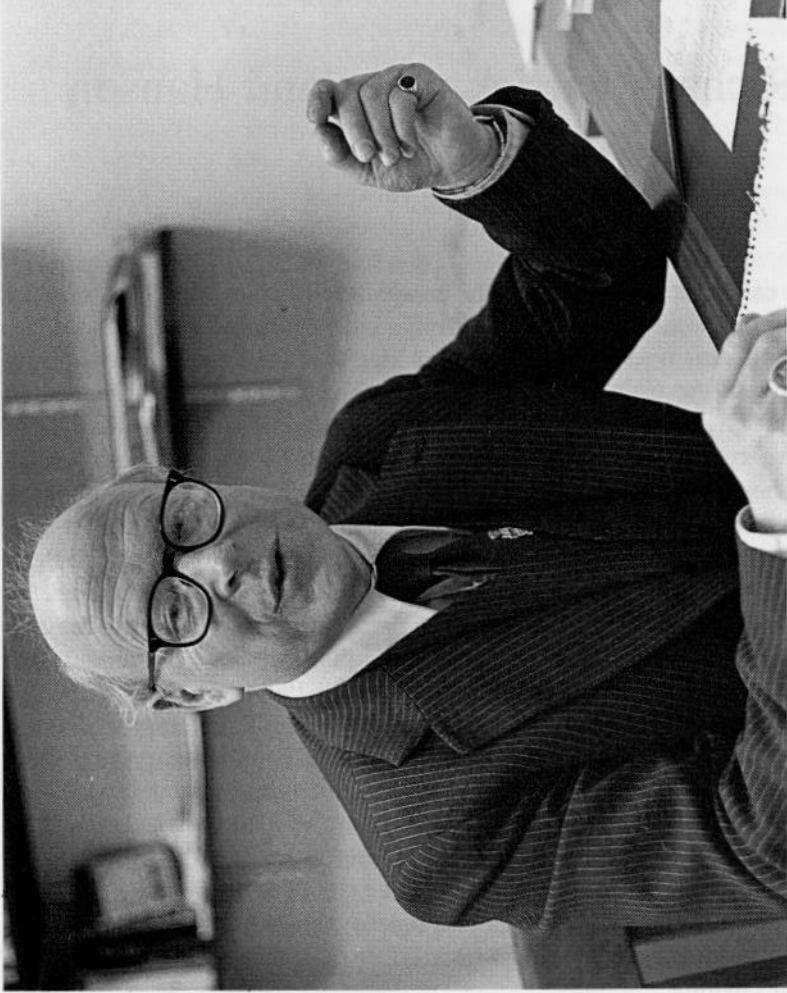


Richard Patrick Crossland Hanson 1916–1988

THERE can be few who achieve the completion of a *magnum opus* and the fulfilment of well-merited hopes through election to the British Academy in the last year of a rich and eventful life. Richard Hanson, scholar and bishop, saw the fruit of 20 years work in the publication of *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, a fundamental study of the Arian controversy from 318–381 within a few months of his death on 23 December 1988. In July of the same year he had been elected Fellow of the British Academy.

Richard Hanson was born on 24 November 1916 at Shepherd's Bush with his twin brother Anthony Tyrrell Hanson. Together they were to make lasting contributions to scholarship, the one to historical theology and the history of late Antiquity, the other to New Testament and doctrinal studies. Their father, Philip (later Sir Philip) Hanson was Chief Commissioner of the Board of Works in Ireland and Secretary to George Wyndham under the Balfour government (1900–5). Sir Philip spent most of his later life in Ireland until his death in 1955, and his family grew up there. Richard went to preparatory school in Dublin and thence to Cheltenham College. He returned to Ireland to study at Trinity College, Dublin and there he had a brilliant career. In 1938 he gained First Class Honours in *Literae Humaniores* and Ancient History, with marks, it was said, unparalleled since the days of J. B. Bury, followed in 1941 by a First Class in Divinity.

Richard, as he was always known to his friends, had decided on Orders and was successively deacon and priest of parishes in Dublin and Banbridge, County Down, where he was long remembered for his preaching and also his visiting. After the end of the war he moved to England to take up the appointment of Vice-Principal (Anglican) at Queen's College, Birmingham, where he was to remain for four years. His links with Ireland remained strong, however, for just after this time he



R. P. C. HANSON

married Mary, daughter of Canon John Powell of Dublin. It proved a perfect marriage of two families with their roots in Ireland. Mary supported and encouraged his work throughout his career as well as providing the home essential for the family of a pastor as well as a scholar. Students were always welcome to his home, and often shown with pride the Reynolds on the stair, before joining in conversations, at once both lively and scholarly. His four children, Catherine, Daniel, Monica and Simon grew up amid secure surroundings.

In 1950 Richard gave up his Vice-Principalship for the first of his pastoral appointments, that of Rector of St John-in-the-Wilderness, Shuttleworth in the Manchester diocese. His duties there, however, allowed him time to complete what was to prove a seminal work on Origen (*Origen's Doctrine of Tradition*, SPCK 1954). Origen appealed to him as one of the great Biblical scholars of the early Church, who believed that Scripture was the sole source of doctrine, and 'usually assumed without question that in any discussion the deciding factor was the evidence of the Bible' (p. 49). This was very much Richard's own point of view and his study, eventually published in 1954, demonstrated his complete identification with the subject. Deservedly he had already been awarded a Doctorate at Trinity College, Dublin on the same work in thesis form.

Academic life was clearly to be his main career, and in 1952 he was appointed to an Assistant Lectureship in the Department of Theology at Nottingham University, then led by John Marsh. His reputation, based on shorter contributions to New Testament scholarship as well as his interest in Origen was not belied. In the 10 years of his stay in the Department he rose rapidly to Lecturer and then Reader. *Origen's Doctrine of Tradition* became a standard work, and in 1959 he followed it with a wider survey of the development of tradition in the early Church by *Allegory and Event*; a study of the sources and significance of Origen's interpretation of Scripture. Up to the time of the publication of *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, I have always regarded this as the most typical of Richard's work. Its scope was wider than *Origen's Doctrine of Tradition*, reaching back to the roots of the Church's use of allegorical interpretation of Scripture in Judaism and following the development of its use through Origen's predecessors at Alexandria such as Clement, and without underestimating the influences of the Gnostic exegete of St John's Gospel, Heracleon (c. 170).

It was a fine work of scholarship, but it also showed that its writer was not wedded to antiquarian research. The question he was trying to answer for himself and his readers was whether the interpretation of the Bible as it is practised today 'has anything seriously in common with the interpretation of the Bible as Origen, or indeed as the early Church generally,

practised it'. It was a question he had been asking himself off and on, since 15 years previously he had lighted upon Armitage Robinson's edition of the *Philocalia* in the library of the Theological Society of the University of Dublin. 'I read it and found it intensely interesting and it started (this) question in my mind'. Excellent though the resulting studies were, an attentive reader would pick out the occasional loose phrase and hasty judgement ('Theophilus of Antioch was not prepared to indulge in wholesale allegorisation', or allegorization described as 'full-blooded', as though there were degrees of allegorization of Scripture), and a tendency to devote space to controverting contemporaries that could better have been used in footnotes or appendices. All in all, however, these works marked Richard as a scholar of distinction, and it was no surprise when in 1962 he was elected Lightfoot Professor of Divinity at Durham University and Canon of the Cathedral.

It was an admirable appointment for though he lacked the exegetical flair of J. B. Lightfoot, he shared that founder's sense of history and its relevance in ecclesiastical affairs. It was also a timely introduction to higher ecclesiastical responsibilities associated with Durham, as well as the experience of a top-class Department which included scholars of the calibre of the early Church historian Gerald Bonner, and the doctrinal historian H. E. W. Turner.

It was, however, to be a short appointment, for in 1964 Alan Richardson, Professor of Christian Theology at Nottingham retired. Hanson could not resist the call of his old university to replace him. The next six years were among the happiest and most fruitful of his life. A student who was at Nottingham in 1964 describes his return. 'He had an enthusiasm and zest for Theology and for living . . . He never walked through the Department, but semi-ran head first, and was happy when some *bon mot* by himself or a student provoked his famous querulous laugh and a "Well!" In the lecture room he delighted and excelled, and his swagger on the rostrum as he paused, removed his glasses to recite accurately and in order, *non pace* Papias on Mark, the movement of the Ostrogoths, Visigoths, and the Huns across the civilized world and their part in homoousios, humoiousios *et al.* aided only by a rollermap which would roll up as he unrolled the story for us—these are abiding memories. Students in his tutorials experienced the brilliance of his range matched only by the extent of his enthusiasm.'

This was indeed his finest hour, and his years as Professor at Nottingham gave him the chance to widen his horizons and become in addition to his doctrinal studies an historian of distinction in late antiquity. Up to this time Origen had been at the centre of his research, but his inaugural lecture showed another, Irish-based interest. Under the title 'St Patrick, a British Missionary bishop', he emphasized the Romano-British character

of Patrick and promised a new study of him, which would concentrate only on genuine historical sources of the period. Three years after the publication of his lecture in 1965 he kept his promise.

To write a new, convincing account of Patrick was a formidable undertaking. Could Hanson add anything to what Daniel Binchy had written in 1962 (*Studia Hibernica*, vol. 2), let alone overturn the seminal theories of J. B. Bury in his *St Patrick* written as long before as 1905? Binchy's work had been hailed as a masterpiece, the anonymous critic of the *Times Literary Supplement* claiming that it 'probably was as near to an objective and fully documented survey as one may reasonably hope for in the absence of some new evidence' (TLS, 19 April 1963, p. 264).

Hanson accepted Binchy's view that 'many areas of Patrick's life will probably remain obscure for ever', but he was able to re-establish Patrick as a credible figure and no longer a sort of theological football; a papal emissary sent by Pope Celestine I, on the one hand, or on the other, the representative of a Celtic Christianity robustly independent of Rome. Keeping close, as he had in his inaugural lecture, to the known Romano-British background of Patrick, he began his *St Patrick: his Origin and Career*, with an assessment of Patrick's surviving writings, the *Letter to Coroticus* and the *Confession*. The Latin was unpolished and did not suggest any long sojourn in Gaul under the tuition of Bishops Amator and Gerontius of Auxerre. Instead, he argued that after his escape from captivity in Ireland, Patrick returned to Britain, was consecrated bishop by British bishops and went back to Ireland at some time between 425 and 435. He arrived, therefore, at the same time as Celestine's missionary Palladius, but worked in a different area among different people. Their paths never crossed. He died c. 460. Patrick, in Hanson's view, was a Romano-British bishop, in the ascetic tradition of Ninian, who took the Roman see and the eucharistic liturgy for granted and hence made no mention of them in his writings. While Bury's dating could be accepted in outline, the source of his missionary inspiration and events of his life could be interpreted differently.

Some of Hanson's arguments, notably his rejection of Gallic influences on Patrick continue to encounter objections, but his work was quickly recognized as a landmark in Patrician studies. Incipient mythology creating 'two Patricks' was destroyed, and Patrick placed firmly within the framework of Britain and Ireland in the first half of the 5th century. His study fully deserved the 'rousing cheer' it was given by Daniel Binchy writing in the *Irish Times* of 9 March 1968, and established its author among the leaders of scholarship in the field of Late Antiquity in the west.

In 1967 Hanson had a further chance to demonstrate these interests. Nottingham University had inherited a collection of Romano-British

artefacts, including some very fine early Samian ware from Oswald's excavation of the 1st century Roman fort at Margidunum (near East Bridgford on the Fosse Way). There had, however, been little follow up, and it was left to the writer of this memoir during his year at Nottingham in 1951–2 as University Research Fellow to refound a university archaeological society with a staff and student membership. This had flourished, and aided by the keen support of E. A. Thompson, coupled with the flexibility that existed in the university in Departmental relationships Hanson combined with M. W. Barley (then Reader in Archaeology in the Department of Classics and President of the Council of British Archaeology) to initiate a conference on Christianity in Roman and Sub-Roman Britain, 300–700 AD.

The conference was held from 17–20 April 1967 and proved a success far beyond the author's dreams. Instead of an enlarged seminar with specialists reading papers to each other, the main hall of the university was crammed with more than 200 in the audience. Hanson, though not a digger himself, summed up the results, pointing out that 'when we turn to the projects for the study of Christianity of Roman Britain we are met with one solid fact. The future lies with archaeology . . . Archaeology is the growing point in the study of the early British Church'. The discovery of the Water Newton treasure in 1973, and other finds since then, proved the rightness of these views. At the same time, he looked forward to further work on Gildas and on St. Patrick. In a particularly Hansonian aside he asserted 'Several dozen could well (dare I say it?) be profitably drafted from pursuing fairly useless researches on the New Testament. I am not convinced that Patrick's slender but significant output of literature has yielded all its information yet'.

Not long after, he was to be faced with a new challenge which called him away from these studies. The autumn of 1968 had witnessed the renewal of the saga of troubles in Northern Ireland. Within two years, the Church of Ireland had invited him urgently to accept the see of Clogher which straddles the political border between North and South. Hanson accepted and was consecrated by the Archbishop of Armagh on St. Patrick's Day 1970, the preacher, being his friend Ian Ramsey, Bishop of Durham. The three years he spent at Clogher, provided scope for his gifts as a pastor and churchman. While he had shed some of his strong anti-Roman views of his first years out of Trinity College, he remained staunchly Anglican. His ability to resist the pressure from the extremes of Protestant and Roman Catholic for as long as he did was due to his representation of positive values in their own right against which other, conflicting views could be measured.

His approach to the two sides was as one would expect, primarily that

of an historian. Samuel Heaslett had worked in Clogher, before becoming Bishop in Japan in the 1930s and a prisoner from 1942 until 1945. Hanson was able to establish a muniment room as a memorial to him, displaying the rich archives of his diocese. It was an initiative designed to divert the minds of people away from the immediate tensions of the situation. Had the peace initiatives of 1972 succeeded, this could have played its part in healing rifts along this part of the border. On a personal level, the Hanson house, became a social meeting-place for clergy of the four main traditions represented in the diocese, Anglican, Presbyterian, Roman Catholic and Methodist. In addition, he was concerned with the Irish School of Ecumenics in Dublin. This served as a forum for discussing theological and, in particular, Christological questions, an effort at a genuine ecumenical exchange against ever-darkening political and religious horizons. In the meantime, Hanson struggled hard to bring his diocese abreast with trends in other parts of the Anglican world. He was the first Bishop of the Church of Ireland to licence women as Readers. He also became Chairman of a committee to revise the outworn Canons of the Church of Ireland. Here too, he was in his element, cutting through the mustiness of a century-old situation immediately following the Disestablishment of the Church of Ireland in 1869, and introducing a spirit of freedom, which was reflected in a code of practice rather than formal canons. His work was commended highly by Archbishop Simms, himself a firm believer in the Church as an agent of the 'freedom of the Gospel', free from any 'ossification' of Canon Law.

However circumstances, particularly in Fermanagh, eventually defeated him. By 1973 south Fermanagh was becoming as murderous as south Armagh as the IRA strove to destroy all opposition farming and business interests in that part of Ulster. Not surprisingly Hanson's ecumenical spirit was gradually overwhelmed by extremists on both sides. He found himself opposed increasingly by the Orange Order, and his own defence through a public attack on it undermined his position among the laity in the diocese. It was perhaps an error of judgement, given the intensity of pressure under which the whole non-Catholic population was suffering. With the utmost reluctance he decided in 1973 to resign his bishopric and return to academic life, this time to Manchester. He accepted an invitation to succeed Hubert Cunliffe-Jones, as Professor of Historical Contemporary Theology, and, in the diocese, that of Assistant Bishop.

Hanson had been able to do more academic work during his time as Bishop of Clogher, including an interesting short article on the death of the emperor Severus II in 307. At Manchester, he found full scope for writing and preparing his *magnum opus* on the Arian controversy. The family

meantime moved to Wilmslow across the Cheshire border, where he was to spend the rest of his life.

The nine years he spent in the Faculty at Manchester were full. A solid work of theology entitled *The Attractiveness of God* defended the traditional shape of the Christian message, the doctrines of the Trinity, of the Atonement and the Incarnation, while attempting the daunting task of re-creating these in forms acceptable to contemporary thought. The Chalcedonian Christological definition he suggested could be accepted as 'a statement of good intentions', 'a statement of the existing tradition on the subject, but not the only possible one today' (p. 114). This was followed in 1975 by an article on 'The Authority of the Christian Faith' published in a memorial volume to Alan Richardson entitled *Theology and Change* (ed. Ronald Preston). In this he balanced the claims of Scripture, Church and faith as the Christian's ultimate authority. A further doctrinal study resulted from his acceptance of an invitation from John Carroll University, a Jesuit university in Cleveland, Ohio, to be Tuohy Professor in Interreligious Studies for the academic year 1978-9, and to give the public lectures named after the founder of the Chair.

Walter and Mary Tuohy had given practical application to their interest in closer relations between the Churches by founding a Chair which was to be held alternatively by a Roman Catholic and non-Roman Catholic scholar, and Richard Hanson filled the latter category perfectly. *The Continuity of Christian Doctrine* (Seabury Press, New York, 1981) asked the same underlying question that he had asked in early works, namely how far contemporary Christianity reflected 'the same communication with God, or the same Gospel or the same paradigm or example as primitive Christianity did'. For him theology was always contemporary, whether he was writing about Origen or the Arians, or J. H. Newman or Karl Rahner. The fact of historical continuity insured that contemporary ideas of doctrine were linked securely to those of the New Testament and the great formative period of Christianity in the 4th and 5th centuries. That said, however, he attacked robustly the varied misunderstandings of development of which Protestants and Catholics were guilty. The authenticity of New Testament for instance, could be guaranteed by the variety of the witness. There was no need to search through 'Form' or any other school of Biblical criticism for 'an authoritative central core' within it. At the same time he criticized Newman and other Roman Catholic theologies for failing to give the New Testament more weight in the development of doctrine. It was far more than a starting-point, from which a luxuriant growth based on piety and theological congruity could develop. Such was the dogma of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary, that had no Scriptural or historical support and rested purely on popular devotion and theological congruity,

as explained by Karl Rahner. No service to Christianity was done by elevating the Virgin to 'much the same status as the Arians had envisaged for Christ' (p. 76). At the same time, he saw the emergence of consensus between the major traditions of the Church, growing out of what could best be termed 'correction-and-fulfilment' or trial and error in the development of Christian doctrine. What was thought of as orthodoxy in one age could find itself branded as heresy in another.

This was, as always with Hanson, well-founded as well as hard-hitting, and was appreciated greatly by those who attended his lectures. When the writer of this memoir was himself Tuohy Professor in 1981, the memory of his predecessor's theme was very much alive. He had put into words, backed by great learning, what very many had wanted to hear regardless of religious identity.

The year 1980 saw the first of three books in which Richard collaborated with his brother. *Reasonable Belief, The Identity of the Church* (OUP, 1980), *A Guide to Recognising the Contemporary Church* (SCM Press, 1987) and *The Bible without Illusions* (SCM Press, 1988). In all these, but especially in the last, the two authors attempted to show that a frank acceptance of the results of criticism was fully compatible with the recognition of the Bible as normative and can, in fact, enhance its religious value. 'The right category in which to see the Bible is that of evidence', that was to say, the Bible was to be seen as a near contemporary witness to the disclosure of God in Biblical times as a God who acted in history and whose character was righteous love. Though the life of the historical Jesus could not be recovered completely, evidence pointed to salient indications about his self-understanding, principally towards that of the 'Suffering Servant' described in (deutero) Isaiah 53. Though some of the 'illusions' could perhaps be dismissed as the views only of a small minority of fundamentalists, there was the more important, if unpublished, criticism of those New Testament scholars who refused to accept the fact and, especially, the life and ministry of Jesus in 1st-century Palestine could be reconstructed with a fair degree of accuracy.

Meantime, St. Patrick had not been forgotten. Before he went to Cleveland he had the satisfaction of seeing his edition of Patrick's works published among *Sources Chrétiennes* edited by Henri Crouzel, under the title *Saint Patrick: Confession et Lettre à Coroticus: Introduction, Texte critique et Notes* (*Sources Chrétiennes*, 249 [Paris, 1978]). This was one of Hanson's best works, combining a detailed understanding of the texts as well as providing the editor with a further chance of making a critical assessment of Patrick's life and achievement, it added to a well-merited international, European standing. In Manchester, students remembered the vigorous exposition of the editor's views, still the 'sparkling scholar' of his Nottingham days.

He retired from his Chair in 1982, but this did not quench his activities. Quite apart from University work, he had taken his duties, as Assistant Bishop of Manchester under Patrick Rodger and Stanley Booth-Clibborn as no honorary appointment. Colleagues remember him driving out on bitter evenings to some remote Manchester church for Confirmations. He was totally committed to the pastoral work of the Church, while his zest for teaching remained undiminished.

These strenuous activities were beginning to tell on his health, and his final years saw a great effort on his part to complete and publish his study of the Arian controversy. This was to be an enormous work. As he claimed, the last full scale study of Arianism in English had been that by H. M. Gwatkin written more than a century before. Since then, the subject had been transformed by the discovery of new texts and vastly improved understanding of the historical and philosophical background of the debate. There had also been the important works on the continent by Meslin and Simonetti, and in Britain the philosophically orientated studies of G. C. Stead and Rowan Williams. Hanson's approach differed from that of these colleagues. Search, not explanation or defence of what was accepted as orthodoxy was the key to his study. As he said near the end of his book, 'the story of the controversy between 318 and 381 is not one of embattled and persecuted orthodoxy maintaining a long and successful struggle against insidious heresy' (p. 870). At the outset, no one had a clear idea how the assertion of monotheism could be reconciled with the worship of Jesus Christ as God. There were strong views on what should be avoided but not many positive ideas. At the Council of Nicaea, it was as Basil of Caesarea described it 50 years later 'like a sea battle where all is confusion', or 'ignorant armies clashing by night' when foe and friend could hardly be distinguished.

Hanson pointed out that while Christian leaders of the 4th century sensed that Arius was wrong, 'virtually every theologian excepting Athanasius accepted some form of subordinationism at least up to the year 355' (p. XIX). Thereafter Trinitarian doctrine developed—and Hanson saw this as an example of the development of doctrine through trial and error—through the hesitations of the post-Nicaean period to the Arian phrase of 356–361, and thence to the acceptance of an agreed statement of the Council of Constantinople in 381. Thoroughness and attention to detail marked this survey of the evidence. Particularly useful were the detailed descriptions of the writings of some important though less accessible actors in the drama, such as Asterius the Sophist or Apollinaris of Laodicea, and despite its length of more than 900 pages, the reader finds himself carried along by Hanson's enthusiasm for the subject and the wit which often enlivened its pages. If criticism was to be made it was that the author made

less than he might of the influence of different cultural backgrounds on the division of opinion during the controversy. Why, for instance, were first Cyrenaica and then the Balkan Provinces such strongholds of Arian opinion, or why did the first decade of the 4th century witness the emphasis, among Christians, shift from Christ as Creator to Christ as Redeemer?

Richard saw the publication of *The Search* in the autumn of 1988. Previously in July he had been elected Fellow of the British Academy, and in September he had found strength enough to attend the new Fellows' lunch. His election had given him enormous pleasure, and it seemed to his friends that his honour had been long overdue. It was sad that he lived so little time to enjoy his success. Cancer had been diagnosed, and he died in St. Anne's Hospice on 23 December 1988. On that same day he was discussing with Mary the poetry of Wilfred Owen, and seeing to the distribution of free copies of *The Search*.

The full scope of his work can be seen in the 17 essays which were published in 1985 as *Studies in Christian Antiquity*. Here were a range of studies that united his early work on the *Philocalia*, with Trinitarian doctrinal studies and St. Patrick and 5th century Gaul. The most interesting and most characteristic was among the shortest. 'The Journey of Paul and the Journey of Nikias'. If, as Hans Conzelmann had suggested in his Commentary on Acts, Luke's account of Paul's journey from Caesarea to Malta (Chap. 27) was not undertaken by Paul at all, but was an adaptation of a contemporary story of a shipwreck designed to lend interest and excitement to his narrative, what about Thucydides's account of Nikias's voyage from Athens to Catana in Sicily? Could not this be subjected to similar negative criticism?

Thucydides was in exile at the time, and hence dependent on hearsay. The speeches made for and against the expedition in the Assembly of Athens were fictitious. Thucydides failed to mention conditions at sea and the account of Alcibiades's adventures was wholly unconvincing. He was simply concocting a reconstruction to suit his anti-democratic prejudices. So, while the expedition probably took place it was possible to detach all the incidents in which Nikias and his associates figure. Thucydides was reproducing an anonymous account of some expedition and fitting his characters into it. And Hanson was quite right in commenting, if this was the way historical criticism of ancient authors was conducted then the reconstruction of past events would become impossible.

Hanson's scholarship certainly had its faults. Sometimes one may feel that description replaces insight, and argument may become too flamboyant, debate too intense. He allowed too many minor mistakes and inaccuracies to creep in, diminishing the credibility of otherwise finely

researched work. But throughout his life there was the patience, perseverance and balance that mark the Classical scholar, and in his later works an immense erudition. Combined with his scholarship and devotion to his students, was a deep-felt loyalty to the Anglican Communion. He felt that this did indeed provide the true balance between freedom and authority in Christianity. If he was conscious of the serious weaknesses of the Church of Rome, even after Vatican II, he was completely at home with Roman Catholic theologians. His *Search* was dedicated to Henri Crouzel, while Karl Rahner was an influence on his thought. A loyal, able and intensely hard-working scholar and Churchman, he left behind a host of friends, and a memory of one who had served his generation well.

W. H. C. FRIEND

Note. In this memoir I am grateful, in particular, to Dr Benjamin Drewery, formerly British Fraser Senior Lecturer in Ecclesiastical History at Manchester University, for permission to use his account of Richard Hanson's life published in *Scripture Tradition and Reason* (T&T Clark [Edinburgh, 1988]), to Mrs Richard Hanson and Revd Canon Anthony Hanson, Professor E. A. Thompson, Revd Canon A. Inglis and Dr Terence Copley of the Department of Theology at Exeter, for additional information and help generously given.