

## **RAYMOND E. BROWN AND THE CATHOLIC BIBLICAL RENEWAL**

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Raymond E. Brown distinguished himself as one of the most renowned personality, academic and priest of the twentieth century in the field of biblical scholarship and in doctrinal and pastoral matters. His published works have inspired and stirred scholars of varying degrees and aspiration to thoughts and actions. They still produce students and scholars who believe in their onions and are confident to engage the Bible in productive scholarly dimensions. Little wonder Craig R. Koester of Luther Seminary asserts that “Raymond E. Brown was an extraordinary human being whose influence in biblical studies and the church has been profound”. Propelled by the charismatic power of this figure, Donald Senior published this Brown’s biography for the academia and history: a concise chronicle of his life, time, academic works and memories. Senior divided this book into nine chapters covering the history of his provenance and family, entrance into biblical scholarship and critical interpretation of the Bible with the historico-critical method which produced his signature exegetical works<sup>i</sup>. Senior further demonstrated how Brown’s works promoted ecumenical spirit and interfaith relations between the Catholic church and other Christian sects and faiths, and how they helped to clarify and simplify complex doctrinal issues for easy comprehension and appreciation by all and sundry<sup>ii</sup>.

This book highlights that Brown believed in the Bible and its science of historico-critical exegesis in nine chapters. Each of the chapters explores and underscores that he vigorously explicated and promoted the relevance of this method through his lectures and publications such as “The Birth and Death of the Messiah<sup>iii</sup>”, “Introduction to the New Testament”, “New Testament Essays”, “An introduction to the Gospel of John”, “A

Commentary on the Gospel of John”, “An introduction to New Testament Christology”<sup>iv</sup>, just to mention a few of his over three hundred publications. In these works, Brown educated humanity on inspiration and revelation, the quest for historical Jesus and the implications of ecumenical relations and interactions. The works which these nine chapters relate with have remained classic and academic biblical literatures that drove Brown to pursue ecumenical interactive activities which made him to champion Catholic-Jewish relations. And Brown’s years of outstanding and immaculate lecturing endeavour at undergraduate and postgraduate levels produced respected and noble scholars for the church and humanity. He was explicit in explicating the significance of the literal and wider sense of biblical understand and incarnational approach<sup>v</sup>.

Employing this method, the book underscores that Brown immensely further contributed to explaining the church’s teachings on complex doctrinal debates on Virginal Conception, the bodily resurrection of Jesus, sinlessness and divine sonship of Jesus and the authentic humanity of Jesus. Brown surmises that the authentic humanity of Jesus seems perhaps less aligned with the doctrine of the virginal conception but not contradictory. He also added that though the doctrine of Virginal Conception while not affirmed by all post-New Testament early Christian sources had “reasonably wide affirmation”. Furthermore, after analyzing biblical records on Jesus’ virginal conception (Matt 1:18-19; cfr. Mk 6:3; John 8:41; John 1:13; Gal 4:4)<sup>vi</sup>, Brown opines that the persistent tradition concerning the irregularity of Jesus’ conception may reflect a historical reality that can be explained only by the virginal conception or by accepting a very unpleasant alternative. The bottom line on Brown’s argument in the view of Senior is the historicity of virginal conception should not be ruled out. Regarding the bodily resurrection of Jesus, Brown concludes that since the tradition which unambiguously professes that the tomb was known to be empty is considerably older than the Gospel narratives of the empty tomb, therefore the disciples and humanity understand the empty tomb in the light of the resurrection faith which is confessed as *seeing the Lord*<sup>vii</sup>. On the debate about the role of priests, authority of the Bishop, the claims of papacy and the ordination of women<sup>viii</sup>, Senior underlines that Brown observes that Christ did in fact constitute the community of faith and that, under the guidance of the Spirit sent by the risen Christ, essential structures emerged and ultimately become the biblical basis for the hierarchical structure of the church, even as these structures would only develop over time. Senior contends still that Brown’s extensive scholarly engagements did not end at doctrinal discourses, but it involved items of Vatican II and other numerous events and fora relating to the Pontifical Biblical Commission and the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith (CDF).

Brown’s scholarship elevated him to the presidency of noble American Biblical Associations, and it aroused the interest of Popes and top church officials who sought to

gain from his constructive contributions in biblical scholarship and the academia. Painfully, his useful works attracted criticism and disagreement from within the church and outside of her. Those who opposed his utilisation of the historico-critical method of biblical exegesis found him an enemy of Church teachings and orientations<sup>ix</sup>. With the intention to educate, he masterfully responded to each criticism with an amazing and inviolable calmness.

This book's nine chapters are a quintessential example of how to present the good, the bad and the ugly in noble personality. Donald Senior captures this literary feat on Raymond E. Brown in an enviable literary prowess, style and discipline.

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<sup>i</sup> Donald Senior, *Raymond E. Brown*, 60-75; Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, AncBible, (New York: Doubleday, 1997); R. Witherup, "The Incarnate Word Revealed: The Pastoral Writings of Raymond E. Brown, ed. John R. Donahue" (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2005), 238-252; Joseph Fitzmeyer, *The Interpretation of Scripture: In Defense of the Historical-Critical Method*, (New York: Paulist Press, 2008).

<sup>ii</sup> Raymond E. Brown, *The Critical meaning of the Bible: How a Modern Reading of the Bible Challenges Christians, the Church and the Churches*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1981). Pay attention to chapters 1 and 2 of this book; Raymond E. Brown, Karl P. Donfried, John Reumann, eds., *Peter in the New Testament: A Collaborative Assessment by Protestant and Roman Catholic Scholars*, (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1973); Raymond E. Brown, Karl P. Donfried, Joseph A. Fitzmeyer, John Reumann, eds., *Mary in the New Testament: A Collaborative Assessment by Protestant and Roman Catholic Scholars*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1978); Raymond E. Brown, "The Unity and Diversity in New Testament Ecclesiology", *Novum Testamentum* 6 (1963), 298-308; Raymond E. Brown, *The Churches the Apostles Left Behind*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1984).

<sup>iii</sup> Raymond E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in Matthew and Luke*, (New York: Doubleday, 1977); Gregory W. Dawes, "Why Historicity Still Matters Raymond Brown and the Infancy Narratives", *Pacifica* 19 (2006), 156-176.

<sup>iv</sup> Donald Senior, *Raymond E. Brown*, 131-52; Raymond E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narrative in Matthew and Luke*, (New York: Doubleday, 1977); Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, (New York – London – Toronto – Sydney: Doubleday, 1997); Raymond E. Brown, *New Testament Essays*, (New York – London – Auckland: Doubleday – Image Books, 2010); Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the Gospel of John*, (London: Doubleday, 2003); Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to New Testament Christology*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1994).

<sup>v</sup> Donald Senior, *Raymond E. Brown*, 63-69; Raymond E. Brown, "The Contribution of Historical Biblical Criticism to Ecumenical Discussion", in Richard J. Neuhaus, ed., *Biblical Interpretation in Crisis: The Ratzinger Conference on Bible and Church*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1989), 24-49.

<sup>vi</sup> Raymond E. Brown, “*The Problem of the Virginal Conception of Jesus*”, *Theological Studies* 33 (1972), 3-34; “Jesus with Mary at Christmas”, NC News Service Supplement, December 1972; “Luke’s Description of the Virginal Conception”, *Theological Studies* 35 (1974), 360-362; “The Meaning of the Magi, the Significance of the Star,” *Worship* 49 (1975), 574-582; “The Meaning of the manger, the Significance of the Shepherds”, *Worship* 59 (1976), 528-538.

<sup>vii</sup> Donald Senior, *Raymond E. Brown, 98-107*; Raymond E. Brown, *The Virginal Conception and Bodily Resurrection of Jesus*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1973), 3-15, 100-103; Raymond E. Brown,

<sup>viii</sup> Donald Senior, *Raymond E. Brown*, 83-98. Raymond E. Brown, *Priest and Bishop: A Biblical Reflections*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1970); Raymond E. Brown, *101 Questions on the Bible*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1990)

<sup>ix</sup> William G. Most, *Free from All Error: Authorship, Inerrancy, Historicity of Scripture, Church Teaching and Modern Scripture Scholars*, (Libertyville: Franciscan Maryville Press, 2008).