

Father Raymond Brown, noted scholar, dies at 70

REDWOOD CITY, Calif. (CNS) — Sulpician Father Raymond E. Brown, one of the most noted Catholic Scripture scholars in U.S. history, died Aug. 8 of a heart attack at Sequoia Hospital in Redwood City. He was 70 years old.

He is to be buried Aug. 17 at the Sulpician cemetery in Catonsville, Md., following a funeral Mass celebrated there by Cardinal William H. Keeler of Baltimore.

Before that, Archbishop William J. Levada of San Francisco was to celebrate a memorial Mass Aug. 14, with Cardinal Roger M. Mahony of Los Angeles attending, at the chapel of St. Patrick's Seminary in Menlo Park, where Father Brown was living in retirement. Father Ronald D. Witherup, Sulpician provincial superior, was to preach at both Masses.

Just the day before his death, Father Brown's latest book — *A Retreat With John the Evangelist: That You May Have Life* — was published by St. Anthony Messenger Press in Cincinnati.

Father Brown was Auburn Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Biblical Studies at Union Theological Seminary in New York, where he taught for 20 years before his retirement in 1990.

He was twice a member of the Pontifical Biblical Commission, 1972-78 and from 1996 until his death, and for 25 years he was a member of the World Council of Churches Faith and Order Commission.

Author of 25 major books on the Bible and more than a dozen smaller ones, he was co-editor — with Jesuit Father Joseph A. Fitzmyer and Carmelite Father Roland P. Murphy — of two widely acclaimed comprehensive commentaries on Scripture, *The Jerome Biblical Commentary* in 1968 and *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* in 1990.

One of his most notable works was his



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landmark two-volume study, *The Gospel According to John*, which broke new ground in the field of Johannine studies for all Scripture scholars. A part of the Anchor Bible series, the first volume appeared in 1966 and the second in 1970.

Other works of note included *New Testament Essays* in 1965, *Jesus, God and Man* in 1967, *The Virginal Conception and Bodily Resurrection of Jesus* in 1973, *The Birth of the Messiah* in 1977, *The Epistles of John* in 1982 and *The Death of the Messiah* in 1994.

In Montreal in 1963 he became the first Catholic to address the Faith and Order Conference of the World Council of

Churches.

Father Fitzmyer called Father Brown "the most pre-eminent Catholic biblical scholar in the United States," adding that "nobody else came near him" in scholarly stature.

In 1971 he received an unprecedented double teaching appointment at Union Theological Seminary, a leading interdenominational Protestant institution, and Woodstock College, a Jesuit seminary then situated in New York.

Benedictine Father Joseph Jensen, executive secretary of the Catholic Biblical Association, called Father Brown "one of our most illustrious scholars."

He noted that in addition to his scholarly research Father Brown devoted considerable time and energy to more popular writing, "books like *An Adult Christ at Christmas*, which explains the infancy narratives in a very lucid way.

"He could have stuck to scholarly work, but the whole point of it was to open (the Scriptures) up to a wide audience," Father Jensen added.

In recognition of his achievements Father Brown was awarded 24 honorary degrees. He was the first U.S. Catholic priest to be so honored by the (Presbyterian) University of Edinburgh, Scotland and the (Lutheran) University of Uppsala, Sweden.

Father Brown also helped break ground in ecumenical biblical studies. As a member of the U.S. Catholic-Lutheran dialogue, 1965-74, he was part of a select team of top Catholic and Lutheran Scripture scholars who wrote two significant ecumenical studies, *Peter in the New Testament* in 1973 and *Mary in the New Testament* in 1978. Both books have been translated into German, French, Spanish, Dutch and Japanese.

As a member of the World Council of Churches Faith and Order Commission, he

played a major role in the development of its landmark 1982 ecumenical text, "Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry."

Born in New York City May 22, 1928, Raymond Edward Brown moved to Florida with his parents in 1944 and entered the seminary at St. Charles College in Catonsville, a Baltimore suburb, the following year.

He took his philosophy studies at The Catholic University of America in Washington, earning a bachelor's degree in 1948 and a master's in 1949.

After a year of theology at the Gregorian University in Rome he returned to Baltimore where he earned his bachelor's degree in theology in 1951, licentiate in 1953 and doctorate in 1955.

He was ordained a priest of the St. Augustine Diocese in 1953 but was affiliated with the Society of St. Sulpice, or Sulpicians, a society of diocesan priests specializing in seminary work.

He received a doctorate in Semitic languages from Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore in 1958 and earned ecclesiastical bachelor's and licentiate degrees in sacred Scripture from the Pontifical Biblical Commission in 1959 and 1963.

He held two main posts in his teaching career: professor of Scripture at St. Mary's Seminary in Baltimore, 1959-71, and Auburn Professor of Biblical Studies at Union Theological Seminary, 1971-90.

He was a visiting professor of New Testament at Union Theological, 1967-68; visiting professor of New Testament at the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome, 1973 and 1988; and adjunct professor of religion at New York's Columbia University 1979-90.

As a Jordan Fellow at the Albright School of Archeology in Jerusalem in 1958-59 he collaborated in preparing a concordance of the unpublished Dead Sea Scrolls.



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