

REVIEWS

RISEN FROM THE DEAD by Henry Wansbrough. *St Paul Publications, Slough, 1978* pp. 107 £2.

Although not received by us for review, this book turned out to be well worth the price, and is warmly recommended to readers: a case, for once, of a reviewer's putting money where his mouth is. The author, who is a monk of Ampleforth, provides the most complete historical and theological discussion of the New Testament evidence about the resurrection of Christ which any English Catholic scholar has so far attempted. Clear and compact, thoroughly aware of modern exegetical methods and shirking none of the difficulties, the book certainly fills a gap. It is published with the *imprimatur* of an English diocese.

Following what is becoming standard practice among scholars, the author first shows from fragments embedded in Paul's writings that the idea of Christ's being raised from the dead was originally distinct from, though related to, and indeed somewhat overshadowed by, belief in his exaltation to the right hand of God and thus in his sharing in God's authority and rule. Throughout Paul's own theology, it is then shown, the resurrection remains unthinkable apart from Christ's Lordship, his return, the judgment, and the salvation of those who believe. The faith that God raised him from the dead comes out in the confession, "Jesus is Lord" (Romans 10: 9). Paul's interest centres always in the present sovereignty of Christ and its effects on his people.

As regards the gospels, by the time that Mark came to write the datum of the empty tomb was a fact that required only to be interpreted. The young man in white was the stock convention to convey the message that the empty tomb demonstrated the intervention of God. Matthew and Luke, and then John, elaborated the narrative to bring out what they saw to be the

implications. But, according to Wansbrough (page 71), "the only narrative about the resurrection for which the evangelists had a solid basis of detailed fact was the story of the discovery of the empty tomb". The representation of Christ in majesty with which Matthew concludes is "clearly the composition of the evangelist himself . . . such that it would be superfluous to postulate any factual source" (page 58). Luke's story of the disciples on the road to Emmaus "is thoroughly Lukan in style, thought and vocabulary, betraying no element which could not have originated with him" (page 64). Luke copied Matthew's picture of Christ's appearance to the Eleven but sited it in Jerusalem "for his own theological purposes" (page 72), and insisted far more on the physical reality of the body "because Luke, unlike Matthew, was writing in a hellenistic environment" (page 73). The Jews could not have conceived any other form of resurrection on the last day or of exaltation to the right hand of God than a bodily one in which the whole physical person was involved. Luke, and then John, insist that the risen Lord is transfigured, no doubt like St Paul's "spiritual body" (I Cor. 15); but those who first believed that Jesus was raised from the dead could not but have believed in real physical resurrection.

So far as John is concerned, "the contribution of the Fourth Gospel to the resurrection narratives is more in the field of theology and interpretation than in factual reminiscence" (page 88). Henry Wansbrough singles out John's stress on the need for the qualities of the beloved disciple in order to see the risen Christ. But here, in what is generally regarded as by far the latest and most maturely reflective gospel, the wheel comes full circle, for the emphasis, finally is, as in St Paul, upon the

present sovereignty of the risen Christ in his Church. The crucifixion and the resurrection are one and the same "hour", in which the one who is lifted up on the cross is lifted up to divine glory.

Henry Wansbrough separates himself completely from the whole Bultmannian approach, and "the characteristically Lutheran position that the more our faith is a leap in the dark, and the less evidence there is to make it reasonable, the higher is the quality of that faith" (page 97). As he says, there is a great cleavage between those who hold that the resurrection is an expression of an already existing faith, and those who say it is the cause. He is firmly among the latter. Those, like Bultmann and Marxsen, who lay all the stress on pure faith, and make resurrection language the product of a faith that was already restored (or perhaps never really abandoned) in the crucified one, come very close to eliminating the resurrection as any kind of event independent of subjective consciousness. There is no need to fall into the opposite trap of thinking in terms of meeting a miraculously resuscitated corpse. The Easter faith was caused by an event that imposed itself on the disciples as intelligible only in familiar apocalyptic language as the dawn of the expected general resur-

rection: Christ, the first fruits of the harvest of the dead (1 Corinthians 15:20).

While insisting on the fact of the empty tomb, Henry Wansbrough finds no particular theological problem that would arise if the flesh and bones had in fact decayed as ours will do (page 103). If he means that God could have raised Jesus as it is promised that we are to be raised that is fair enough. But then the tomb would not have been empty. On the other hand, it is surely correct, against those who say that if the resurrection of Jesus is the prototype for our resurrection it is essential that his body did corrupt for ours certainly will, to remark that, since the medical criterion of death is irreversible damage to the brain-cells, by which their structure corrupts within two minutes of the cessation of the flow of blood to the brain, the body of Jesus did indeed "see corruption". Anything else would have been only suspended animation. But such metaphysical questions lie beyond the scope of this book. Within its prescribed limits—"to follow out the doctrine of the resurrection as it develops in the New Testament" (page 7) —this is a splendid essay: critical, serene, and concise.

FERGUS KERR O.P.

LOVE'S ENDEAVOUR, LOVE'S EXPENSE by W. H. Vanstone. DLT. 1977. pp. xiii + 120 £2.95.

This is a powerfully and passionately argued exercise in theology. Starting with a felt conviction that the Church is important (the author is a parson and the son of a parson), and that this remains true even when the church is not in any important way meeting people's urgent social or economic needs (the church is not a "church of the gaps"), Vanstone takes us on a voyage of discovery which was plainly exciting and convincing for him, and his conviction, served well by an excellent prose style, cannot fail to impress the reader that something worthwhile is going on. The model which dominates the whole book is that of creative devotion. The artist who is involved in what he is creating is at the mercy of his own creation; his whole enterprise is vulnerable, and may go wrong: the test of his creativity is his ability to redeem the unforeseen occurrences which might well destroy the whole

work—the rash stroke of the paintbrush, the awkward consistency of a piece of marble. But it is precisely the artist's involvement in what he is making that gives it value, at least for him. It is a work of love.

This leads Vanstone into a more general discussion of "the phenomenology of love", personal as well as creative, in which he singles out three marks of authenticity—or rather, three symptoms of inauthenticity, which enable us to surmise, indistinctly, what true love must be. These are: limitation (the difference between kindness and love is that kindness is specific and defined, but love must set no limit to what will be given, endured or done); control or possession (the activity of love is precarious, it is shown up as false if it seeks to *secure* its own success); and detachment (love is revealed in the vulnerability of the lover to the object of his love).