

Encyclopedia of the Historical Jesus

Craig A. Evans, ed. *Encyclopedia of the Historical Jesus*. New York: Routledge, 2008. 728 pp. \$195.00. Hardcover. ISBN: 9780415975698.

The historical Jesus continues to be an appealing topic both among biblical scholars and in popular culture. While there are other reference works that deal with some aspect of scholarship on Jesus (e.g., *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* and *Jesus in History, Thought and Culture: An Encyclopedia*), the *Encyclopedia of the Historical Jesus* uniquely focuses on topics related to study of the historical Jesus. It is edited by well-known New Testament scholar Craig A. Evans, the Payzant Distinguished Professor of New Testament at Acadia Divinity College in Nova Scotia.

Much of the work on the historical Jesus since 1985 has been designated the “Third Quest” of the historical Jesus. Such work has been characterized by a more optimistic view of the reliability of the canonical material than was held by the previous generation of scholars known as the “New Quest.” The Third Quest also emphasizes the Jewishness of Jesus, and therefore devotes much energy in understanding Second Temple Judaism. Often those involved in the Third Quest understand their work to be first and foremost historical and only secondarily, if at all, theological. This encyclopedia is primarily a work of this mainstream Third Quest, and each of these points of emphasis can be seen in its entries. While the Jesus Seminar also fits into this time period, its members do not fit these characteristics. The encyclopedia does not ignore the work of the Jesus Seminar, but clearly relegates its importance.

The *Encyclopedia* does not make explicit its intended audience, only that it seeks to fill the “need for expert guidance” given the major advances to the study of the Jesus of history (vii). It is likely that the *Encyclopedia* was written with a wide audience in mind. Most entries begin with basic information suitable for a beginner. The bibliographies’ frequent inclusion of French and German sources may signal its usefulness to more advanced students and scholars. If the *Encyclopedia* assumes levels of varying familiarity with the topics, a list of abbreviations would enhance its usefulness to those who are beginning their quests for the historical Jesus. The introduction envisions this encyclopedia as a companion to the four-volume *The Historical Jesus: Critical Concepts in Religious Studies* (Routledge, 2004).

The *Encyclopedia* offers 227 signed entries written by 110 international scholars totaling almost 500,000 words (vii). The entries are arranged alphabetically, but there is also a helpful thematic entry list that groups the entries into sixteen broad categories, such as “Major Contributors and Their Works,” “Methods and Criteria,” “Teachings of Jesus,” “Places and Regions,” and “New Testament Gospels” (which curiously includes the entry on “Q”!). The inclusion of this variety of entries brings together information that otherwise would have to be gained by consulting several dictionaries or encyclopedias, such as a Bible dictionary, atlas, and dictionary of biblical interpreters.

The entries tend to aim for the broad sweep. For example, there is one entry on “Extra-New Testament Gospels” rather than separate entries on each non-canonical gospel. Likewise, the fellows of the Jesus Seminar are treated in one entry. A detailed, analytical index at the end of the *Encyclopedia* provides an efficient way to search for

narrow subjects within the broad entries. Ranging from one page to about twelve pages, the entries include fine bibliographies including non-English work for further research.

The contributors to the *Encyclopedia* are mostly male, and most contribute one to five entries. Evans, the editor, contributes the most by far with nineteen entries plus a co-authored entry. The *Encyclopedia* lacks an index that matches the contributor with his/her contribution(s). The contributors range widely in terms of experience from a Master of Theological Studies student to established scholars. James D. G. Dunn has the distinction of being both a contributor and having an entry devoted to his work.

While most entries are helpful and clearly relevant, there are a few that seem unnecessary. “Buddhist Thought and Jesus” seems out of place. There are also some redundancies. While the entry on Rudolf Bultmann deals with demythologization, this concept receives its own entry which is concerned exclusively with its use by Bultmann. The entry on “Historical Criticism” carries the alternate title of “Gospels as Sources,” which is the more appropriate title for the entry because it primarily deals with source-critical matters. Yet, there is a more detailed entry on “Source Criticism” also included. A few entries, such as “Abraham,” fail to focus on their topic as related directly to the historical Jesus.

Another minor criticism: There is inconsistency in some grammatical issues. For example, there seems to be no rule for when to capitalize “gospel.” This is true not only among the various entries, but within individual entries (e.g., “Matthew’s gospel” in one sentence and “Matthew’s Gospel” in the next, 257).

Overall, the *Encyclopedia* is attractive and user-friendly. It brings together a wealth of information in a single volume and is recommended for theological libraries and those serving religious studies programs.

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