rural Ministries, a church planting ministry in the UK and he previously pastored in Dublin for 6 years.

Those who attended this year made the following comments:

*"Spot on. Understanding ministry - how it grows... maintain a right focus... strength for the weary."*

*"The 'triple' aspect of looking at ministry, personal life and marriage seems to be present each time and serves us so well."*

*"We were really encouraged by the event. Thank you for all your efforts and planning on our behalf."*

*"Helped make sense of painful times in ministry - placing my experiences within a biblical framework."*

*"Communication with others in similar but different situations and not usually in my network of workers and friends."*

*"Encouraging and challenging; instructive."*

*"Helpful to be reminded to look after ourselves... we can't do it all... choose what is worth fighting for."*



*Church Planters pray for Ireland*

IBI also held a Church Planting forum with Declan while he was here. We had anticipated a small group of a dozen or so, but 45 individuals who were interested in church planting turned up. It was great to listen to this group discuss questions like "What are the greatest hindrances to church planting in Ireland?" and "What would make a significant positive difference to church planting efforts?" The success of the event has challenged us to consider if we should facilitate further events in this area. There is little doubt that as the church grows in Ireland new churches will need to be planted and IBI is open to any useful role in this regard. Your prayers are valued for wisdom and guidance in this area.

*Jacob Reynolds, Principal*

## Journey of Faith in a changing Ireland

Journey of Faith is a joint IBI and EAI (Evangelical Alliance Ireland) initiative, exploring the Christian faith journey and what that looks like in Ireland today. On this occasion Roy Searle of the Northumbria Community shared his wisdom with us. Roy is based at Ballydugan near Downpatrick, Northern Ireland.

'How do we maintain life in the midst of our ministry?' was the question Roy addressed. In a world that is rapidly changing, where the church is equated with a passing culture and we are in a new spiritual age, exiled and surrounded by unfamiliar things, how do we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?

Contemporary western consumer culture can make us careless, eroding wonder and imagination, solitude is alien to us, we lose touch with inner attentiveness making it difficult to think or listen to God. Because we become like the person or object that we most desire, we need to cultivate a single-minded desire for God.

Roy spoke about the use of time, busyness and the problems it brings that sap energies and diminish spiritual life. He looked at causes of weariness and diseases of the soul then showed us the principles that lead to a balanced spiritual life. The list included prayer, liturgy, scripture, solitude and silence. It also included 'pottering' (i.e. doing something of no intrinsic worth or value), play, reflection and rest, the practice of retreat, Sabbath, having interests beyond the church, drinking copiously of grace and learning to laugh at yourself in order to bust pomposity! Much of that balance is about being rather than doing.

Roy also spoke about the need for relationships. We should have Soul Friends (Brigid of Kildare said whoever is without a Soul Friend is like a body without a head) these are people who will journey with you, who are concerned about your soul; a Spiritual Director - a sister or brother in Christ; a Mentor - someone who will relate and impart nurture as Jesus did with His disciples; a Confessor - someone who will help you own your true feelings both positive and negative and will call you to accountability; and Formation Groups where you meet and talk together with friends. The sum total of all of this is character formation, as Roy put it, "Where there is no shadow-boxing but people see the real you.... where integrity, authenticity and transparency operate we see the Kingdom of God at work". The call is to be counter-cultural and non-conformist, challenging the values around us - 'only dead fish go with the flow'.

The question Roy started with is answered simply by his conclusion "character is more important than content" and character is formed when we live and follow Jesus.

Roy Searle returns in Spring 2008 for an EAI event, if you would like to know more about the Northumbria Community their web address is [www.northumbriacommunity.org](http://www.northumbriacommunity.org) and [www.renovarē.org](http://www.renovarē.org)

*Linda Basdeo, BA Programme Administrator*

# Financial Update

There are definite advantages to living in an affluent age with all the privileges and opportunities that come with material blessing. However, a disadvantage is the increasing pressure to buy into a more secular and material mindset. Christians wanting to resist this pressure and be generous with what God has given them often face tough financial choices, particularly when faced with numerous requests from local and global Christian agencies to fund a wide range of excellent ministries.

Those organisations also face difficult decisions. For example, at IBI we are not immune from financial pressure either, especially during the summer months. We constantly have to balance the tension of meeting budgets, trusting God and inviting our supporters to give.

So, perhaps you ask yourself, "how am I to manage the money that God has entrusted to me? Who do I support, how much and how often?"

Here are some thoughts that may help you to work it through:

- ⇒ Wealth is a privilege - everything we have comes from God, as a gift.
- ⇒ We are accountable to God for the way we use what are, ultimately, his resources.
- ⇒ God is keenly interested in the decisions we make, including financial ones - we can ask for his input through prayer.
- ⇒ It shouldn't be all about the money - pray for those you support, they need it! Engage with them and help carry their burdens (it is a fantastic encouragement to us here when supporters do this).
- ⇒ Not all commitments are for life - it is appropriate to review and adjust support annually.
- ⇒ Giving is but one aspect of stewardship. How we handle what we retain is every bit as important as the money we give away.
- ⇒ A structure can be helpful. Consider dividing your giving in three parts - your equivalent of 'Jerusalem, Judea and the rest of the world'.
- ⇒ Your church leaders may be shy of preaching on stewardship - encourage them to approach what can be a touchy subject.
- ⇒ Read - you can't beat the Scriptures but there are also some great books on the subject of stewardship. Our visiting teacher Craig Blomberg has written one entitled '*Heart, Soul, and Money: a Christian view of possessions*' which I recommend. Write to me for a free copy, first come first served!

And whoever you support, remember that 'God loves a cheerful giver' (2 Cor. 9:7)

*Eric Chaloner, Support and Development*

# Summer Institute 2007

*Joan Singleton*, IBI tutor in Pastoral Care with new responsibility for the Mentoring and Apprenticeship Programme, reflects on Summer Institute 2007:

'I didn't have time to go to the Summer Institute, with getting ready to move to Dublin, lots of things to do in the church before we move, people to say goodbye to, etc but I am so glad that I



made time to be there. We had four mornings when we had the privilege of Gus Konkel opening up the book of Job with us and exploring the very difficult issue of suffering.

Gus taught us with the Hebrew Bible as his text. His great knowledge of the book of Job and the Bible generally were matched by his gracious and sensitive handling of painful issues. He taught in an interactive style so that we could ask questions and comment if we wished to.

The Institute has expanded my knowledge of God and his dealings with us, has enriched my trust in Him, and enabled me to more effectively care for people in pain.'

Here are some comments from others who attended this year:  
"Have been excited and stimulated and so blessed by this week."  
"Thank you so much-lots to go away with and lots to ponder."  
"A really challenging yet enjoyable week."  
"My relationship with God was challenged and strengthened."

## Prayer and Praise

The 2006/07 academic year is now at an end and we have much to give thanks for:

- ⇒ Exam time!: We have just finished our own 'exam' in the shape of a visit by the University Moderator and External Examiner. Since this was the first year of running the BA degree we were not sure how it would all go. They gave a very positive report and commended IBI for the quality of teaching and student experience here on both the BA and the MA - so praise God!
- ⇒ Graduates: For those who are about to graduate, please pray for the Lord's blessing - that their time at IBI will have increased their knowledge, enlarged their hearts for God and His people and equipped their hands for service in His Kingdom.
- ⇒ Returning students, teachers and staff: please pray that each will have some time for refreshment and rest over the summer months, and for our teachers - quality time to prepare several new courses that will be taught for the first time next year.
- ⇒ Recruitment: IBI exists to serve the Lord through excellence in biblical education and leadership training for the church in Ireland. Please pray for the men and women the Lord is drawing to apply to us as they make important decisions about their future.



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