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Reflection and Tribute for James H. Charlesworth

I first met Jim in the early Fall of 1992. I was fresh out of college and my first friend at PTS, Henry Rietz, who lived above me in the old CRW apartments was in his first year as PhD student working closely with Jim on the scrolls. Henry and I hit it off immediately and since I had been a religion/Bible major in undergrad, he encouraged me to take Jim's Historical Jesus course already in my first semester. I was game but it meant I had to have Jim's approval since I hadn't had the NT101 course there at Princeton yet. I screwed up the courage to go to Lenox house and waited for the esteemed professor at the receptionist's area. He came out and gave me a quick cursory glance (as I recall now) and spoke to his secretary. Then he turned to me and the matter at hand.

I led with the connection to Henry of course! But that wasn't quite yet enough.

"When was the Gospel of John written," Jim asked, putting me on the spot with an unexpected oral exam!

"Umm," I stammered. Was he looking for a specific year, date, time of day? "Umm...well, Henry said I should take your class..." Clearly this wasn't going well!

Jim gave me a second change and chose a different tack. "Okay, which is the first gospel that was written?" I felt a bit better since I knew a bit about that.

"Well, Mark, according to most people, but some still hold to Matthean priority. And it is hard to know where to place John—"

"Okay," Jim said, cutting me off. "Your problem isn't that you know too little, you know too much."

He then grabbed some stationary and jotted a handwritten note to the registrar: "Please allow Brent Strawn to take my Jesus Seminar. He is well prepared for the course." He handed it to me and then said: "That 'well prepared' is for them, not for you. You may not be well prepared." And off he went!

So that was my first exposure to the Rev. Dr. James Hamilton Charlesworth. I loved the Jesus course and made it my goal to write a paper that was solid in both primary and secondary resources and that is exactly what Jim wrote in his comments. I was thrilled when my wife, Holly, gave me a copy of Jim's book *The Messiah that Christmas* as my present and it was inscribed by Jim!

Despite the great time I had that fall and into Spring, I wondered at times if I had made the right decision coming to Princeton instead of my small denominational seminary. One day I remember sitting in chapel praying and worrying about that and then going home to my apartment. Henry came to my door and told me that very day that Jim wanted to hire me on the Dead Sea Scrolls project. It was literally an answer to prayer. And I never had another doubt about my decision.

I've worked with Jim and the DSS ever since. I cut my teeth, quite literally, as an editor and textual critic in my early days in seminary on the DSS and the PTS project. And that work has remained with me. And Jim spent countless hours with me and the other members of the team teaching us far more than what could be covered even in his fascinating seminars (I took, in addition to Jesus, the DSS course, and a Pseudepigrapha course). Jim became not only a mentor but a dear personal friend of the family. He took care of us in lots of ways and I owe him an immense amount that I could never repay. I am truly and forever indebted.

I could mention other things: going to Jordan, Israel, and Egypt with Jim, his support of me and my application even when I chose to go into Old Testament, not New (sorry Jim!), his invitation to copublish with him, and indeed his support and enabling of all my early publications which helped immensely on the job market and so on and so forth.

I must end with just one more vignette, though: our mutual love of basketball. We both love basketball and we both used to play—sometimes together or even, occasionally, as opponents. I don't recall playing one-on-one, but I do remember playing HORSE a lot. A lot. And I remember winning. Once. Only once. Dang that guy has a good outside shot—even without his glasses on! Because he didn't wear his glasses when he played. How is that even possible? He had a nose for the basket evidently and once he got hot he dialed it in. It was quite impressive. But I did win. Once!

I love you, Jim! Thanks for everything you've done for me, Holly, and the kids—and so many others. Congratulations on your many accomplishments, and on your well-deserved retirement.

As always and ever, all my best,

Brent (or, around the PTSDSS project, more simply: bas)
The Rev. Dr. Brent A. Strawn, Ph.D.