

*An Introduction to the New Testament*, by Raymond E. Brown. New York: Doubleday, 1997. Pp. xxxvii + 878.\*

As far as quality and depth of scholarship is concerned, Raymond Brown's new *Introduction to the New Testament* has a few, if any rivals. One of the foremost Roman Catholic biblical scholars in the world today, Brown is known particularly for his contribution to Johannine studies (Anchor Bible commentaries on John's Gospel and epistles) and Christology (the two-volume *The Birth and Death of the Messiah*). Nevertheless, for the following reasons, I cannot recommend this remarkable new work to conservative evangelical students of the New Testament without reservations.

To begin with, evangelicals will part company with Brown's critical stance toward the authorship and date of many of the New Testament writings. Brown's position is already reflected in his chosen format of presentation: first, the Gospels and related works (that is, Acts and the Johannine epistles); second, the Pauline letters (which, for Brown, means 1 Thessalonians, Galatians, Philippians, Philemon, 1 and 2 Corinthians, and Romans); third, what Brown classes under the category "deutero-Pauline writings" (2 Thessalonians, Colossians, Ephesians, and the Pastorals); and fourth, other New Testament writings (Hebrews, 1 Peter, James, Jude, 2 Peter, and Revelation).

Many conservative evangelicals (including myself) will find Brown's inclusion of the above-listed letters among epistles falsely attributed to Paul problematic. They will also object to his dating of many New Testament writings (including the Synoptics, the "deutero-Paulines," Hebrews, 1 Peter, James, Jude) subsequent to A.D. 70. Second Peter is even dated during the reign of Hadrian (A.D. 117-38). Likewise, they will express reservations regarding Brown's rejection of the apostolic authorship of Matthew and John (though Brown is less skeptical regarding Luke and Mark). Finally, they will not be entirely satisfied with Brown's espousal of a position of inerrancy that limits such to matters of "salvation" (p. 31, quoting the Vatican II document *Dei Verbum*).

Another point of difficulty pertains to the way in which Brown's Roman Catholic commitment affects his scholarship. For example, Brown seeks to justify his church's Tradition (with a capital "T") as "*normative* interpretation of [God's salvific action] which is not found in Scripture" (p. 34). As a result, he is able to support doctrines such as the assumption of Mary as a legitimate application of the New Testament teaching on "the raising from death to glory of all the faithful disciples of Christ" (p. 34). A further outgrowth of Brown's particular confessional stance is his limited engagement, even acknowledgment, of evangelical sources. Thus one looks in vain for the New American Standard version among the translations listed by Brown. Likewise, his bibliography of New Testament Introductions does not include the standard evangelical work by Carson, Moo, and Morris.

It is a pity that Brown falls short in the above mentioned areas, for there is much to commend in this work. Apart from the quality of scholarship one has come to expect from this author, Brown also excels in his inclusion of material that is frequently overlooked but essential for an introduction to the New Testament. These include matters of canon, textual transmission, and translation; the social and political background to the New Testament, both intertestamental and contemporaneous to Jesus and the early church; the religious and philosophical world of New Testament times; the various "criticisms" applied to New Testament study, such as form, source, or redaction criticism; and even hermeneutics, to name but a few. It was because of the lack of a New

Testament Introduction treating all these vital matters in one volume that teachers of New Testament survey courses have up to this point found themselves compelled to patch together treatments from a variety of different sources: matters of Bible introduction from Geisler and Nix's *General Introduction to the Bible*, intertestamental information from Lea's *New Testament Survey*; New Testament background from Barrett's *Selected Documents* and a variety of other sources, and so on. Now there is Brown's work, which includes all of these matters in one volume.

Still, any endorsement of Brown's *Introduction* must be less than wholehearted. At best, we can recommend that his work be read alongside a more conservative work such as Carson, Moo, and Morris or Blomberg's recent *Jesus and the Gospels* as an exemplar of contemporary critical Roman Catholic scholarship (albeit of the best variety). Otherwise, it seems precarious to expose beginning students of the New Testament to a work that denies the apostolic authorship of Matthew and John, attributes half of Paul's writings to later "disciples" of Paul, and dates many books considerably later than seems warranted by the evidence. With all its brilliance and erudition, Brown's *Introduction* is not the reliable guide beginning students of the New Testament need. For this, evangelical seminarians will have to wait for the completion of the New Testament Introduction currently being prepared by a team of scholars from Germany, Britain, and the US, to be published in the Baker series *Engaging the New Testament*.

Andreas J. Köstenberger

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