Karl Rahner Volume Seventeen

Theological Investigations, Volume 17 by Karl Rahner
translated by Margaret Kohl
DLT London 1981 pp 260 £14.50

Fergus Kerr O P

Another one safely on the shelf, with only five more to come, and then all fourteen thick volumes of Karl Rahner's *Schriften zur Theologie* (1954-1980) will be translated into English, in some twenty-one slimmer and somewhat more manageable ones. This particular instalment is the second part of the volume which Rahner put together shortly after the celebration for his seventieth birthday (the volume itself was dedicated to his mother on her hundredth birthday).

The only comparable *oeuvre* by a Catholic theologian of Rahner's generation would no doubt be that of Hans Urs von Balthasar, but the translation into English is lagging far behind. If one thinks then of the work of Yves Congar, equal in bulk and importance although relatively restricted in its focus on questions of ecclesiology, one can only be astounded at what giants that generation of Catholic theologians has produced (all three are septuagenarians). But it is also very striking to recollect how very different they are from one another. In each case, the theological research and speculation spill over into, or rather (more accurately) spring forth from, a distinctive training in piety and spirituality, so that in each man's work a whole Christian stance or physiognomy is on offer. No one could doubt the profoundly Catholic spirit of all three – and no one could mistake the work of one for that of either of the others! They certainly show how much real internal diversity a relatively constrained and stable theological tradition can stand – and arouse.

Another volume on the bookshelf then – but how many of us really want or need another 250 pages of Karl Rahner? The lectures which have been collected in this latest volume date from 1967 to 1974, with most of them from the later years of that period. They have been sorted, as usual, into four groups: Christology, doctrine of man, ecclesiology, and ecumenism. What are the main themes that attract the reader's attention? Is this a good place to start to read Rahner? Where is the reviewer inclined to

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.1981.tb03299.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

pencil in the margin?

1 *Christology*

The first section opens with the text of a Christmas sermon preached to a Jesuit community. Rahner seeks to relate the Ignatian method of "indifference" in prayer to the doctrine of the Incarnation. In effect, he suggests that those who go in for the Ignatian practice of "indifference" have a foothold, an *Ansatzpunkt,* in their own experience, for understanding what happened, according to the Gospel, in the case of the birth of Jesus of Nazareth.

This "key notion of Ignatian piety" means exactly the same as "what Paul calls the freedom conferred by the Spirit of God himself – freedom with regard to all the individual powers and forces in our human existence, both in our inner life and in our external situation" (p 4). What St Paul had in mind, according to Rahner, is how God gives himself "directly and without mediation" and thus "radicalizes our transcendentality towards himself".[1] This means that God makes us free, inwardly and outwardly, of every particular item in our life to which we should otherwise be subject and captive, whether innocently or culpably. What Ignatian indifference and Pauline liberty designate, then, is "the infinite and open space in which God becomes the event we encounter in our existence – God himself, not God represented by anything finite". It is "in a kind of emptiness and darkness, in dumbness and mute adoration of the ineffable mystery which shelters us namelessly in its infinity" that this "space" opens up in which God himself (and nothing finite that would represent him) becomes "the event we encounter in our existence", *das Ereignis unserer Existenz.* The Heideggerian resonances in the text are unmistakable but, as usual, it is another matter to decide how seriously Rahner intends them.

This "space" opens up as one reaches out, through the practice of mortification, into the darkness of God beyond the boundary that we can articulate. Whether we bring it off or it comes of itself we can never be sure. For that matter, as an *experience,* it is really only the stuff of our *hope,* and of a wobbly hope at that. Contrary to the impression that he might have given so far (Rahner goes on), the Ignatian detachment is not some mysticism of pure inwardness or any form of Buddhism. When it happens it sends us back into everyday life to make decisions and take action – "But what is sent must be penetrated and reclothed, without adulteration and division (*unvermischt und ungetrennt*), by that absoluteness, that eternal divine validity and glory out of which it is sent to us" (p 5). And thus the Heideggerian resonances unite with the "inconfuse, indivise" of the Chalcedonian dogma of the two natures in the one person of Christ to prepare the way for Rahner's demonstration of how the practice of Ignatian spirituality enables one to understand

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.1981.tb03299.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

the doctrine of the Incarnation. As we acknowledge the Unconditioned, we find something assigned to us (*zugeschickt*, another favourite Heideggerian word): our mission, in fact. But our mission must be pervaded now, and dressed anew, by that glory of God from whom it has been received. The permeation must be "inconfuse, indivise", without confusing and yet without dividing the two. The Ignatian experience, so Rahner maintains, "lets us perceive how we can be, and must be, 'detachedly' lost in the incomprehensibility of God, in order in this very way to find the true reality of our unique existence in its own specific history". But he goes further, insisting on the corollary of what he has just said: the Ignatian experience "also lets us discover how this world and the beyond, history and transcendence, can be bound into an unadulterated and undivided unity, so that God is to be found in everything". What the Ignatian practice of indifference thus makes empirically available to us is the unity of the concrete-historical with the absolutely transcendent, without confusing or dividing the two. Rahner can therefore conclude as follows (p 6): "Christmas is the supreme instance of this unity of transcendence and concrete freedom, though of course it is unique, unsurpassable and exemplary". Thus, by practising Ignatian humility, we should have a foothold in our own experience to help us to understand that unity of transcendence and history which the doctrine of the Incarnation speaks of in the case of Jesus Christ.

But Rahner is not done yet. None of this is reducing the mystery of the Incarnation to our level. It might be thought that to approach the case of Jesus Christ in terms of some sort of practical experience of the unity between transcendence and history of which we ourselves are capable would overthrow classical Christology. Far from it. What we finally have to see, according to Rahner, is simply that being human at all is from the outset, in the way that it unites transcendence and history, "the potentiality of what theology generally calls the hypostatic union of God and an undiminished and untruncated humanity". What being human *means* is being "the potentiality for the hypostatic union". Thus, if we allow ourselves to *realize*, in the experience (*Erfahrung*) of that unity of detachment and decision which the Ignatian method teaches, we shall learn to understand what being human is -- and we shall at the same time learn to understand what the doctrine of the Incarnation means.

"Minds are what we are", as Donald MacKinnon used to say in the philosophy classroom at Aberdeen University some thirty years ago. It is a neater formula than Rahner manages to construct. The potentiality for hypostatic union – that is what being human has always been. If the doctrine of the Incarnation is true then we belong to a form of life which has had the potentiality within it

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.1981.tb03299.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

from the start to allow, or endure, or enjoy, hypostatic union with godhead. For Rahner, our nature is essentially our capacity to transcend ourselves towards God. The doctrine of the Incarnation thus refers to what is, when all is said and done, only a very special instance of this human self-transcendence towards God. Christian faith in God, in turn, is only the contingently historical form that our transcendence happens to take.

Of course Rahner has been saying all this for years. In fact, the idea is clear in his *Geist in Welt,* which he completed in 1936 when he was thirty one. It is a very attractive way of dealing with the question of what we are together with the question of how to present the doctrine of the Incarnation today. We are made intelligible to ourselves as the kind of being of whom one proved capable of hypostatic (personal) union with the Godhead. On the other hand, the doctrine of the Incarnation is saved from becoming the docetist myth of God incarnate: we have a foothold *in our own experience* as we attempt to scale the heights of Chalcedonian Christology. To some extent at least, by practising a certain habit of ascetical detachment, we can discover empirically the unity – "inconfuse, indivise" – between the absolutely transcendent and the historically particular.

This approach certainly makes the claim that theological understanding may gain greatly in depth and clarity from one's ascetical practice. Indeed Rahner recently noted that the spirituality of St Ignatius Loyola which he has learned in prayer and life under vows, has been more significant for him as a theological source than all the philosophy and theology he was taught both inside and outside the Society of Jesus.

2 *Doctrine of man*

Everything depends on what Rahner means by "transcendence". The first essay in the second section of this book deals with "theological anthropology". Rahner begins by asking whether any "anthropology" at all is possible, in the sense of systematic interrogation of the nature of human nature. There are plenty of scientific questions about the human kind, but "the question about man as such" is another question altogether. Rahner sketches his intellectual context. We might think, for example, that Levi-Strauss, the social sciences, depth psychology, etc. have dissolved "the individual concrete person as always unique and of his own making" in favour of "structures". We might be tempted to follow those (Continental) philosophers who argue that the idea of man as the rational animal is a purely *western* idea (and thus local, provincial, doomed, etc). We might go for full-blooded structuralism and reject the very idea of man as subject and agent of his own action. We might reject the Enlightenment ideal of the *honnête homme – and* the existentialist doctrine of the tragic predica-

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.1981.tb03299.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

ment – *and* the Prometheanism of Marxist humanism. What else, for heaven's sake, is there left? Well, we might be tempted to think of ourselves as "poised over the void". Of course it all sounds much more dramatic and exciting than our own familiar intellectual scene (this particular text was originally a lecture at the annual conference of R. E. teachers in West Germany); but translation into the fog of British thought can find fairly identifiable equivalents, deliquescent round the edges as they inevitably must be. Empiricism, vulgar Freudianism, stolid stoicism – these are recognizable "philosophies of man". What it is much more difficult to find, however, is any foothold in contemporary Anglo-Saxon philosophy which offers much chance of explaining what Rahner means by "transcendence". He argues, in some extremely dense and intractable pages, that "the question about man" is, ultimately, the question which man *is* – and the radical form of this question is already itself our initiation into the incomprehensible mystery which we call "God". Theological anthropology is essentially "the apophatic radicalisation of philosophical anthropology" (p 62). Rahner writes as follows (p 64) "If we could analyze the meaning of the individual statements of theological anthropology more closely, it would emerge that they are really only the radical form of secular anthropological statements. And it would, of course, also be possible to do the same thing in the reverse direction: what are apparently merely secular anthropological statements prove to be secretly theological assertions, if they are only taken seriously in the radical form which is implicit in them". That is to say: all theological claims about human nature are the radicalisation of philosophical claims; philosophical statements about the nature of human nature are already incipiently theological. The beauty of Rahner's approach is obvious. Christian faith, for example, far from being something alien to man, is nothing other than the radical form of man's rationality now freely acknowledged – provided that rationality is understood in turn as sustained and empowered by its own intrinsic transcendence in which it shatters on the incomprehensible mystery which we call "God" (p 64). Our "nature" as rational beings is conferred by our persistence in always going beyond what is understandable at any given point: our "transcendence" defines "rationality". On the other hand, if we *give in freely to the way in which our minds keep going* on beyond what is understandable we already have Christian faith.

It is wrong to let people think that Christianity teaches things about man which go absolutely beyond anything that we can experience: "The Christian message which is to be conveyed to men and women does not mean conveying something alien and external. It means awakening and interpreting the innermost things in

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.1981.tb03299.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

man, the ultimate depths of his existence's dimensions" (p 67). We have the right and the duty, so Rahner concludes, in a phrase that sums up the deepest intention of all his writing, "to present the Christian message in such a way that it is really nothing other than the interpretative call of the reality which is present in the listener himself – experienced if not always understood" (p 67). There is something in everybody, perceived though not understood, which Christianity calls out of us and interprets. Far from being something unnatural, inhuman, irrational, and the like, Christian faith is thus the release and the relief of being properly what we are. For Karl Rahner, faith is therefore not something that goes against the human grain; on the contrary faith is a pleasure and fulfilment. Scripture and Church are (only) the sources which enable us to identify and acknowledge, clearly and convincingly, that "essence" of our own being with which we are always already aware but which we cannot get into words on our own and from which, indeed, we recoil because it seems so disturbingly mysterious (*unheimlich*). There are many ways of coming to Christian faith, so Rahner argues but there is no better way than the way of reflection on the nature of human nature – "always providing that we really face up to the incomprehensibility of man's existence, do not avoid it out of embarrassment, and do not think that because we can only stammer over this incomprehensibility we can let it alone" (p 69).

At the close of this particular lecture Rahner explicitly leaves open the question of how available this way of bringing people to understand Christianity may be in practice: that will depend, among other things, on the intellectual and cultural situation in which it is attempted (p 70).

"Minds are what we are" – but in the predominantly empiricist climate of Anglo-Saxon philosophical reflection on the nature of human nature what prospect is there of making Rahner's approach accessible? It is one thing to translate his books into English; it is another matter altogether to cross his idea of human transcendence with contemporary English philosophical reflection in a way that might be fertile, particularly for philosophy of religion. That Rahner's theology draws on the Ignatian method of prayer is one thing; that it evidently also draws on a certain metaphysical philosophy is, on the other hand, a great difficulty for the English reader. In fact, even those who are sympathetic towards metaphysical philosophy and know something about it, begin to find page after page about "transcendence" increasingly hard going. But then suddenly, just occasionally, a shaft of light breaks through and you see how a conversation with Rahner might begin. This happens in his splendid essay in this volume on the *body*.

"If I put someone like Kant on the scales and see that he

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.1981.tb03299.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

weighs ten stone, then of course I have seen less of Kant than I would have done if I had talked to him" (p 84). That is just the sort of point that an Anglo-Saxon philosopher would make in the same context; even the tone of voice is familiar. "If we say that, all the same, the body is what I can see with my eyes, and what I experience when I shut my eyes and think of God or of my mother belongs to the soul (mind), i.e. that what is inside belongs to the soul, then it would be more correct to say: No, that is another bit of me, but it is just as 'body-soulish' (*leib-seelisch*) as what I can look at from the outside" (p 84). Or again: "There is no inwardness which does not stand open, as it were, to what is outside" (p 87). And finally: "Our body doesn't stop where the skin stops, as if we were a sack containing something distinctive which simply stops at the skin" (p 87). These pithy observations sum up the philosophy of psychology which Karl Rahner has been working on (and with) since the mid-thirties. Just at that time, quite unknown to Rahner of course, Ludwig Wittgenstein, in the so-called Blue and Brown Books, inaugurated that whole series of essays in the philosophy of psychology which would offer a bridge for communicating Rahner's version of the Christian doctrine of man in terms that we might be better able to understand. But the philosophical tradition in which Rahner has worked is still so largely incomprehensible to the Anglo-Saxon reader that the reference to Wittgenstein's work serves only to mark out how much bridge-building is still required before there is any hope of conveying Rahner's "transcendental anthropology' in an accessible enough formulation to allow for serious criticism, *a fortiori* for domestication and appropriation.

3 *Ecclesiology*

In the third section of the book under review Karl Rahner offers us four essays on ecclesiastical themes. He reprints his very critical analysis of "Mysterium Ecclesiae", the Declaration issued by the Holy Office in 1973 on the subject of infallibility. This "answer" to Hans Küng (who is not named and whose provocative views on the subject Rahner has criticized very severely) is the only lengthy "official" statement on the doctrine since Vatican I. But the most interesting essay in this group is the one on the place of criticism and opposition within the Catholic Church.

Once again Rahner starts from the nature of human nature. As beings who *question* we are also inevitably beings who *criticize*: "Even as a Christian, the Christian is a human being first of all. As human being he is unavoidably and rightly a 'critical' being; and the scope of his 'criticism' is fundamentally identical with the scope of his existence" (p 129). It is all part of Rahner's vision of Christian faith as something *intelligent* – and if intelligent then obviously also questioning and critical. He goes on as follows, in

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.1981.tb03299.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

words that would surely make ultramontane Catholics squirm: "From the point of view of the Church's self-understanding, a critical attitude on the part of the Catholic Christian to the Church is an essential characteristic of its nature" (p 131). A great deal is open to change in the Catholic Church – which means that it is also open to criticism. For Rahner the criticism begins at home – the *theology* in which the proclamation of the Gospel is expressed is always open to question: "petrified conservatism is just as possible as fashionable progressivism" (p 131). The criticism and counter-criticism here can often be wearisome and acrimonious – "We have to see them through with mutual tolerance, patience and hope". Secondly, the Church's engagement with the social order often gives rise to self questioning and criticism: "In this sector no one in the Church –neither authority nor critics – is safe from mistaken attitudes and false decisions" (p 132).

Internal criticism and opposition in the Church can take many forms. Rahner insists that there is a place for formal opposition to ecclesiastical authorities (p 135), but clearly he expects far greater long-term benefits from the informal criticism that just doing things differently, with patience and imagination, can eventually achieve: "Ways of thinking and movements which – without being expressly 'against' something – develop new living energies directed towards positive ends, can in actual fact, through their persuasive character, exert a highly critical function, because the better and more living thing they are aiming at constitutes a silent but effective criticism of what is merely traditional" (p 134). Rahner's vision of the Catholic Church as an open and dynamic system of mutual criticism and creative tension may seem quite unreal to those who lament the passing of the monolithic Church of the Pian era and deplore the apparent anarchy of recent years. The very idea of internal opposition in the Roman Catholic Church seems shocking and improper. But here at least it should not be difficult for English-speaking Catholics to pick up what Rahner is saying. In Newman and in Friedrich von Hügel we have our only two major thinkers and they both had a vision of the Catholic Church in such terms. We also have plenty of experience of the complex and delicate relationship between the diversity of "official" ecclesiastical institutions and the even greater diversity of unofficial and informal Catholic institutions in this country.[2] Rahner's doctrine of man as "a critical being", *ein kritisches Wesen*,[3] only puts into a phrase what we can surely see for ourselves: "all the energies of a living Christianity can be implemented only in a process which must inevitably have a critical component" (p 135, footnote).

4 *Ecumenism*

In the fourth and final group of essays Rahner returns to some

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.1981.tb03299.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

favourite ecumenical themes. He has (for instance) long been interested in the difference between what people really believe and what they are officially supposed to believe. This goes for all the churches, in his opinion: but the difference is much more evident in the case of the Catholic Church because the official doctrine is so much more clearly defined. He is not thinking primarily of people who simply reject one or more of the official doctrines. He is interested, rather, in how what people believe at the grass roots often seems to have a different structure from official teaching: "It may perhaps have a less explicitly expressed content; it may stress things differently, where the significance and binding character of particular theological statements are concerned; or it may take a different view of the significance of a particular doctrine for the actual life of the Christian" (p 198). It is a question, that is to say, of the relative distribution (so to speak) of the truths of faith within the whole constellation of Catholic doctrine. In many cases, some particular doctrine or devotion may, at some epoch or in some culture or in the life of some individual, pull the whole of Catholic doctrine into a highly idiosyncratic shape. Often enough, elsewhere, Rahner has insisted on our duty to make our own as much as possible of Catholic doctrine as a whole. As he grows older he insists more and more on how we should get a grasp of the basic and essential truths and let the rest settle quietly around them. In practice, there is a "hierarchy" of truths; it is important to get it right. But he is also fascinated by how the official doctrine may sometimes have to readjust itself to "what actually goes on in the heads and hearts of church members" (p 198). Here again there can be creative tension.

Ecumenical dialogue usually means discussion between professional theologians and comparison between the official doctrines of the Churches they represent. Rahner writes as follows: "The only question asked in ecumenical conversations was about the compatibility of the official teachings of the various Churches. Indeed faith as it actually existed in the Churches was hardly the subject of theological discussion at all" (p 200). He admits that the customary line in Catholic theology is to say that what Catholics actually believe must be submitted to the purifying judgment of the offical teaching of the Church. But, in what is certainly the most controversial essay in this book, Rahner goes on to argue that, as an implication of the necessary interplay between the two, the official presentation of doctrine has to submit to the norm of what Catholics actually believe. The official teaching, after all, is only a "snapshot" of what people actually believed at a certain point (p 203). What Catholics actually believe is always somewhat ahead of the official doctrine – often askew (as Rahner has argued frequently enough), but perhaps just as often leading the official

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.1981.tb03299.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

doctrine in what will turn out to be the right direction. The official teaching simply does not mirror exactly what Catholics *de facto* believe in their heads and hearts: it is (to repeat) an ideal to which we subject our beliefs, but in another sense it is much *less* than our actual faith. Official teaching almost always bears the marks of controversy in its formulations and often of controversy long past and superfluous. In Rahner's view, "the average faith of contemporary Christians in the various Churches hardly shows any differences" (p 208). The upshot of his appeal to us to bring to bear in ecumenical discussions the shape of people's real faith as well as the shape of the official doctrine is, then, the suggestion that separated Christians may already be sufficiently united in real faith to allow us to move to visible unity: "We can in fact say: the major Christian Churches of today could unite, even institutionally; their sense of faith presents no insuperable obstacle" (p 214). Rahner insists: "faith as it is actually experienced is today the same in the different Churches, among average Christians" (p 209).

In the final essay Rahner reflects on his own writing – "what I write is the work of a dilettante"; "it is all far too amateurish"; it is only "haute vulgarisation" – but all the same "I am not ashamed of the fact"! It may *look* scholarly and it may be demanding enough to read, but Rahner is very conscious of the shelves of learned monographs on his favourite topics which he has never had time to study. If he were to wait until he had mastered all the relevant bibliography he would never have written at all – and he has wanted only to "talk to people today" and to "say something which may minister to salvation" (p 248). As he says: "Of course that does not mean that one could not do it in a thousand other ways, or a thousand times better than I have succeeded in doing". To be sure, a shelf of books is obviously not the only way[4] – not that Karl Rahner has ever been exclusively a writer. But the volume under review, for all its sometimes intractable strangeness by Anglo-Saxon standards, certainly confirms that capacity to open up questions which is Rahner's distinctive mark.

1 In several of my quotations I have modified the translation which (in my opinion) would often have been much clearer if it had been more literal.

2 "Consider a few institutions", as H. McC, once invited our readers (*New Blackfriars,* February 1967): "Spode House, the Newman Theology Groups, the Union of Catholic Students" etc.

3 The same idea is found in the work of another Continental thinker, Karol Wojtyla (*The Acting Person,* p 343) "The structure of a human community is correct only if it admits not just the presence of a justified opposition but also that effectiveness of opposition which is required by the common good and the right of participation".

4 A shelf of books can't be weighed in a balance with a conference centre; but over the past thirty years Spode House has certainly embodied and radiated a vision of the Catholic Church which is both critical and traditional in the right sense. My first

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.1981.tb03299.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

meeting with the Warden was at Christmas 1954: I hated every minute of the party but Miss Beechey initiated me into the Dominican breviary and I could withdraw from the traditional games to read back numbers of *Blackfriars* and *The Life of the Spirit* in the quiet room – which is one reason that I am happy to be able to contribute to this special issue.

Reviews

THE BIBLE NOW. Edited by Paul Burns and John Cumming.
***Gill & Macmillan* 1981. £5.95.**

Young Catholics today must think of the second Vatican Council as my generation thought of the Boer War: something that one reads about in books and occasionally hears mentioned, along with old-fashioned modes of dress, by one's parents. How do middle-aged people think of it? I suspect that they connect it with the disappearance of Latin from public worship, a shocking loss of liturgical dignity and decorum, and the "ecumenical movement"; and they have an uneasy feeling that the orderly and disciplined Church of their youth has become an anarchical chaos. They may easily overlook the fact that the Council, in principle, restored the Bible to its place in the Catholic scheme of things, and also removed the ban of genuine biblical scholarship. This book of sixteen essays by qualified experts or practitioners is a very valuable attempt to build some sort of bridge between the experts and ordinary Catholics. While warmly welcoming it and thanking the editors for the help they have given us, I also wonder a little what sort of a reception it will receive and how far it will help to clear up our difficulties. I think that the readers of the book, who will certainly learn from it that the Bible, far from being a monolithic book, is a compilation of a large number of very different and to some extent conflicting viewpoints, may retain the right to note that the essayists themselves are by no means all of one mind.

The book calls for some intellectual effort on the part of its readers. One advantage of a collection of essays by a number of different authors is that one need not begin at the beginning and continue in orderly progression to the end. I think some readers might ease their way into the book, after reading the introduction, by turning first to the very readable and helpful essays by Doris Hayes: *Teaching the Bible* (with its horror stories to illustrate the dangers of fundamentalism) and Cecily Bennett: *The Relevance of the Old Testament for Christians;* the Old Testament is far more bulky than the New; and we get many extracts from it in the liturgy (rather a novelty, this, for Catholics; Anglicans have had the advantage of the "first lesson" at Evensong and/or Mattins).

Next one might read Brian Davies's very helpful piece on the resurrection of Christ (I particularly liked his treatment of the alleged discrepancies between the various New Testament accounts of, and references to, this; he points out that there are several early accounts of the death of St Thomas Becket, and that these accounts disagree with each other in some remarkable ways, especially over details concerning people, dates and chronology; "some of them also show signs of being affected in their narrative by theological reflections on Becket"; yet all these accounts "can be taken as recording the absolutely certain fact that Becket was murdered in Canterbury"). Davies has little use for the rather sophisticated academic suggestion that Christ's resurrection cannot be regarded as "historical fact" because it affirms something that has its real meaning in a supra-temporal sphere.

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.1981.tb03299.x Published online by Cambridge University Press