

philippine studies

Ateneo de Manila University · Loyola Heights, Quezon City · 1108 Philippines

Biblical Research Today: New Testament Essays

Review Author: Jose Chanco

Philippine Studies vol. 15, no. 3 (1967): 518–521

Copyright © Ateneo de Manila University

Philippine Studies is published by the Ateneo de Manila University. Contents may not be copied or sent via email or other means to multiple sites and posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's written permission. Users may download and print articles for individual, noncommercial use only. However, unless prior permission has been obtained, you may not download an entire issue of a journal, or download multiple copies of articles.

Please contact the publisher for any further use of this work at philstudies@admu.edu.ph.

<http://www.philippinestudies.net>
Fri June 30 13:30:20 2008

and public documents. As such, it does not possess or generate the feeling of intimacy with the person under consideration. Were he alive today, perhaps his biography would have been little different. He was, as we said, a quiet, modest man.

It is the unspectacular nature of the man that is revealed in this study. The inference one is led to draw is that it takes, sometimes, such a character to be a great man. As Carlos P. Romulo states in his introduction to this book: "What we badly need is greater variety of interpretations, more realistic approach to the life and times of our political and intellectual leaders—an approach that will render their total humanity without neglecting their greatness; critically examine their ideas without perverting them by either adulation or prejudice."

It is not often that a reviewer can agree with the introduction of a book. This is one such occasion. A warning, though—this is a dry book to read, not because of its content, but precisely because its treatment is of a scholarly character. It is not by any means a novelized biography; so no reader should expect a study "à la Irving Stone". The fact is, Aquino's study is so objective in its approach that the reader will have to draw his own conclusions about the real value of the man's achievements.

This writer hopes that this biography will initiate a trend towards the production of more biographies about our eminent figures. Very many books have been written on Rizal, Bonifacio and Mabini. It is time that we paid a little more attention to the other men who have made Philippine history a more vital thing. It is high time, too, that we encourage living figures and their families to donate their personal papers to university libraries, the National Library or, in the case of Justices, the Supreme Court Library. Quite often, scholars interested in the lives and times of such men have lamented the paucity of available materials. In the case of Abad Santos, the paucity of materials proved a problem. And yet, the greater part of the man's life is well-presented.

JORGE M. JUCO

BIBLICAL RESEARCH TODAY

NEW TESTAMENT ESSAYS. By Raymond E. Brown, S. S. Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1965. xvi, 280 pp.

This collection of New Testament essays presents a cross section of biblical studies both in popular style and in depth, with particular

emphasis on the Fourth Gospel which is the specialized field of the the author who is widely known for his popular commentary on John in the *Collegette New Testament Reading Guide* and is at present translating John for the scholarly and interdenominational *Anchor Bible*. This collection of essays by the Rev. Raymond E. Brown, S.S., consists mainly of two parts, namely, popular essays on the advancement of biblical research today and its ecumenical possibilities, and technical essays on examples of modern biblical research into the Gospels.

In the first section, after acknowledging the indebtedness of the Catholic biblical movement to the works of Protestant scholars, Father Brown admits that Catholic biblical scholarship with its new approach to the Bible is now making substantial contributions in the New Testament field. With the aid of language studies, historical and archeological discoveries, new materials have been used by Catholic biblical scholars with the blessings of the Popes since the encyclical "Divino Afflante Spiritu" (1943) of Pope Pius XII to acquire a more realistic understanding of the Bible. For instance, the discovery of the Dead Sea Scroll's abstract language and dualistic thought written in Jesus' time removed once and for all the doubt on John as an authentic witness to the historical Jesus on the basis of its similar dualistic thought and abstract language (i.e., a world distinguished between light and darkness, truth and falsehood) formerly presumed to have been an exclusive Hellenistic influence of a much later date after Christ. Needless to say, the newness of this biblical movement is not a novelty but the logical development of the organic growth of a living community of believers, the People of God.

With regards to the ecumenical possibilities of this biblical movement, it is instructive to quote in full what Father Brown has to say on the feasibility of a common Bible, a very popular issue.

The first question that needs to be raised is this: a Bible common to whom? Publicity about this Bible seems to presume that it will be common to all Christians (and perhaps the Old Testament will be common to Jews as well). The idea that in the foreseeable future all Christians will accept a single Bible is a romantic dream. There are large groups of fundamentalist Protestants who are emotionally attached to the King James Version (KJV). Despite its critical shortcomings, the KJV is for them *the* Bible; and attempts to replace it with the Revised Standard Version (RSV) led to book-burnings in the Bible Belt. On the Roman Catholic side, although for the first time in 1943 Pope Pius XII recommended translations from the original language, there remains a preference among more conservative Catholics for translations made from the Latin. No one can establish a Bible common for all over such opposition in both camps.

Nor would it be desirable that a Bible be so common that it replace all other translations. Bibles have purposes. A Bible written in colloquial style may be perfect for home reading but sound vulgar in a pulpit or in a solemn religious ceremony. A Bible that is quite literal may be very useful for study purposes but not make attractive continuous reading. We need to have various translations of the Bible to bring out the many facets of God's word.

If, for the reasons given, one must rule out a common Bible suitable for all Christians and all purposes, one cannot deny that one legitimate purpose for a Bible is ecumenical use. And indeed, a common Bible in this limited ecumenical framework may be feasible.

Allowing the feasibility of such a project, the author still notes down a number of obstacles to its becoming a reality. Yet Father Brown himself is outspokenly optimistic in the modern biblical movement. Optimism in a real scholar does not lessen his keen awareness of the problems and difficulties involved. All the more his sanguine attitude encourages him to investigate thoroughly all possible angles from which a problem may be viewed without losing sight of their limitations. For example, without forgetting the fact that biblical criticism is only "one avenue of research into the Church of the first century," the author maintains that a substantial theology of the Church can be established that is neither an oversimplified picture of the continuity and uniformity of the New Testament ecclesiology, nor an exaggerated caricature of its diversity and discontinuity. An essay on the unity and diversity in New Testament Ecclesiology is included in the first section of this collection.

Essays in depth mark the second part of this collection as the author touches on his specialized field, the Fourth Gospel. In a more detailed study, the author presents a theology of the sacraments in John as the mainstay of the life of the Church inasmuch as these are intimately connected with the acts of Jesus Himself. For example, the significance of baptism is seen in relation to an act of Jesus Himself; the real effect of baptism which enables the Christian to 'pass over' from sin and darkness which enslave and blind fallen man even from birth is symbolized in the cure of the man born blind who was enabled to see not only the physical and material world but also the meaning of this physical and material world in the Light Truth and Life that is Christ (Jn. 9).

Related to John's theology of the Incarnation, this Johannine emphasis on the sacraments as acts of Jesus, the Incarnate Word, underlines the total implication of Incarnation as God's whole method of dealing with men through the things of the flesh or the world that God so loved that He gave His only begotten son (Jn. 3:16; 1 Jn. 4:9). Hence, a Christian worldliness within the context of John's theology of the Incarnation and the sacraments—so necessary

in an age of rapid secularization—becomes a meaningful and enriching way of life.

Among the many insights provided by the rest of the essays in the second part of the collection, which include studies on the independent historical source material of the Fourth Gospel, its similarities to and differences from the Synoptic Gospels, a deeper understanding of the Our Father as an eschatological prayer, a more balanced evaluation of parables and allegories, and a new insight into the old and familiar beatitudes in Luke—the distinction is made between the historical sense of a text in the context of its original historical tradition and its literal sense in the written Gospel as exemplified by the Johanne account of John the Baptist's witness to Jesus in the first chapter. The context in Mt. 11:3 ("Are you he who is to come or do we look for someone else?") indicates that John the Baptist did not really know Jesus and yet, Jn. 1:26,33 ("I baptize in water... he... baptizes in a Holy Spirit."), Jn. 1:29 ("Behold the lamb of God who takes away the world's sin.") and Jn. 1:30 ("After me is coming one who ranks ahead of me because he existed before me.") seem to suggest the contrary. Whereas in their literal and inspired sense, i.e., with the aid of the Holy Spirit after Pentecost, Jn. 1:33 refers to the coming of the Holy Spirit, Jn. 1:29 refers to the value of Jesus' death as a propitiation for sin, and Jn. 1:30 refers to the pre-existence of the Word, in their historical sense, i.e., what they meant to John the Baptist when they were first uttered, in the light of John the Baptist's expectation of apocalyptic judgment, Jn. 1:33 is parallel to the significance of the passage "he will gather the wheat into his barn", Jn. 1:29 refers to the sacrificial lamb to be raised up by God to destroy evil in the world, and Jn. 1:30 points to the Prophet Elijah or an Elijahlike figure. The interpretations of the historical sense of the above passages are not definitive but, to substantiate his interpretations, Fr. Brown offers convincing arguments based on an analysis of related biblical passages in the light of new historical and archeological evidence. It is in the appreciation of these arguments which opens a new approach to the Bible, "the only approach that can make sense to the men of our time" that we can make the study of the Bible a fruitful and never-ending challenge to the search for a deeper understanding of God's revelation to man.

JOSE CHANCO

THE HUMAN DIMENSION OF THE BIBLE

THE DYNAMISM OF BIBLICAL TRADITION. Concilium: Theology in the Age of Renewal. Volume 20. New York: Paulist Press, 1967. 213 pp. .