

RESURRECTION by Rowan Williams, Darton, Longman & Todd, London, 1982. Paperback, pp 123. £4.75.

Two years ago or so I had the pleasure of reviewing Canon Williams' book *The Wound of Knowledge*. Now after reading this book I am convinced that the author is one of the more important and profound of contemporary Anglican theologians. He lectures in Divinity at Cambridge. But this book results from the Lent Lectures he gave in Stepney in 1981. It is not, he says, so much an edited transcript of the lectures as the fruit of discussions and explorations initiated by those lectures.

I would classify Canon Williams, if I may be excused the impertinence, as an original traditionalist in theology. I mean this as the highest of compliments. Theologians ought to be traditionalists, because their subject is a tradition, which it is their business to study, to interpret and to hand on, if possible, even fresher than they received it. This is where the gift of originality comes in, a gift which Canon Williams so fortunately enjoys. There is hardly a cliché, and certainly not a single dusty, dehydrated thought in his book. His traditionalism shows in his last chapter, entitled "The Risen Body". He is certainly more sympathetic to many of the modern scruples about the bodily reality of Jesus' resurrection than I manage to be; but he refuses to entertain them himself. The resurrection gospel, he says, was perceived by the apostolic generation, and is presented in the New Testament, and can only be satisfactorily understood, "as a message from outside" (p 104). It is first brought to the community by "marginal figures" — women. A purely psychological faith of the disciples in Jesus is not sufficient. Something 'from outside' must have stimulated this resurgence of faith. What was it? "Matthew at least is perfectly well aware that the tomb story (i.e. the story of the emptiness of the tomb) is not a sufficient condition for resurrection faith; but that is not to say that the evangelists are mistaken in seeing it as a *necessary* condition" (p 106). "Something" he continues, "must have provided a first stimulus, and more importantly a structure of presuppositions within which subsequent experiences could

be organized. The empty tomb tradition proposes just such a stimulus and structure: the apostles are drawn together by receiving the message that Jesus' body is not in its grave, and this helps them to understand what later happens as an encounter with a Jesus who is, now as hitherto, a partner in dialogue, a material other, still involved in the fabric of human living while also sovereignly free from its constraints" (ib.).

Canon Rowan succeeds much more effectively than the scholastics did in making the resurrection of Christ an integral part of our salvation and redemption and healing. This is perhaps a feature of most contemporary theology being written about the resurrection, in Catholic circles at least since F. C. Durrwell's book. But I think this one does it better, and with more refreshing originality than any others I have read. The first chapter shows us the resurrection as the essential means, so to say, by which the forgiveness of the victim is conveyed to the victimiser (I have to use that word, to show that we are not here using 'victim' in the strict sacrificial religious sense). The writer says that it is only the victim of injury or oppression who can heal the oppressor, save the oppressor by forgiving him. And that is what the risen Christ is doing; he is the one 'perfect' victim, in that he is only and purely victim, and in no way at all victimiser — whereas all the rest of us are in different degrees both victims and victimisers; and precisely as such he is bringing us forgiveness, and making it possible for us both to see how we should extend forgiveness and reconciliation and thus life to our victimisers, and also how we should look for it from our other victims. The first stage of preaching the resurrection, says the author, is to preach it "as an invitation to *recognize one's victim as one's hope*" (p 11).

Another most important reflection on the risen Christ is contained in the chapter "Talking to a Stranger". The risen Christ is in a very important sense a stranger". He is not *merely* the crucified, with whom we may sometimes find it only too easy, in

ecstasies of self-pity, to identify ourselves. It is, no doubt, properly consoling for people enduring great suffering to think of Christ as suffering with them. But even for them the full Christian use or evaluation of suffering cannot stop there. They are, all of us are, invited to go through their sufferings to meet and finally to recognize the risen stranger in a beyond, in what Paul calls newness of life. A piety that stops short at Calvary, that is concentrated exclusively on the figure of the crucifix is a piety that has refused the real challenge of Christ crucified *and risen* to share in the transformation of the world and of human social relationships. It is a piety one can

imagine being practised by a Sicilian *mafioso*, or by one of those anonymous Lebanese Catholic Christians who recently massacred the Palestinians in Beirut. But one cannot imagine such persons being devoted to Christ the risen stranger, who shows us our victim as our one hope, and remaining unconverted and unrepentant of their atrocious victimising. Belief in the resurrection, and a life-long search for and devotion to the risen Christ are necessary elements in genuine Christian maturity and humanity.

Rowan Williams' excellent book makes this very clear.

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ROY CAMPBELL by Peter Alexander. OUP. £12.50

It came as a surprise to me in 1946, when I was living in Kensington, to discover that Roy Campbell had a house a few hundred yards away. Although I had read his poetry with admiration as a schoolboy, I had imagined that he was dead. This shows, I think, how effective by the late 1930s had been the left-wing boycott of his work. Then, on 10 May 1946, there exploded on the literary world a new volume of poems by Campbell characteristically entitled *Talking Bronco*. In it he introduced 'Macspaunday' – a portmanteau name for Louis MacNeice, Stephen Spender, W. H. Auden and C. Day-Lewis, all of whom, to his anger and fury, had supported the Republicans during the Spanish Civil War, and later, during World War II, found themselves "cushy jobs" on the home front or stayed put in America. In contrast Campbell had been eager to join up.

Shortly after the appearance of *Talking Bronco* I got to know Campbell. On one occasion he stopped in Kensington High Street. "Macspaunday have been getting at Eliot for publishing my poems," he began. "They say the book has made their hair stand on end. I've said to Eliot next time I'm going to scalp them." The remark was typical of one side of Campbell – brash, boastful and belligerent.

Peter Alexander, the author of this biography of *Roy Campbell*, never met the poet, and his book, though excellent on

the poetry, is less satisfactory when it comes to the life. However, he is right when he says that Campbell's antipathy to certain writers – "lefties" usually – did not hold up if he got to know them. In the 1940s he had punch-ups with both MacNeice and Spender. But subsequently he made it up with MacNeice and would defend him when others criticised him. In 1952 at the Dorchester Hotel in London, when Spender presented Campbell with the Foyle Prize for Poetry for his translation of *The Poems of St John of the Cross*, "the two men shook hands with the utmost cordiality." Incidentally, to keep the record straight, it should be added that at a previous, much less friendly meeting in 1949 Spender did not say that Campbell (as reported here) was "a great poet" but "a good poet." That, too, was Campbell's own assessment of himself, since, behind the swagger and buccaneering ways, was a shy, modest man. Referring to fellow South African writers, he would say: "Plomer and Laurens Van der Post and I are talented people. Olive Schreiner is a genius."

Campbell and his brothers and sisters were second-generation South Africans. Their father, who was a much loved doctor in Durban, treated black and white patients alike – and brought his family up to have nothing to do with the colour bar. Yet although Campbell was never a racialist, there are anti-Semitic and Fascist ele-