

Trinity Centre for Biblical Studies

Post-graduates in Focus Series

An interview with **Leszek Lech** who began the Ph.D. programme in 2018.¹

Leszek, sincere thanks for participating in this series.

Would you mind telling us a little about your background and the path you took to a Ph.D. in biblical studies?

Initially, I became interested in biblical studies because of an active faith life and my engagement with a religious organization whose mission is to share the Gospel around different cultures of the world. While living among indigenous tribes in South America, where I worked for an extended period, I noticed the values and inner richness of the culture I was experiencing. These are local traditions with immense depth and grounded in a millennium-long and well-structured systems with convictions and beliefs. This finding encouraged me to broaden my knowledge about the sources of my own religious convictions, many of which underpinned my life decisions. It also drove me to invest my life energy in funding a small publishing house there in South America where I worked to publish academic research in the humanities. The deeper I went towards finding answers to my questions, the more committed I became to continuing along an academic path of discovery.

Why did you choose to come to TCD for your Ph.D.?

Frankly speaking, I initially chose TCD, because I had always been fascinated with Ireland. Irish culture is so rich, as I had become familiar with through longstanding relationships with Irish friends abroad. Initial conversations with my potential supervisor, Ben Wold, at TCD were also extremely important to my decision. After being involved in academic scholarly circles in Brazil, and taking part in Amerindian cultural activities for decades, I needed to ensure I was making a wise decision for my family and Ireland is an excellent place for families. My wife and I moved to Ireland with our, then, 4-years-old son with the excitement of introducing him to a new culture and language. The circle of post-graduate students at TCD also offered a promising context where my ideas would be challenged, so too the prospect of interacting with world renowned scholars in the Biblical Studies Research Seminars.

Would you mind sharing a little about the topic of your Ph.D. thesis?

My Ph.D. thesis investigates aspects of religious experience in early Christian apocalyptic writings, especially in the Ascension of Isaiah which originates with a Jewish text. This composition is particularly important because it is widely considered to be important for the study of early Jewish and Christian apocalyptic. Through an innovative interdisciplinary method, which considers different components to study complex and multifaceted

¹ This is the seventh in a series of interviews with Ph.D. students, and recent graduates, who are members of the Trinity Centre for Biblical Studies.

religious experience of people living in antiquity, I am analyzing fragments of the writing that may be expressions of ancient Christians and how they expressed their encounters with the divine. This research is based on the observation that these texts often have as their *raison d'être* in some religious experience of author and/or of community.

What are some of the highlights of your time at TCD?

There have been many different highlights which together form a 'mosaic'. What especially stands out is the work conducted together with my supervisor; I would describe this as a continuous process of 'gradual incremental breakthroughs.' This learning process, promoted by years of regular dialogue, have helped me to develop and communicate a solid method for analyzing the ancient texts with questions about my topic, as well as generating pro and con arguments for my hypotheses, until reaching conclusions and verbalizing them with a new vocabulary.

I should also note how much I have appreciated the beauty of this country we are living in. Every piece of wild nature discovered while on personal outings with my family have contributed to our well-being and played an important part in motivating me to keep writing.

Do you have any advice for prospective Ph.D. students?

Your proposed thesis project is central to your success. While it should be grounded in advances made in previous research, you should not hesitate to explore new ideas and question elements of others' hypotheses. I would urge anyone planning to do Ph.D. studies to seek out the supervisory relationship where your ideas will variously be met with challenges and affirmations by an adviser whose goal is your success.

Regarding living in Ireland, if you move from abroad with your family, like me, seek to find a location where you can balance access to TCD with a place that promotes the well-being of your family. I have found living outside the city promotes a greater ambience of harmony that helps me to be creative and shape sound arguments.

Thank you, Leszek, we really appreciate you taking the time to respond to our questions.