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**Book review:**

**Browning, W. F. R. *Dictionary of the Bible*. New York: Oxford UP, 1997.**

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## REVIEWS

**A DICTIONARY OF THE BIBLE.** By W. F. R. Browning. Pp. xv + 412. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997. Cloth, \$25.00.

This dictionary is designed for students interested in acquiring a deeper knowledge of the most prominent peoples and places found in a Christian Bible translation. Thus, "Old Testament" replaces "Hebrew Scriptures," and entries that could apply both to the Hebrew Bible and to the New Testament typically focus on the New Testament. When looking up "divination," for example, one learns that it was practiced widely in Greece, but finds none of the numerous references to divination in the Hebrew Bible. (One must consult the entry "magic and sorcery" for this.) The entry "resurrection" focuses on Christian perceptions of life-after-death, but makes no mention of Elijah's resurrection of the widow's son in 1 Kings 17. Under the term "analogy" one finds that it is "much employed in the Bible" (p. 15), but a discussion of its use begins with Paul's remarks in 1 Cor 10:4. Comparative sources and manuscripts pertaining to the New Testament also are cited more frequently. Thus, one can consult "Nag Hammadi," "Didache," "Byzantine Text," and "A" (for Codex Alexandrinus), but not "Aleppo Codex," "Enuma Elish," or "Gilgamesh (Tablet XI)."

Unique to this dictionary are entries outlining scholarly and theological terms, issues, themes, and hermeneutics. Students can acquaint themselves *inter alia* with historical and narrative criticism, narrative ethics, liberation theology, structuralism, rhetorical criticism, and the proposed Q-source. The inclusion of various hermeneutics is the dictionary's greatest asset, for it synthesizes in a general way information normally found in scattered sources and allows quick access to the diversity of interpretive approaches which the Bible has elicited over the centuries. Nevertheless, two areas of historical critical inquiry are less represented: Jewish exegesis and the most recent trends in biblical hermeneutics. While the author makes clear that his point of departure is a Christian Bible translation and the world of biblical scholarship, entries devoted to Saadia Gaon, Abraham Ibn Ezra, Rashi, and references to *peshat*, *remez*, *derash*, and *sod* would have provided a historical point of comparison both for some of the early Christian approaches to the biblical text and for many modern hermeneutics as well. This is especially noticeable since space is given to other early exegetes, including Miles Coverdale, Theodore Beza, and William Tyndale. Similarly, while the reader acknowledges the author's "grateful indebted-

ness to the achievements of modern critical scholarship" (p. ix) and finds it affirmed in the entries "reader-response criticism" and "deconstruction," entries do not exist for "intertextuality," "inner-biblical exegesis," "folklorist approaches," "ethnoarchaeology," "psychoanalytical criticism," "sociolinguistics," "discourse analysis," or even "philology."

One area in which the dictionary is particularly weak is in its treatment of relevant material from the ancient Near East. While one can locate entries for "cuneiform," "Mesopotamia," "Egypt," and even "Ebla," the information provided is far too cursory. For example, the entry "Mari" informs the reader that the 20,000 Akkadian tablets discovered there "give information about the surrounding culture in the time of the Old Testament patriarchs of Genesis" (p. 241), but makes no mention of the similarities between the Mari and Hebrew Bible's prophetic texts. Some sites, like Emar and Nuzi, do not appear at all, despite their relevance for Bible scholars. A lack of reference to Nuzi is particularly glaring since the Nuzi tablets, when coupled with the biblical evidence, place Abraham in the fifteenth century BCE, and not the eighteenth, as asserted by the chronological table at the end of the book. (See conveniently, C. H. Gordon and G. A. Rendsburg, *The Bible and the Ancient Near East* [4th. ed; New York: Norton, 1997], pp. 109-130.) Similarly, when one consults "exorcism," one finds the well-known references in the New Testament, but none to its ubiquitous practice as found in Mesopotamian and rabbinic literature. A lack of references such as these regrettably severs the Bible from its Near Eastern context and blurs the relationship between the New Testament and ancient Judaism.

The Christological perspective of this material begs the question whether doctrinal concerns underlie the treatment of the information given in some of its entries. For example, I note with curiosity that "homosexuality" is defined as a "condition" (p. 175). The entry "clean and unclean" also leads readers to a particular point of view:

It was precisely the notion of separateness that Peter was reluctantly persuaded to renounce (Acts 10:15) as being inconsistent with Christian fellowship. Much of Paul's energy was given to teaching that for Christians the time of the Law, including its food regulations, was over (Rom 14:15), and Jews who joined the Church should renounce all their ties with the synagogue and throw in their lot with those converted from paganism (p. 71).

The long-standing debate whether Paul refers here to the Levitical dietary restrictions or to vegetarianism at least should have been mentioned.

Similarly, while one finds no reference to the questionable historicity of Jesus or his resurrection, the author prefaces his dictionary by alerting the reader to possible fictions in the Hebrew Bible:

There are other persons described in the dictionary where what is recorded of them in the biblical text is mentioned, but a note of caution must be assumed—that the material we are dealing with may well not be historical (p. ix).

Throughout the dictionary, the author also has opted for the term "Palestine" instead of "Israel," because after the Jewish revolt of 135 CE "the emperor Hadrian deleted 'Judaea' from his map and substituted 'Palestine'" (p. x). He also reminds us somewhat suggestively that "There are those who hold, for example, that the Israelites never 'entered the Promised Land' and were living in Canaan all the time" (p. ix).

With so many new Bible dictionaries appearing in recent years (see, e.g., the excellent student-friendly and photo-filled version edited by Paul J. Achtemeier, *HarperCollins Bible Dictionary* [New York: HarperCollins, 1996]), students will benefit by carefully comparing them before selecting one. If the aim is to study the Bible in its ancient historical and literary contexts, to understand the intimate relationship between the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament more fully, and to appreciate the common ground of ancient Judaism and Christianity, one is obliged to continue shopping.

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**THEOLOGICAL DICTIONARY OF THE OLD TESTAMENT.**  
VOL. VIII. G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, Heinz-Josef Fabry, eds. Pp. xxiii + 560. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997. Cloth, \$45.00.

The *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, the English rendering of the *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament*, has already become a classic, well before its completion. The *Dictionary*, the younger sibling of the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, states as its purpose "to analyze its [i.e., the Bible's] religious statements with the aid of all accessible resources and to present them in their peculiarity, in order to shed as much light as possible on the connections of the content of Old Testament thought in a given text, tradition, or institution" (Preface to