

Raymond E. Brown, S.S.: Recollections by William R. Telford (Visiting Fellow, St John's College, Durham University)

The first time I encountered the name of Raymond E. Brown was when I was studying for my Bachelor of Divinity degree at Trinity College, Glasgow University, in the period 1968-71. The British edition of *The Jerome Biblical Commentary*, which he edited along with Joseph A. Fitzmyer and Roland E. Murphy, had appeared in 1969 and the two volumes of his magisterial Anchor Bible commentary on *The Gospel According to John* in 1971. Both proved an invaluable resource for aspiring theological students as well as budding New Testament scholars like myself.

I met Ray in person one year later when, as Scots Fellow, I went on from Trinity to spend a year pursuing a Master of Sacred Theology degree at Union Theological Seminary, New York City (1971-72). Ray had just moved to NYC to take up a joint professorship at both the Jesuit Woodstock College and UTS, and I took one of his courses, The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha (NT 272) in the Spring Semester, 1972. I still have all the excellent notes and handouts he gave out for that most stimulating course, along with the helpful, generous and encouraging comments he made on the short paper and exam that I did for him, and which were the course requirements for Woodstock and UTS seminarians. I remember the first day of class, when we met 'Father Brown' and recollect being struck with the directness of his approach, his relaxed teaching style, that distinctive Brooklyn accent, and the impressive command he had over the vast literature that it was his mission to make us familiar with. He was free, too, with his time, and I recall visiting him in his flat at Union that same semester. There was great excitement at that time when fragments of the New Testament were allegedly discovered at Qumran, particularly José O'Callaghan's putative identification of Qumran cave fragment 7Q5 with Mark 6:52-53. I raised the matter with him, and, with customary enthusiasm, he pulled down a volume from his shelves (which he later lent to me), showed me a photograph of the fragment, with its ten Greek letters on four lines (the only full Greek word discernible on which was καὶ (and)), and patiently reviewed the arguments for and against O'Callaghan's attribution. In such small ways, and with such small kindnesses, do great teachers inspire students!

My further contacts with Ray came about through the Society for New Testament Studies (Studiorum Novi Testamenti Societas, or SNTS), of which I was Assistant Secretary (1993-95) and General Secretary (1996-2005). Ray was a regular participant in our annual week-long meetings, which take place in the summer, principally, but not exclusively, in European or North American University-based venues. SNTS not only offers its members an excellent academic programme (of main papers, short papers and seminars) but a social programme that allows scholars (and their partners or spouses) to meet together more informally and share excursions and other events. Ray was President of the Society in 1986 when it met in Atlanta, Georgia. The year before, the Society had met in Trondheim, Norway, in the second half of August, and I remember one particular excursion that we all made together to the copper-mining town of Røros, a UNESCO World Heritage site. As the coach set off, my wife, Andrena, and I found ourselves sitting in front of Ray and the distinguished German scholar, Professor Karl Kertelge, from Münster. Both were engaged in heated discussion. I pointed this out to Andrena, and curious to know what great theological topic or complex exegetical issue was taxing them, we somewhat

naughtily leaned against the gap in the coach seats to hear what they were debating. It turned out to be the merits of the micro-wave ovens that they had recently purchased ('they are great for heating ready-made meals'... 'und wunderbar auch für Bratkartoffeln')!

Another of my abiding memories of him is in connection with the Pre-Conference Tour of Andalusia (July 22-27, 1992) when he joined Andrena and I and a group of fellow SNTS members and spouses in a joint tour of the cities of Cordoba, Seville, Malaga, Granada and Toledo immediately prior to the society's annual meeting in Madrid (under Joseph Fitzmyer's Presidency). Ray was everything one could ask for in a travelling companion—interested, involved and energetic by day and sociable, witty and conversational in the evening. I particularly recollect, for example, our visit to Seville, and to the Universal Exposition (Expo '92)—a photograph of Ray, Andrena and Marty (Soards) which I took there is attached—, our getting lost in the city on a relaxed after-dinner walk with Ray and Marty when all of us had different ideas of how we should return to the hotel (how like New Testament scholars!) and the boyish delight Ray took in joining me in commandeering cakes and champagne from the Lord Mayor's reception in Madrid for our late evening Andalusian trip reunion—and the resultant hilarity.

But Ray also shone with regard to his contribution to SNTS's academic programme. He gave main papers in 1966 (Cambridge) and 1975 (Aberdeen)—which was the first SNTS meeting I attended as a Cambridge postgraduate, the guest of my supervisor Ernst Bammel—as well as a well-received Presidential Address in 1986 (Atlanta). He also contributed to the society's seminars. As co-chair (with Professor Hans Klein or Sibiu, Romania) of the 'Pre-Synoptic Traditions' seminar (1991-94), I invited Ray to give a paper on the Markan & Johannine Passion Narratives, and he readily accepted, presenting the paper in Chicago (1993). His respondent was Professor Frans Neirynck, and what a thrill it was to witness the debate between these two Gospel giants, the one championing the independence of John vis-à-vis the Synoptics, the other committed to the opposite position!

Ray's death in August, 1998 left his many friends and admirers shocked and deeply saddened. From my early student days in Glasgow, New York City and Cambridge, he has been a great inspiration. In supervising students or lecturing, whether at Oxford, Newcastle or Durham, I have been influenced by his work, and owe a great debt, as have all of us, to his many fine books, with their lucid, balanced and challenging scholarship (*The Birth of the Messiah*, 1977; *The Community of the Beloved Disciple*, 1979; *The Death of the Messiah*, 1995; *Introduction to the New Testament*, 1997, etc.). Courses that I have taught on the Gospel of John or the Johannine Literature have been indebted to his *The Community of the Beloved Disciple* (1979) and *The Epistles of John* (1983) as well as to his splendid Anchor Bible commentary on John, and I have always made sure that my students have benefited, as I did, from his erudition. What better summary can there be of the exegetical problems presented by the birth and infancy narratives than that supplied in the introduction to *The Birth of the Messiah* (1977, pp. 25-38)? I am grateful to Matthew Montonini for inviting me to provide these few reminiscences for they have served to bring him back to some extent for me. Raymond E. Brown should not be forgotten, and both as a man and a scholar, he is sorely missed.