

Reviews

BIBLICAL REFLECTIONS ON CRISES FACING THE CHURCH, by Raymond Brown, S.S. Darton, Longman & Todd, London, 1975 118 pp. £1.70

Among Roman Catholic New Testament scholars of the past two decades, Raymond Brown must rank among the forefront, both for his encyclopaedic ability to gather and analyse all possible data in a given question, and also the much rarer quality of being able to present such data duly processed in a most readable form for specialist and non-specialist alike. But within the past few years, Fr. Brown's own personal career has entered upon a new phase, beginning with his appointment as Professor of Biblical Studies at Union Theological Seminary, New York, the first professorship ever given in that Protestant Seminary to a Catholic. And this has meant quite naturally that he has entered the field of ecumenical dialogue at the highest level, also serving on a team of Lutheran and Catholic biblical experts which investigated the question of the papal primacy, Brown himself joining the symposium *Peter in the New Testament* (reviewed in *New Blackfriars*, January 1975) as the literary end-result of this investigation.

However, while entering the ecumenical field, Brown has at the same time stepped into a minefield of controversy, not so much from his Protestant colleagues as from the Catholic "right-wing" press, who attack both his flirting with "heretics" and, perhaps more seriously, his alleged "modernist" approach to biblical studies. To the British, who live in a relatively peaceful (some would even say somnolent) ecclesiastical environment, it is difficult to appreciate the virulence of this polemic, except to multiply in imagination our own right-wing fringe about ten times in terms of people and finance, and to imagine that they had gained control of *The Universe*. Quite a thought.

I give this biographical background, because Brown's collection of lectures here reviewed reflect very much this double perspective of ecumenism and controversy. The bulk of the book consists of the Hoover Lectures on Christian Unity deliv-

ered in Chicago, while the first lecture is addressed to the National Catholic Educational Association at New Orleans and is entitled "The Current Crisis in Theology as it Affects the Teaching of Catholic Doctrine"—an explosive subject on both sides of the Atlantic, if ever there was one. Thus such subjects, as to be expected, are covered, as *Women and the Priesthood*, *Peter and the Papacy*, *the Role of Mary*, and *Gospel Christology*, subjects which pose questions both for New Testament scholarship, and for Catholic and Protestant theology today.

But is Brown as happy in his new role as in his earlier one of straight New Testament scholar? One cannot help feeling that there is a kind of unease in his writing in these lectures, reflecting perhaps the fear of the extremist ogre plucking at his elbow while he is delivering his lectures to audiences of various denominations including his own. One cannot help feeling also that the author has allowed his style to become somewhat cramped in the face of these new pressures, because so little is clarified in any of these lectures.

First of all, in trying to give as many possible lines of thought in a given question, Brown makes one impatient for his own view, and particularly for his view as a biblical scholar. For example, in giving a brilliant analysis of the various types of New Testament Christologies, from liberal to conservative, the author does not give his own chosen Christology, but asks his readers "to determine in which column you belong"; similarly, when discussing the ordination of women to the priesthood, we are again not told the writer's view as to whether such an innovation is possible within Catholic tradition, but are left to swim for ourselves. Such fence-sitting may at first sight be good from an ecumenical viewpoint, since it attempts to present the viable alternatives; but, in the end, does it not rather detract from the value of Brown's contribution, and even from the ecumenical goal itself, since we

are not being guided by his scholarly judgment? Again, both to silence his right-wing adversaries and to open further theological dialogue, surely an ecumenical study such as this might well have grasped the nettle of Vatican II's assertion of the 'historical' character of the four Gospels, which has so many implications when we discuss biblical and theological matters?

There is much that is good in this book, particularly in the article on the Papacy in the modern world, and in the value of

Mary as *symbol*, which represent the best in biblical studies as applied to ecumenism. But, at the end, one was looking forward very much to Raymond Brown's finishing his projected long commentary on the Infancy Narratives, because there, in biblical commentary, he is indisputably a master; here, in ecumenical dialogue, as no doubt he would be the first to admit, he joins the rest of us as very much an apprentice.

JOHN M. REDFORD

THE RELEVANCE OF NATURAL SCIENCE TO THEOLOGY, by William H. Austin.
The Macmillan Press Ltd. London and Basingstoke, 1976. 132 pp. £7.95

This book sets out the ways that natural science could conceivably affect theology, and illustrates them by discussing the works of a number of contemporary and recent philosophers of religion. In a field where precision and clarity are often lacking, this systematic discussion is welcome.

The specific question tackled is: 'In what ways (if any) is it in order for theologians, in doing their theological work, to take account of the discoveries and theories of natural science?' The author lists the possible types of relevance:

1. *Direct Relevance.* 'A set S of scientific statements bears directly on a theological doctrine d if d or its negation can be inferred from S.'
2. *Quasi-direct Relevance.* 'A situation in which theologians and scientists offer alternative, and apparently competing, explanations of the same data.'
3. *Indirect Relevance:*
 - (a) *By way of Metaphysics.* This possibility 'arises if metaphysics is understood as a discipline which attempts to provide a conceptual scheme in terms of which the leading results of every special discipline can be expressed.'
 - (b) *By way of Methodology.* 'If the methodology employed by the theologian is conceived by analogy with the methods of natural science, then we have another indirect way in which science bears on the theologian's work.'
 - (c) *Heuristically.* Science may be heuristically suggestive for theologians.

There are also several types of arguments for the irrelevance of science to theology:

1. *Instrumentalist.* These deny that scientific or religious statements make assertions about what is the case.

2. *Two-realm.* These admit that both scientific and religious statements are assertions, but they are said to be about such entirely different things that they can neither support nor conflict with each other.

In the following chapters the arguments for irrelevance are discussed in detail. The instrumentalist argument is perhaps the oldest, going back to Bellarmine, who suggested that astronomical theories cannot bear on theology because they are merely devices for the classification and prediction of phenomena, not assertions about real causes. Duhem developed this argument, but made significant concessions to realism, allowing scientific statements to bear directly on theology except for those of theoretical physics, and even these are allowed indirect relevance by way of metaphysics.

There are also instrumentalist theories of theology. Thus Braithwaite considers religious discourse as just a psychological aid to a way of life, and W.T Stace treats doctrines as instruments for the evocation of mystical experiences. Austin shows that these are both unreasonable interpretations of religious belief, and that even if they were correct they would still leave open an important way in which science would bear on the work of the theologian.

Two-realms arguments take many forms. Crude versions that, for example, assign the material to science and the spiritual to theology break down because religious doctrine includes beliefs about the relation between God and the physical world. More sophisticated theories assign different aspects of reality to science and theology. Among these Austin considers