

Encyclopedia of the Bible and its Reception

Hans-Josef Klauck et al., eds. *Encyclopedia of the Bible and its Reception*, Vol. 1: *Aaron-Aniconism*. 1223 pp. ISBN: 9783110183559; Vol. 2: *Anim-Atheism*. 1207 pp. 973110183701. Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2009. 30 volumes projected. \$299 per volume on standing order through 31 December 2009; \$325 per volume thereafter; \$7999 per set prepaid. \$448 annual online subscription through 31 December 2009; \$896 annual online subscription thereafter; unlimited access through 2018, \$13,190 (through 31 December 2009; thereafter, approx. \$14,500); online available at half price to subscribers to the print version.

The *Encyclopedia of the Bible and its Reception* is the product of two intersecting tenets. The first is the realization that, with the completion of the *Theologische Realenzyklopädie* (*TRE*), a new biblical encyclopedia was needed, one that also traces the history of the reception of the Bible. The second is the fact that English has become a prominent language in theological discourse. As a consequence, the Walter de Gruyter publishing house set itself the task of producing such a work. It enlisted several hundred women and men from all over the world, experts in the fields of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament, New Testament, Judaism, Christianity, and reception history. The work will be gathered together in this comprehensive thirty-volume encyclopedia. An international editorial board of at least six experts in each of these five areas was selected to oversee the work to its conclusion. The first volumes appeared in June 2009. The plan is to publish three volumes for each of the next nine years with an estimated 9,000 entries in total.

The goal set for this monumental work is twofold. Like many other encyclopedias of biblical research, it carefully examines the current state of biblical studies. It includes essays that treat biblical persons, places, and events as found in the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible; the historical, political, social, and religious contexts out of which the biblical material originated and developed; the salient theological issues that arise within the text; the various literary forms within which the biblical message is couched; and the traditional and current methods of interpretation. However, this work is unique among other encyclopedias in that it also examines the history of biblical interpretation, the reception of the biblical message as it has evolved within both the Jewish and the Christian communities down through the ages, and the people involved in the transmission and reception of that message.

Each volume includes the names of the editorial board and consultants; a list of the contributors to that volume and the translators; a catalog of the figures, plates, and maps found in that volume; and an explanatory file of abbreviations used. Maps and charts are found throughout the volume where corresponding material is discussed. In addition, several pages of striking and colorful plates are positioned in the middle of the book. References to other articles are found at the end of some of the entries. However, this is not a universal feature.

The entries themselves vary in length; some are quite comprehensive. For example, the twelve-page entry on the biblical character "Aaron" treats his appearance in the pages of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament, in Jewish tradition from the Second Temple Period to Medieval and Later Judaism, and in the New Testament. It identifies and explains archaeological evidence pertinent to the period associated with Aaron and the early priesthood of

Israel. It then discusses his importance, first in Christian tradition through the ages, then in the tradition of Islam. Finally, it highlights the appearance and importance of Aaron in literature, the visual arts, and music. Each section of this entry ends with a bibliography of references for further study. Eleven authors contributed to this entry, each one writing from her or his area of expertise.

The long entry on “Allegory” demonstrates the manner in which various interpretive approaches are treated. The importance of allegory in Greco-Roman, Jewish, Christian, and Muslim literature is thoroughly explained and exemplified. As one would expect, the significance of Patristic biblical interpretation comes into play here. The bibliographies that attend this entry are wide-ranging and current. The essay on “Archaeology” shows how the insights of one field of knowledge can supply invaluable information to another while retaining its own unique character. This entry discusses the history of archaeology in biblical lands, the methods used, and the problems that face modern archaeology in those lands. While this essay is only six pages long, almost an entire page is bibliography.

Theological topics are also treated extensively. The multi-authored entry on “Adoration” consists of nine sections: History of Religion, Hebrew Bible/Old Testament, New Testament, Greco-Roman Antiquity, Christianity, Islam, Literature, Visual Arts, and Music. The entry on “Angels and Angel-Like Beings” follows the same format and is even longer; it extends through twenty-two pages. This extended treatment might be due to popular devotion’s continued interest in angels. However, not all the entries are long. The contribution to biblical interpretation made by the second century master Rabbi Aqiva is awarded two columns of explanation, and that of the tenth century theologian Anselm of Canterbury is granted only one column.

The encyclopedia is not only interdisciplinary in its approach, it is also interfaith in its focus. It treats issues that are important to one, two, or all three Abrahamic faiths, and it does this with sensitivity and equal attention. Neither does it espouse specific or particular theological points of view, nor does it disparage any. It provides information about matters of faith without propagandizing.

The readership of this encyclopedia will be quite diverse. Scholars will appreciate its interdisciplinary character, the considerable scope of its investigation, and the suggestions for further study. Students will find it an invaluable tool for both the study of the Bible and the integration of biblical data with material from related disciplines. Those not involved in formal education will also benefit from the vast store of information collected here. Though written by scholars, the authors have kept the diverse readership in mind. Technical jargon has been avoided, and foreign language is kept to a minimum. When it is included, it is immediately translated so that the reader can appreciate its relevance. It is the kind of tool that should be on the shelf of every serious theological library.

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The *Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception (EBR)* is a pathbreaking departure from Bible dictionaries and histories of interpretation as we have known them. Growing out of the burgeoning approach known as “reception history” or “reception criticism” in biblical studies (an approach that has engendered such projects as *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture* and *The Church’s Bible*), *EBR* takes a further leap forward by including Jewish and Muslim commentary on each major entry. Thus, “reception” is not limited to Christian reception. In addition, these topics are explored in literature, the visual arts, film, and music. The potential for teaching suddenly mushrooms with this multiplicity of viewpoints in a single source and the multiplicity of bibliography suggested thereby.

The editors’ names indicate the stature of the project; they are so well respected that they need no comment, only gratitude for undertaking the immense work involved. The contributors’ list is extensive (over 400 for volume 1 alone) and international as well as interreligious. Oddly, each editor’s or contributor’s name is followed only by a geographical identification, with no indication of institutional affiliation or responsibility. Neither the online version nor the print version provides anything more. If one wants to know more about the person whose work one is reading, going beyond *EBR* is required, leading one to hope that fuller identifications will be provided in future volumes.

First of all, *EBR* is a Bible dictionary. It has articles on people and places in the Bible, but also themes (adultery, anointing), literary forms (e.g., apocalypses), and approaches to Scripture (allegory), to mention a few. But *EBR* goes far beyond where Bible dictionaries stop; hence, there will be thirty volumes, not five or six (like *Anchor Bible Dictionary* or *The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*). Part of the additional content comes from the aforementioned treatment of biblical material from Jewish and Muslim perspectives as well as Christian, and another part from extending “reception” into articles on aspects of postbiblical history (e. g., anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism, American Revolution), intellectual life (e.g., anthropology, archives and libraries), and culture (especially the arts)—to look just at the first two volumes, the only ones available so far.

Thirty volumes are projected over a ten-year publishing period, but only two have appeared so far. What is not clear is whether the articles for later volumes have already been written, or whether articles in later volumes will take advantage of post-2009 scholarship. The website has no information on this point. The effect of this delay is magnified by the user’s inability to make use of forthcoming articles in order to fill out details in articles already available. For example, the article on “Anne” (mother of Mary the mother of Jesus) does not offer much discussion about the *Protevangelium of James*, and the volume in which the article on that text is to appear will not be published for several years. The kind of inconvenience we experienced over four years with the five-volume *New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* is going to be intensified substantially because of *EBR*’s schedule of publication.

There are tantalizing articles announced in the first two volumes, such as “Anglican Liturgy,” for which we will have to wait until “Liturgy” is published. There are also, however, some such announcements that raise serious questions. For example, when one looks for the article on the Acts of the Apostles, one is referred to “Luke-Acts, Book of.” It is by no means agreed among scholars that the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles are *simply* to be treated as a two-volume work, particularly in view of Richard Pervo’s recent work; at least some discussion of the matter might be expected here in volume 1. When the volume with “Luke-Acts, Book of” is published, will there be a discussion of Pervo’s 2009 Hermeneia commentary, or will the article have been written too early to take account of that pathbreaking work?

As with any collaborative venture of this kind, articles vary in character and, to some extent, in quality. The first article in volume 1 is on “Aaron,” and the treatment is well developed; there is a separate article on “Aaron’s Rod,” and there is a cross-reference from “Aaron’s Tomb” to “Aaron: Archaeological Evidence,” meaning that one must consult the general article on Aaron and find the section in it that treats archaeology. Thus, Aaron gets reasonably comprehensive coverage, with each aspect of Aaronic scholarship getting comparable attention (though Aaron in music is given shorter shrift).

When one turns to “Abel,” however, we find a very different situation. To be sure, there is more in the Bible about Aaron than about Abel, but the latter is by no means an insignificant figure. Yet *EBR* offers three sentences, with no bibliography, about Abel in the Hebrew Bible *and nothing whatever* about Abel in the New Testament. The section on Abel in postbiblical Christianity is well developed, but there is *nothing whatever* about Abel in postbiblical Judaism. Nor can one fill out—at least, not yet—the treatment of Abel by turning to the article on Cain. Brief sections on Abel in literature and the visual arts provide some interesting comments and bibliography, but the scantiness of attention to Abel in the New Testament and early Judaism is both astonishing and inexcusable.

In the article on “Adam,” the section dealing with New Testament use of this figure offers brief treatments of all passages and includes appropriate specialized bibliography, the use of which ought to lead the reader to more resources. The implicit assumption seems to be that the reader will have sense enough to go to the commentaries on the passages treated, since no commentaries are cited in the bibliography, though we are usefully reminded of Jeremias’ article in Kittel’s *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. It is disappointing however, to see in the corresponding article on Adam in the Hebrew Bible only three bibliographic references, including one to Westermann’s Augsburg commentary on Genesis 1–11 and Wallace’s article on Adam in the *Anchor Bible Dictionary*. Of course, many of *ABD*’s articles are excellent, but they are usually similar to *EBR*’s own articles in depth and extent. One expects the next level of detail from such a bibliography, not articles in other biblical dictionaries. However good such works as the last two may be, they are scarcely at the same scholarly level as the material cited in the New Testament section. Most of the bibliographies are well selected, though the *Anchor Bible Dictionary* is found in other *EBR* entries.

In other words, the bibliographies vary enormously in kind and level from one entry to another, and even from one section to another in the same entry. The user of *EBR* is given no explanation for this variation and cannot help but wonder what has happened. Were authors not given clear instructions, or did editors not hold them to a common standard? One hopes that the publisher will take note of observations like these in reviews and in correspondence from users of *EBR* so that subsequent volumes can be brought up to a uniform standard. This project is too important, potentially too basic to all who work in this area, to be left to the vagaries of individual author’s approaches. Furthermore, we need to be confident in looking to *EBR* as an advance on *ABD* and *NIDB*, not one more instance of the same kind of thing.

Like the bibliographies, the articles themselves vary in quality and depth, though almost all are helpful. As always, students must be cautioned against relying solely on any single resource and must be encouraged to go beyond the short summary article to follow up the bibliographies cited there. Yet students must also be encouraged not to omit this initial stage and rush on to the specialized monographs. Pointing students to *EBR* will pay off in making them aware from the beginning of the different dimensions of any of the people and things treated in it. Having that breadth of vision will also enable teachers to think of fresh ways to come at standard subjects, whether in biblical courses or in courses on postbiblical periods and on religious art.

One great benefit of such a reference tool is having both the biblical material and the subsequent use of it treated in the same resource. One does not have to (or ought not to have to) consult different reference works for entries in different periods, religions, or media. This collocation makes *EBR*, even with shortcomings of the kind noted here, clearly something that it will be risky not to have in our libraries.

Of course, *EBR* is not simply a print product, and one must look at its online presence as well: <http://www.degruyter.de/cont/fb/th/ebr/ebrProjectEn.cfm>. The text is completely searchable, bringing up and highlighting terms throughout the entire text of *EBR*. The usual features of online resources are present: tables of contents, Boolean operators, truncation of search terms, printing of articles, and links to PDF versions of printed articles. Access is typical of other online resources. IP recognition is available for on-campus use of the work; for libraries that provide proxy service as well, *EBR* will be available anywhere. The online subscription price is for one simultaneous user, but more simultaneous users can be purchased.

Certainly *EBR* is very expensive. Unless your library is able to make a one-time purchase, the expense is ongoing. On the other hand, spreading publication over ten years means spreading payment over ten years, which has its advantages for the budgets of libraries as well as for the budget of Walter de Gruyter. I suggest that the process of deciding whether your library can afford it is twofold. First, ask the faculty—all of them, not just the biblical scholars—to think about how they would use it. Ask the publisher for a trial of the online version. Second, ask yourself what resources have comparable costs; are those resources more or less valuable to your library's users than *EBR*? It is hard to imagine how a theological library can afford to be without this resource, even at the cost of giving up another. Subscriptions to one periodical title in some fields cost as much or more, although articles from them can be obtained through interlibrary loan.

The prospect is tremendous for students and teachers, for preachers and researchers, and for nonspecialist academics seeking ways into biblical material or biblical reception via a comprehensive resource not tied to a single religious orientation. I think that it will be great fun exploring *EBR* and experimenting with it as a teaching and learning tool.

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