

INTRODUCTION TO THEOLOGY by David Brown. *Basil Blackwell, 1987. 182pp.*

David Brown's *Introduction to Theology* claims to cover 'all the major topics studied in schools, universities and seminaries'; all the major topics, that is, connected with theology and religious studies. Brown discusses the nature of religion, the Bible, the history of the Christian Church and the present state of theology and philosophy of religion. I would not consider its level of discussion to be advanced enough for most university or seminary courses, but it would be excellent for secondary school use.

An introductory work that is short (Brown's book has 148 pages of text) and attempts to be comprehensive faces certain problems. It has to discuss questions briefly, but without leaving out any aspect of importance, without distorting the issues through superficiality, and without being too hard to understand. Brown sometimes fails at this, but his successes deserve respect.

His first section, on the nature of religion, is the least good. He tries to help the reader understand the role of myth in religion by claiming that religious myths 'have a clear counterpart in some modern novel writing', such as William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*. This is an anachronism. The authors of the Book of Genesis or the Mahabharata did not have at their disposal the literary techniques of 20th-century novelists. One of the more important things about the past is that it is not like the present, and students need to be taught this; they don't need to have this fact obscured by misleading comparisons. Brown falls victim to superficiality here.

He is also guilty in this first section of presenting his own opinions as established fact, a scholarly fault he himself warns against. He remarks that '... there is no need to return to the position of assuming truth to lie only in one (religion). Instead, we need to see all as containing various mixtures of truth and falsehood.' (p. 41) Many religions, such as Islam and Catholicism, reject the possibility of their teachings being mixtures of truth and falsehood. Indeed they have to do so, since to admit the possibility of any of their teachings being false is to destroy the justification for their entire systems, viz. divine revelation. Brown can allow for the possibility of a revealed religion being a 'mixture of truth and falsehood' because his conception of revelation is different from the Catholic or Islamic one. This conception is not, however, an established fact, as he would admit.

After discussing the nature of religion, Brown wisely restricts himself to the main issues connected with Christianity. Perhaps because of limiting his subject matter, he does better here. As an almost uninformed reader, I found his section on the history, nature and teachings of the Bible profitable and interesting. In his history of the Church, he succeeds at his task of compression. He makes an effort to dispel common misconceptions about Church history, and thus present a truer history than is usually given. His discussion of present trends in theology and philosophy of religion is also fairly successful. It includes topics like liberation theology, feminist theology and the ideas of Alvin Plantinga, along with his own comments on them.

More space is taken up by criticism in this review than by praise, but that should not be taken as a reflection on the book; criticism requires more justification than praise. I would rate the book as flawed, but worth reading.

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