

August 8, 2013

Dear Matthew,

Thanks so much for getting this website of Raymond Brown's contribution up; I believe it will honor his work and memory. As we think of the ways Brown's work has contributed to our lives, each of us has our stories to tell, whether it be as a factor of reading his works or engaging him personally. I hope that others will share their stories; here are some of mine.

As I think of Raymond Brown's contribution to biblical studies, I doubt there are any whose work is more significant in the 20th century. If I may quote my opening paragraph in my *RBL* review of *Life in Abundance*, here's the fuller basis for my judgment (http://www.bookreviews.org/pdf/4874_5078.pdf):

“The untimely death of Father Raymond Brown in 1998 was a tremendous loss to ecumenism, to New Testament studies, and especially to Johannine scholarship. A very small handful of biblical scholars in the modern era will have written as many the 47 books, 200 articles, and 108 substantive reviews that Brown wrote (as outlined helpfully in a complete bibliography prepared by Ronald Witherup and Michael L. Barré, pp. 259-89), but I cannot think of a single American New Testament scholar whose work has been more helpful, measured, and significant than Brown's. Credit Brown's trail-blazing impact with other first-rate Catholic scholars joining the ranks of critical biblical scholarship, and a sober estimation of Brown's importance goes even higher. As if his 2,000-plus page commentaries on the Anchor Bible Commentaries on the Gospel and Epistles of John weren't enough, his 2,400-plus page treatments of the birth and death of the Messiah, his 900-page introduction to the New Testament, and his co-editing of the 2,000-plus page *New Jerome Biblical Commentary* and *Bible Handbook* bespeak the substantive character and scope of his contribution. For these reasons a conference in his honor is well deserved, and both the conference and the collected essays have well lived up to their billing.”

All who have been influenced by Brown's work have their own stories to tell, and many of these are recorded in the *Life in Abundance* collection. My own story begins with reading his two-volume commentary on John for my seminary class on John at the Earlham School of Religion, taught by Alan Kolp, who had recently completed his Harvard PhD under Helmut Koester and George MacRae. Building on the works of Brown and others, I wrote a term paper on the functions of “belief” in the Gospel of John, which I later revised as a stand-alone pamphlet (http://www.pendlehill.org/bookstore?page=shop.product_details&flypage=flypage.tpl&product_id=5974&category_id=21&keyword=paul+anderson : *Navigating the Living Waters of the Gospel of John*, Wallingford, PA: Pendle Hill Press, 2000).

As time came for doctoral studies considerations, it was clear to me that I wanted to pursue either the Kingdom of God in the Synoptics or Johannine Christology as important subjects, and working with John Riches at the University of Glasgow would allow developments in either direction. While preparing to go to Scotland, Raymond Brown spoke in Portland, Oregon, where I was serving at the time in pastoral ministry, and by then (in the early 1980's) he was working

on *The Churches the Apostles Left Behind*. His work on *The Community of the Beloved Disciple* was also a favorite of mine, so thinking about the larger Johannine situation and aspects of leadership in the New Testament era became a personal interest in addition to exegetical issues. Tracking independently with Brown's work on ecumenism, I later served for two terms on the Faith and Order Commission of the National Council of Churches, contributing a substantive response to Pope John Paul II's encyclical, *Ut Unum Sint* (1995), in response to Cardinal Kasper's general invitation to find a new way forward in Christian unity, which was published in *One in Christ* in 2005, and which I gave personally to Cardinal Kasper and Pope Benedict XVI in the Vatican the next year (<http://www.georgefox.edu/discernment/petrine.pdf>). This research also coincided with two Lilly grants on effective church leadership I'd received (2004-2009), which built upon strength-weakness analyses of Matthean and Johannine (and other NT) ecclesiologies, as developed within several historic Christian traditions. I think Ray would have concurred with attempts at practical applications of biblical models of leadership—including understandings of what works and what doesn't.

Back to Johannine studies; having completed my doctoral research at Glasgow and ready to write up my thesis, I was invited to attend the 1987 SNTS meetings in Göttingen as a guest of Otto Betz, with whom I'd studied in Tübingen that summer. Raymond Brown gave the presidential address, and that evening he was generous enough to take a walk around the old city, allowing me to probe his understanding on a variety of issues that would be central to my approach to John's riddles. He agreed with my analysis of Bultmann's and others' works, that while John was independent of the Synoptics, evidence for alien sources underlying John seemed weak. He also concurred that John 6 seemed to be a unity, with implications for understanding the rest of the Gospel's composition, including some "interfluence" between the pre-Markan and early Johannine traditions. On the Johannine situation, he agreed that there were several partners in dialogue over several decades, and that the evangelist and later editors were likely working on more than one front. He made me think about the eucharistic overtones of John 6 while being open to my pushing back on the informality of language and their martyrological associations. Of all the leading Johannine scholars I interviewed that week, he was the only one that caused me to revise a bit my emerging overall Johannine theory. Other developments came later.

After thanking Martin Hengel for his hospitality also in Tübingen, he invited my work on John's Christology for consideration in the WUNT II series, and happily, it was accepted. As I prepared the work for publication, Ray continued to be helpful in my developing of my paradigms. He approved of my bi-optic understanding of John and Mark, and he liked the three levels of dialogue (intratraditional, intertraditional, and reader-response dialogues) I was developing, as well as my uses of faith-development models for understanding evangelists' thinking (chs. 7-10). He also was willing to receive my introduction of the Roman imperial presence as a formative factor in the Johannine situation—a thesis confirmed by Richard Cassidy's work, and later by that of Warren Carter and Tom Thatcher. He also liked my surfacing of a hitherto overlooked clue to John's apostolic authorship, which I included as the last of eight appendixes at the end of the book. He encouraged me to substitute the word "apostle" for the weaker term, "disciple," with reference to John's being associated with a distinctly Johannine phrase in Acts 4:19-20 (cf. 1 Jn. 1:3, etc.), and I was making some headway, I think, in convincing him that Luke's departures from Mark and siding with John suggested the Johannine tradition's being one of Luke's sources (Lk. 1:2), following Cribbs rather than Bailey. When the time for publication

came, Ray was willing to contribute an endorsement for the back of the book, and along with statements by C.K. Barrett, Craig Koester, and Moody Smith, the book received a strong launching.

The third printing of *The Christology of the Fourth Gospel* (Cascade Books, 2010) is dedicated to Raymond Brown, and in the new introduction I describe being called in to the house from working in the yard one Sunday evening by my five-year-old daughter, Della: “Dad, it’s ‘Way Bwown’ on the phone for you!” Needless to say, I rushed in and was delighted to hear his first words as he had finished his blurb: “Congratulations; first rate! I agree with 85% of what you say.” As we discussed a variety of issues, he was willing to be part of a review at the Orlando SBL meetings. Unfortunately, he died that August—15 years ago, today, and we never got a chance to work on that remaining 15%. So, two scholars were willing to stand in for Ray (Alan Culpepper and Graham Stanton—accompanying Bob Kysar, Sandra Schneiders, and Alan Padgett; see *RBL* 1, 1999, pp. 38-72), which allowed for a very engaging review session. Still, Ray Brown’s voice was missed in that discussion, and it has been missed in biblical studies and the broader Christian movement ever since. Of course, his high estimation of John’s being an independent Jesus tradition influenced my second book, *The Fourth Gospel and the Quest for Jesus* (T&T Clark, 2006), and I build on many of his views in my overall theory addressing *The Riddles of the Fourth Gospel* (Fortress, 2011).

As I think of Raymond Brown’s legacy and how much we all stand in debt to his work, I’m impressed at several things: a) the rigor and fairness with which he considered and evaluated the views of scholars internationally and intergenerationally—sympathetically yet analytically, serving the field well in pointing ways forward where possible and noting dead ends when apparent; b) his generosity in helping scholars on all levels of development, including general audiences, understand and address important biblical issues; c) his devotion to the church and society at large, in seeking to further the truth, building on the strongest of biblical scholarship while at the same time refusing to be either enamored with the latest fad or influenced by longstanding scholarly positions, despite their erudition and academic hegemony; d) his willingness to employ a variety of disciplines and considerations, including innovative ones, in seeking to address long-standing critical problems; e) the ecumenical and global reach of his work. It is no wonder that in his essay within the *Life in Abundance* volume, Moody Smith refers to Brown as “the most influential Protestant exegete in the latter part of the twentieth century”—indeed, a compelling witness to genuine catholicity and the power of authentic biblical interpretation.

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PS As a continuing tribute to Brown’s good work, and on behalf of the John, Jesus, and History Project (itself building on the contributions of Brown and others), I’d like to invite any and all interested to join us for the conference celebrating the magna opera of C.H. Dodd (celebrating the 60th and 50th anniversaries of *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* and *Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel*), as well as the contributions of Raymond Brown: “John, Jesus,

and History: Engaging the Legacies of C.H. Dodd and Raymond E. Brown,” November 20-22 (<http://johnjesus2013.eventbrite.com/>). This conference will celebrate the book of collected essays, gathered by Tom Thatcher and Catrin Williams, *Engaging with C.H. Dodd on the Gospel of John: Sixty Years of Tradition and Interpretation* (Cambridge University Press, September 2013). I’d also like to invite folks to attend a conference on Jesus, Christology, and the Gospels at the Vatican, October 24-26 (<http://www.pul.it/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/Depliant-Gospels-ENG.pdf>). If Ray were alive and well today, he’d be there for sure, connecting the scholarship of the academy with the life of the church and society beyond.