

Pew Research Proposal Form
Union University

Cover Sheet

Name(s) of Applicant(s): **Justin Wainscott**

Title of Proposed Project: **A Life of Alexander Maclaren: The Prince of Expositors**

Primary Discipline: **Theology**

Secondary Discipline(s): **Homiletics**

Has this proposal been submitted to another agency, publication, or program (including for the Union University Research/Study Leave)? **No**

If so, which one(s)?

Location of proposed research: **England and Scotland**

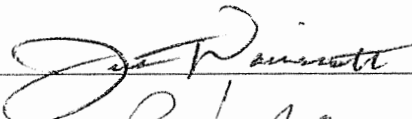
Desired start date: **Summer 2026**

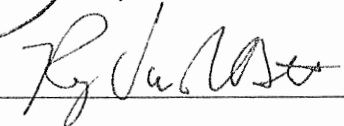
Recommending Scholars and their disciplines:

External: **Dr. Timothy George (Theology, History)**

Union: **Dr. Hal Poe (Theology)**

In consultation together, we recommend the approval of the proposal as an acceptable project and affirm that the applicant has the professional wherewithal to accomplish the project satisfactorily.

Chair of your department  Date: 8/14/25

Dean of your college/school:  Date: 8/18/25

If the chair and/or dean do not recommend the proposal, the applicant should seek a conference to discuss the reasons.

Proposals should be submitted as a PDF via email to the chair of the Research Committee.

PEW RESEARCH PROPOSAL

Justin Wainscott

1. Title of the project

A Life of Alexander Maclaren: The Prince of Expositors

2. Statement of the end product

A book manuscript submitted to Courier Press, with whom I have a contract to write this biography (to be published in their Baptist Figures Series).

3. A description of the project and its major goals

I. Statement of the specific research project

Alexander Maclaren (1826–1910) was one of the most significant and influential Baptist preachers of the nineteenth century, but his ministry has been largely overshadowed by his friend and contemporary, Charles Spurgeon. Much of that has to do with the fact that very little scholarly attention has been given to Maclaren, while numerous books, articles, theses, and dissertations have been written on Spurgeon. This project, in connection with the new Baptist Figures Series by Courier Press, seeks to revive interest in Maclaren and his ministry by producing the first biography of him in almost a century. I will argue that he deserves to be known and remembered; and in particular, I will argue that his method of expository preaching can serve as a helpful model for preachers today.

Consequently, my research will seek to answer the following question: why is it that Alexander Maclaren's life and ministry is worthy of recognition and remembrance, and what was it about his ministry that led to him being considered "the prince of expositors"?

II. Description of the planned research activity and its goals

Because Alexander Maclaren ministered in England (Southampton for twelve years and Manchester for forty-five years), it will be important to visit the places where he lived, the churches where he served, and the other places that played a significant role in his life and ministry. And because there has not been any full-length biographical work devoted to him since the early 1900s, it will be necessary to access the archives of several libraries in England where denominational newspapers, national and local newspapers, sermons, addresses, and personal letters are housed.

I have already been in contact with the archivists at these libraries to ensure that I will be able to schedule researcher appointments next summer. I have also been in contact with a church member at Union Chapel, the church in Manchester where Maclaren served for forty-five years. She has agreed to show me records and archives related to Maclaren that the church still has. I have also been in email correspondence with two respected Baptist historians in the U. K., Dr.

David Bebbington and Dr. Ian Randall, who have agreed to help me make further contacts to make the most of my time there.

Therefore, I have four goals for this research project. One, I plan to spend time in the places that held significance in the life and ministry of Alexander Maclaren so that I can see them for myself and can adequately describe them for readers. It is important to understand the places and spaces that were formative for him, and the only way to do that is to visit them and spend time there. Thus, I plan to visit Southampton (where he served for twelve years), Manchester (where he served for forty-five years), and the Scottish Highlands (where he spent time resting, recovering, and vacationing).

Two, I plan to spend time in the appropriate archives to access information related to Alexander Maclaren's life and ministry. Most of the articles, letters, and addresses connected to Maclaren are housed in three libraries—the Angus Library (Regent's Park, Oxford), the Bristol Baptist College Library, and the John Rylands Research Institute and Library. Thus, I will schedule researcher appointments at each of those libraries to access the Maclaren documents in their archives. I will also plan to spend time in the archives of the *Manchester Guardian*, the major newspaper in Manchester during Maclaren's day.

Three, I aim to understand what led to Alexander Maclaren being considered “the prince of expositors.” In exploring both the primary source material, as well as the secondary sources, I hope to be able to articulate a clear argument for the book that demonstrates why Maclaren was so widely respected and appreciated, and why he was hailed as “the prince of expositors.”

Four, I hope to revive interest in the ministry of Alexander Maclaren and encourage others to spend time reading and benefiting from his sermons. Lord willing, my research (and the biography it will lead to) will bring renewed attention to Maclaren and point people to the helpful resources that came from his pulpit and his pen.

III. Theoretical framework and brief examination of surrounding scholarly literature

Robert Caro, one of the finest journalists of our time and arguably the greatest biographer, discusses in his book, *Writing*, an often-overlooked aspect that should guide the researching and writing of biographies. He writes:

The importance of a sense of place is commonly accepted in the world of fiction; I wish that were also true about biography and history, about nonfiction in general, in fact . . .

By “a sense of place,” I mean helping the reader to visualize the physical setting in which a book's action is occurring: to see it clearly enough, in sufficient detail, so that he feels as if he himself were present while the action is occurring. The action thereby becomes more vivid, more real, to him, and the point the author is trying to make about the action, the significance he wants the reader to grasp, is therefore deepened as well. Because biography should not be just a collection of facts. Its base, the base of all history, of course *is* the facts, it's

always the facts, and you have to do your best to get them, and get them right. But once you have gotten as many of them as possible, it's also of real importance to enable the reader to see in his mind the places in which the book's facts are located. If a reader can visualize them for himself, then he may be able to understand things without the writer having to explain them; seeing something for yourself always makes you understand it better.¹

He goes on to say:

If the place is important enough in the subject's life—if he was raised in it, for example, or presided over it, or maneuvered within it—if the place played a significant role in shaping his feelings, drives and motivations, his self-confidence and his insecurities, then, by making the place real to the reader, the author will have deepened the reader's understanding of the subject, will have made the reader not just understand but empathize with him, feel with him.²

It is this “importance of a sense of place” that shapes the way I am approaching my research and informs how I will spend much of my time in the U. K. If I am going to succeed in “making the place real to the reader,” then I must spend time walking where Maclaren walked and standing where Maclaren stood so that I can help the reader “to visualize the physical setting in which a book's action is occurring.” This cannot be done well without physically being “on the ground” and visiting the places that played a prominent role in the life and ministry of Alexander Maclaren. Therefore, a large part of my research will consist of simply seeing such places with my own eyes.

At the same time, there are historical facts that need to be researched, and there is scholarship that needs to be reviewed and accessed. While there have been chapter-length and article-length treatments of Alexander Maclaren's life and ministry written in the last few decades, there have only been three biographies written on him and they were all published early in the previous century—one in 1902 (John Carlile), one in 1911 (E. T. McLaren), and one in 1930 (David Williamson). Sadly, they are all out of print and thus remain largely inaccessible for readers and preachers today. Still, my research will build on theirs and will use theirs as a starting point. In that sense, then, this project will be an effort in extending and engaging with existing scholarship.

Thankfully, I will not be starting from scratch when it comes to researching the surrounding literature. The reason why is that the invitation to write this biography stemmed from my own previous work on Maclaren. I contributed the chapter on Maclaren and his preaching to *Princes of the Baptist Pulpit*, a book project with B&H Academic for which I am also serving as the general editor. Therefore, I am already familiar with much of the scholarly literature that exists.

¹ Robert Caro, *Working* (New York: Vintage Books, 2019), 141.

² Caro, *Working*, 142.

References:

- Gaius Glenn Atkins, ed., *The Best of Alexander Maclaren* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1949)
- John Carlile, *Alexander Maclaren: The Man and His Message* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1902)
- Edwin Charles Dargan, *A History of Preaching*, vol. 2 (New York: Hodder & Stoughton, 1912)
- Clyde E. Fant, Jr., and William M. Pinson, Jr., *20 Centuries of Great Preaching: Volume 5, 1826-1912* (Waco, TX: Word, 1971)
- Ernest H. Jeffs, *Princes of the Modern Pulpit in England* (Nashville: Cokesbury Press, 1931)
- David L. Larsen, *The Company of the Preachers: A History of Biblical Preaching from the Old Testament to the Modern Era* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1998)
- Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture*, vols 1-17 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1944)
- E. T. McLaren, *Dr. McLaren of Manchester* (New York: Hodder & Stoughton, 1911)
- W. Robertson Nicoll, *Princes of the Church* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1921)
- Scott Pace, "Alexander Maclaren: The Art of Hermeneutics for the Practice of Homiletics" in *A Legacy of Preaching: Volume 2, Enlightenment to the Present Day*, Benjamin K. Forrest, Kevin L. King, Bill Curtis, Dwayne Milioni, eds. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2018)
- T. Harwood Pattison, *The History of Christian Preaching* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1903)
- Justin Wainscott, "Alexander Maclaren (1826-1910)," in *Princes of the Baptist Pulpit*, Justin Wainscott, ed. (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2027)
- Warren Wiersbe, *Walking with the Giants: A Minister's Guide to Good Reading and Great Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1976)
- David Williamson, *The Life of Alexander Maclaren: Preacher and Expositor* (London: James Clarke & Co., 1930)

IV. Connection to Ernest Boyer's Models of Scholarship

This project relates to Ernest Boyer's categories of the scholarship of discovery, integration, and application:

- *Scholarship of discovery*: The project will seek to discover previously unknown (and unpublished) aspects from the life and ministry of Alexander Maclaren.
- *Scholarship of integration*: This project brings together the disciplines of history, biblical studies, theology, and homiletics.
- *Scholarship of application*: The finished biography should be of interest to pastors and preachers, aiding them in their knowledge and practice.

4. **An essay (500 - 1000 words) describing how the Christian faith relates to your understanding of your discipline and how it relates to this scholarly endeavor**

Because I work in the discipline of theology, I understand the Christian faith not just to be *related* to my discipline but to be *fundamentally essential* to it. Of course, that is not to suggest that it isn't also essential to other disciplines. I certainly believe that it is. As C. S. Lewis remarked, "I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen: not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else."³ Thus, I believe that every discipline should be seen and understood in light of the Christian faith. But for a discipline like mine, the Christian faith is uniquely explicit. When properly taught (i.e., in accordance with an orthodox understanding of Holy Scripture), it does not take much effort for the Christian faith to be "integrated" to theology because it is already at the heart of it. It is the Christian faith itself that we give attention to and explore in my particular discipline.

Our Triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—has spoken and revealed himself through his Word. Therefore, we study his Word to know him better and to grow in the Christian faith, which is why we teach classes on the Bible, doctrine, and Christian spiritual formation in my discipline. God is not only the Creator of all, but he also actively and providentially sustains all things, carrying out his sovereign plans and purposes in the world. Therefore, we study history to see and learn of God's actions in and through the lives of others, which is why we teach classes on church history in my discipline. God equips and empowers his people to advance his kingdom in the world. Therefore, we seek to develop knowledge and skills to help us be more faithful servants of Christ, which is why we teach classes on ministry, evangelism, and missions in my discipline.

Put another way, the content of the Christian faith is what forms the theology of the School of *Theology* and Missions. And Christ's command to share the Christian faith is what fuels the missions aspect of the School of Theology and *Missions*. Apart from the Christian faith, then, we have no content to teach, and we have no motivation for our mission.

This particular scholarly endeavor—the researching and writing of a biography on Alexander Maclaren—relates to the Christian faith in a variety of ways. One, it seeks to be obedient to a clear command of Scripture, which calls for Christians to pay "honor to whom honor is owed" (Romans 13:7). Alexander Maclaren is someone who is owed honor because of his labors in preaching and teaching the Word of God, and this biography will strive to give him the honor that is long overdue. Two, it will focus on the life of a faithful servant of God, demonstrating the ways in which God worked in and through him (and can continue to do so through his writings, sermons, etc.). Three, because of Maclaren's ministry of the exposition of Scripture, much of the book will focus on different aspects of God's Word—its authority, its origin, its value, its depth, its beauty, its truthfulness, and its power. Four, because Maclaren was a Christian and a pastor, his life was centered on Christ and serving him, which means that much of the content of the book will focus on the same. Five, because it is a biography, it will discuss different ways in which the Christian faith impacts our lives—in terms of parenting, in terms of ministry, in terms of the church, in terms of suffering and adversity, and in terms of death and dying. Six, it will focus on someone who loved, lived for, and proclaimed Jesus Christ, which should help readers want to do the same.

³ C. S. Lewis, "They Asked for a Paper," in *Is Theology Poetry?* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1962), 164-165.

5. A time frame for the completion and dissemination of the project

Fall 2025/Spring 2026 – Continue initial phases of research, purchase books, develop a general outline for the biography, confirm research appointments with the archivists at the Angus Library, Bristol Baptist College Library, and John Rylands Library, confirm research appointment with Union Chapel in Manchester, and book flights and accommodations.

Summer 2026 – Travel to the U. K. to visit London, Oxford, Bristol, Southampton, Manchester, and the Scottish Highlands.

Fall 2026–Spring 2028 – Write the biography and submit the finished manuscript to Courier Press for publication.

6. A brief budget

Airfare	\$2,000
Electronic Travel Authorization	\$15
Lodging	\$1,500
Public Transportation	\$250
Meals	\$550
Books	\$100
<u>Scans from archives</u>	<u>\$85</u>
Total	\$4,500

7. A current *curriculum vitae*

See below.

8. Two letters of recommendation

Letters of recommendation have been solicited from the following:

Dr. Timothy George, Research Professor and Founding Dean, Beeson Divinity School

Dr. Hal Poe, Charles Colson Professor of Faith and Culture, School of Theology and Missions, Union University

9. Letter of support

A letter of support has been solicited from my dean (as the Associate Dean, I serve as the department chair):

Dr. Ray Van Neste, Dean of the School of Theology and Missions