

Encyclopedia Of The Bible And Its Reception

CRITICAL REVIEW

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

Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception

The study of the Bible, its contents, and its impact on culture and society is a vast and complex field. The "Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception" plays a pivotal role in documenting the textual, historical, and interpretative journey of the Bible throughout history. This comprehensive compilation provides insights into how biblical texts have been understood, interpreted, and utilized in various contexts, from antiquity to contemporary times. It serves as a vital resource for scholars, students, and anyone interested in the profound influence of the Bible on literature, art, theology, and ethics.

Understanding the Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception

The "Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception" (EBR) is a multi-volume reference work that seeks to illuminate the Bible's extensive history and its reception across different cultures and epochs. This encyclopedia is unique because it does not merely focus on the biblical texts themselves but also on how they have been interpreted and reinterpreted through the ages.

Purpose and Scope

The primary objectives of the EBR include:

- Documentation: Providing a comprehensive record of biblical texts, their origins, and their historical context.
- Interpretation: Exploring various interpretations of biblical texts across different cultures and time periods.
- Cultural Impact: Analyzing how the Bible has influenced various facets of culture, including literature, art, music, and ethics.
- Interdisciplinary Approach: Integrating perspectives from theology, history, literary studies, and cultural studies.

The encyclopedia covers a wide array of topics, including:

1. Biblical texts and their translations
2. Historical-critical methods of interpretation
3. Theological themes and debates
4. Reception history in different religious traditions
5. Influence on literature and the arts
6. Modern interpretations and applications

The Historical Context of the Bible's Reception

To fully appreciate the significance of the EBR, it is essential to understand the historical context in which the Bible was written and how it has been received over time.

Ancient Context

The Bible, composed over centuries, reflects a variety of literary forms and historical contexts. The Old Testament (Hebrew Bible) was written in a milieu marked by ancient Near Eastern cultures and religions, while the New Testament emerged within the context of the Roman Empire. Key elements of

ancient reception include:

- Oral Tradition: Many biblical narratives were initially transmitted orally before being committed to writing.
- Cultural Interaction: The Bible has interacted with various ancient cultures, influencing and being influenced by their religious and philosophical ideas.
- Translation: Early translations, such as the Septuagint (Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible), played a crucial role in making biblical texts accessible to a broader audience.

Medieval and Early Modern Reception

During the medieval period, the Bible's reception was predominantly shaped by the Church. Key developments during this time include:

- The Vulgate: Jerome's Latin translation of the Bible became the standard for Western Christianity.
- Scholasticism: The rise of scholastic theology led to systematic interpretations of biblical texts.
- Reformation: The translation of the Bible into vernacular languages, such as Martin Luther's German Bible, democratized access to the scriptures.

The early modern period saw the Bible's reception influenced by:

- Enlightenment Thought: Critical approaches to the Bible emerged, questioning traditional interpretations and emphasizing reason.
- Colonial Contexts: The Bible was used both as a tool for colonial expansion and as a source of resistance by indigenous cultures.

Modern Reception of the Bible

The modern era has witnessed a diverse range of interpretations and receptions of biblical texts, influenced by various movements and cultural changes.

Contemporary Scholarship

Modern biblical scholarship encompasses a wide array of methods and approaches, including:

- Historical-Critical Method: Analyzing the historical context, authorship, and original audience of biblical texts.
- Literary Criticism: Examining the literary features and structures of the texts.

- Postcolonial Criticism: Investigating how biblical texts have been interpreted in colonial and postcolonial contexts.
- Feminist and Gender Studies: Exploring the roles and representations of gender in biblical narratives.

These methodologies contribute to a richer understanding of the Bible and its implications for contemporary society.

Impact on Culture and Society

The Bible's reception has had a profound impact on various cultural domains:

- Literature: Many literary works, from Dante's "Divine Comedy" to contemporary novels, engage with biblical themes and narratives.
- Art: Artists throughout history have drawn inspiration from biblical stories, as seen in the works of Michelangelo, Rembrandt, and modern artists.
- Music: The Bible has influenced countless musical compositions, from sacred choral works to contemporary popular music.
- Ethics and Morality: Biblical texts continue to shape moral and ethical discussions in various societal contexts, including debates on social justice, sexuality, and human rights.

Important Themes in the Encyclopedia

The EBR explores numerous significant themes that emerge from the study of the Bible and its reception. Some of the most prominent themes include:

- Authority and Interpretation: The question of who has the authority to interpret the Bible and how interpretations can differ across communities.
- The Role of Tradition: Exploring how historical traditions influence contemporary readings of the Bible.
- Sociopolitical Contexts: How different sociopolitical contexts shape the interpretation and application of biblical texts.
- Interfaith Dialogue: The Bible's role in interfaith discussions and its reception within Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

Conclusion

The "Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception" serves as an invaluable resource for understanding the multifaceted nature of biblical texts and their enduring significance across cultures and time periods. By documenting the history of the Bible's interpretation and reception, it not only sheds light on the texts themselves but also reveals the dynamic interplay between scripture, culture, and society. As we continue to engage with the Bible in a rapidly changing world, the insights provided by this encyclopedia will

remain essential for scholars, theologians, and laypeople alike, fostering a deeper appreciation for the Bible's profound impact on human history and culture.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the 'Encyclopedia of the Bible and its Reception'?

The 'Encyclopedia of the Bible and its Reception' is a comprehensive reference work that explores the historical, cultural, and literary impact of the Bible throughout history, detailing its interpretation and influence in various contexts.

How does the encyclopedia address the reception history of biblical texts?

The encyclopedia examines how biblical texts have been received and interpreted across different eras, cultures, and religious traditions, highlighting changes in understanding and the impact of socio-political factors.

Who are the primary contributors to the encyclopedia?

The encyclopedia features contributions from a wide range of scholars, including biblical scholars, theologians, historians, and experts in literature and cultural studies, ensuring a multidisciplinary approach.

What types of topics can be found in the encyclopedia?

Topics include the historical context of biblical writings, interpretations by various religious traditions, the influence of the Bible on literature and art, and contemporary debates surrounding biblical texts.

How does the encyclopedia contribute to biblical scholarship?

It provides a valuable resource for researchers, students, and educators by compiling essential information on the Bible's reception, aiding in the understanding of its ongoing relevance and interpretation.

Is the encyclopedia accessible to general readers?

Yes, the encyclopedia is designed to be accessible, with entries that cater to both scholarly audiences and general readers interested in the Bible's

impact on culture and society.

What is the significance of reception history in biblical studies?

Reception history is significant as it reveals how interpretations of the Bible have evolved over time, reflecting changes in societal values, theological perspectives, and cultural contexts.

Are there any notable entries in the encyclopedia that focus on modern interpretations of the Bible?

Yes, the encyclopedia includes notable entries on contemporary movements, such as feminist theology, liberation theology, and post-colonial readings, highlighting how these perspectives reshape understanding of biblical texts.

How can educators use the encyclopedia in the classroom?

Educators can use the encyclopedia as a teaching tool to encourage critical thinking about biblical texts, facilitate discussions on their historical contexts, and explore their influence on various aspects of culture and society.

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