

When I published my commentary on *First Corinthians* in the *Sacra Pagina* series in 1999, I dedicated it to “Raymond E. Brown, S.S. Priest, Scholar, Friend.” The dedication was appropriate, not only because all of the epithets were so true but also because the Lord had taken from among us one of the servants of his Word just a few months previously. And if that were not enough, the truly memorable piece of my last conversation, via a trans-continental telephone connection, with Ray concerned the identity of the person or persons who delivered the letter to its recipients. At the time, Ray was working on his magnificent *Introduction to the New Testament*.

Long a devotee of his scholarship, I first heard him when he addressed a general session of the NCEA during its annual meeting back in the late sixties or early seventies. Two of the things that he said to that huge audience impressed me at the time and have remained with me until this day. One of them was the opposition that he received from the religious right, opposition that clearly pained him. Only later, when I got to know him better did I come to appreciate that any “daring” view that he published was despite himself. He was truly a conservative at heart. His scholarship arose from his conservatism, his desire to maintain and explain our scriptural heritage. My other memory of that address is a bit of trivia, Ray’s offhand remarks that although most religious sisters and priests are Democrats, most bishops are Republican.

I really got to know Ray in 1976. Back then, I was not only a faculty member of the School of Theology at the University of Leuven but also the rector of the university’s American College of Louvain. The university is the oldest extant Catholic university but also one whose School of Theology has sought international outreach since 1431, just six years after the university was founded. Given the circumstances, I thought that it would be fitting were the university to confer an honorary doctorate on an American theologian as our nation celebrated its bicentennial. I made the proposal and suggested that Ray be the designated honoree. Not only was he a distinguished American biblical scholar but he was also an occasional participant in the university’s annual Colloquium biblicum lovaniense. The faculty agreed with my proposal and, after it made its way through the university’s bureaucratic labyrinth, Ray was honored amid due solemnity with the title of doctor *honoris causa* at the conclusion of the 1975-76 academic year.

The days that he spent with us at the American College gave me an extraordinary opportunity to get to know him even more. Our time together was capped off by a long transatlantic trip home on July 4, 1976. It was then that I learned about the source of Ray’s love for the New Testament. As a seminarian of the diocese of Saint Augustine, at the time the only diocese in Florida, Ray had been sent to Rome’s North American College to study theology. Bishop Hurley, the bishop of the diocese, had been a papal diplomat. When the Korean War broke out, the wary bishop called Ray back home after just one year in Rome. Apparently the bishop was fearful lest increasing hostilities might leave Ray stranded, perhaps trapped, in Europe.

At the time, the Roman curriculum offered only introductory courses in the first year of study. The curriculum at St. Mary’s Seminary in Baltimore, to which Ray was next sent, had an

integrated curriculum. So had to make up the first year scripture courses that he had missed because he had been in Rome. Ray's first year of study at St. Mary's basically consisted of both first and second year scripture courses. All of us know the rest of the story. He continued to study scripture for the rest of his life.

The long plane trip afforded time for a long conversation. We conversed about *exegetica* but also about *personalia*. It was then that Ray told me of his interest in the Mormon Temple, Mormonism, and the *Book of Mormon*. A beach lover myself, I was delighted to learn that Ray liked to spend his winter break in the Caribbean. I learned about his frustration with seminary students who were more interested in finishing the course of studies than they were in probing the Word of God. There was so much more to the man that I had realized. A few years later, I asked Ray to write the introduction to my *Introduction to the New Testament*. Ray declined to do so, telling me that he was often asked to write such a piece. He didn't have time to answer all the requests and did not want to discriminate among his friends and acquaintances. Ray did, however, suggest John Meier who graciously agreed to write the piece.

Somewhat reluctantly I left Leuven in 1993 to become dean of the School of Religious Studies at The Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C. Annually the School honored a distinguished America scholar with the Johannes Quasten Medal of Excellence in Scholarship and Leadership in Religious Studies. The medal is named after the great patristic scholar who had once been a member of the CUA faculty. As dean, I proposed to our faculty that the medal for 1994-95 should be presented to Ray Brown. The previous year, we had honored Joseph Fitzmyer, a truly deserving scholar but one of our own. As I had been almost twenty years earlier, I was fortunate that the faculty agreed to my proposal.

Ray agreed to accept the Quasten medal and came to the CUA campus in Washington where he delivered the medalist's lecture and received the award, a medal duly draped around his neck. Once again, I had some one-on-one time with Ray. What stands out most in my mind about his visit was that he was so quick to say yes when I asked him to meet informally with our doctoral students in scripture the day after the festivities. The notice was extremely short but about twenty doctoral students gathered with an informally attired Ray Brown—he was wearing an old sweater—to discuss any number of issues related to the scriptures. Such was the esteem in which he was held. Such was the down-to-earthness of the man.

After Ray's untimely death in 1998, a wing of the Knott library at St. Mary's Seminary and University was dedicated to hold his collected papers and volumes from his personal library. The dedication ceremonies included a Johannine seminar in his honor. There were but five items in the display cases near the collection of his papers and books. Among the five were the shoulder piece that serves as a token of the Louvain doctorate and his Quasten medal. I had lost a friend and the church had lost a great scholar but I was pleased that I had been instrumental in his being honored by two prestigious universities, one at home and one abroad.

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