

Dictionary of Biblical Criticism and Interpretation

Stanley E. Porter, ed. *Dictionary of Biblical Criticism and Interpretation*. London, New York: Routledge, 2007. 406 pp. \$250.00. Hardcover. ISBN: 9780415201001.

Described in the preface as a “guide to major issues, approaches, and people that have been important in the development of biblical criticism and interpretation” (vii), this dictionary joins a number of other recent publications in the subject area (Hayes, *Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation*, 2 vols., 1999; McKim, *Dictionary of Major Biblical Interpreters*, IVP 2007; Kannengiesser, *Handbook of Patristic Exegesis*, 2006; Vanhoozer, *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, 2005). Stanley Porter identifies as his goal “to provide some historical and contemporary perspectives on the major issues and approaches at hand as an aid to the ongoing task [of biblical interpretation]” (3). The *Dictionary* targets seminarians and university students involved in biblical research. A well-established biblical scholar himself, Porter has assembled articles by leading figures in biblical studies. These include C.K. Barrett, Bruce Chilton, James Dunn, Craig Evans, John Goldingay, and Richard Longenecker; however, there is no biographical information about any of the contributors.

The *Dictionary* does not attempt to be exhaustive. Porter apologizes in advance for any “favorite biblical scholar” left out (vii). Despite Porter’s hope that the volume will “overcome the kind of contemporary critical introspection that results in failure to contextualize the contemporary within the broader sweep of history” (2), the *Dictionary* focuses on recent methods and exegetes. The *Dictionary* contains 178 articles in all. About seventy of these discuss particular exegetes, with over half treating exegetes of the twentieth century. There are fifteen articles on exegetes from the earlier modern period (sixteenth through nineteenth centuries) and nineteen articles on patristic and medieval exegetes. Over thirty articles treat modern (and postmodern) methods and approaches. All types of criticism are discussed, from the standard (form, source, redaction, and textual) to newer types (canonical, feminist, formalist, liberation, narrative, poststructural, rhetorical, social-scientific) to lesser known approaches of art, music, and film. The only areas of recent criticism neglected are various Third World and interreligious approaches.

In his introduction, Porter expresses a desire to see cross-fertilization among the panoply of approaches and “a reintegration of historical and theological disciplines” (3). These are lofty goals for a reference work that most will refer to selectively. Though most of the articles are of high quality, one exception is unfortunately the first to appear in the *Dictionary*: Peter Abelard. The first paragraph of the article employs the Latin plural *universalia* three times as a singular. This is a small grammatical error, but on the question of universals, the article never discusses the role Abelard’s theory plays in biblical interpretation. The article briefly mentions Abelard’s commentary on Romans, but neglects his commentary on the Hexameron, recently edited. Nor does it mention his lectures on Ezekiel which Abelard makes so much of in his *Story of My Misfortunes*. Another deficient article is that on Augustine where, unbelievably, the author does not discuss any of Augustine’s vast exegetical works or hermeneutical principles!

For the hefty list price of \$250, a library would do better purchasing Hayes’s two-volume *Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation* if it does not already own a copy. It is out of print, but available used for under \$100. Besides its greater breadth, articles and bibliographies in the Hayes *Dictionary* are usually three times longer and often of better

quality than those in Porter. Hayes includes articles on all biblical books, whereas Porter includes articles on only a few, relying instead on more general articles on the Pentateuch, the Gospels, and the Pauline Letters. The Hayes *Dictionary* treats important exegetical topics not found in Porter; for example, Hayes provides thirteen columns on the Kabbalah, while nothing appears in Porter. Again, only Hayes has an article with extensive bibliography on Alfred Loisy (1857-1940), the central figure of Modernism in the Catholic Church. With the money saved by not purchasing the book under review, a library might consider purchasing Porter's better and more in-depth work, *Handbook to Exegesis of the New Testament* (638 pages, 1997), and one of the other titles listed above.

Michael Woodward
St. John Vianney Seminary, Denver

