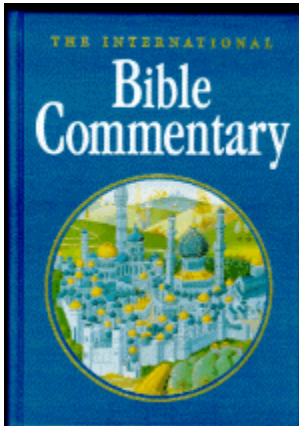


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Farmer, William R., ed.

The International Bible Commentary: A Catholic and Ecumenical Commentary for the Twenty-First Century

Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1998. Pp. lii + 1,918 + 16 plates, Cloth, \$89.50, ISBN 0814624545.

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The editors of *The International Bible Commentary (IBC)* declare their intention to produce a commentary that is both "Catholic" and "ecumenical," with the chief aim of giving scholarly assistance to pastors throughout the world (p. xiv). The work is to be made available in several major languages by the year 2000. "Catholic" is to be understood with both a capital *C* (Roman Catholic) and a lower case *c* (universal; p. xv). The Roman view is clearly presented wherever official teaching is at stake (*vide* the note on perpetual virginity, p. 1261). The ecumenical goal is exemplified in the editors: William R. Farmer (*emeritus*, Perkins School of Theology, S.M.U.), Methodist, David Laird Dungan (University of Tennessee), Presbyterian, and Sean McEvenue (Concordia University, Montreal) and Armando J. Levoratti (Seminario Mayor, La Plata), Roman Catholics.

The *IBC* introduces several format innovations. Rather than the usual "introduction/comment" form, the editors have opted for what they call "first reading" and "second reading" in the treatment of particular biblical books. This approach is both a matter of format and a recommendation to the reader of the Bible, who is urged to read each biblical book twice. The first reading should be rapid, with an eye to grasping the overall theme, contents, and setting of a book. The second reading should be slower and more detailed-what some today would call a "close reading." The "First Reading" sections in the commentary contain the sort of information found in the introductory - section of most commentaries, the "Second Reading" the detailed comments and clarifications of the exegesis section of the typical commentary (p. xxxii). Shaded inserts that provide clarifying information appear at various points in the text. The longest of these is a statement by John Paul II, "Peace with All Creation," in the article "The Bible

and Ecology" (pp. 320-22). Elie Wiesel's version of the Hasidic tale of the Baal Shem Tob, the secret place, the sacred fire, and the prayer, illustrating the power of tales, is the most entertaining (p. 153). There is no index, but there is a "Pastoral Guide for the Use of the Bible in Preaching" (pp. 1885-1903), a sort of brief combination glossary-concordance which gives short identifications and definitions, and a list of relevant biblical references. This device would have been strengthened by cross-referencing to the commentary text.

The maps should give the targeted readers the information they need and want. There are two sorts: line maps that are included with the text of particular articles, and sixteen "signature maps" collected together at the end of the volume. Map editor A. LaCocque, assisted by C. LaCocque, provides a valuable "Guide to the Maps" (pp. xxxiv-lii), including comments on what they consider some of the more important line drawing maps. One may wonder why the bulk of the volume was interposed between the guide and the maps themselves. I would only enter a couple of quibbles. The - Exodus-Conquest Map (SM 4) does not show a possible southern (Gulf of Suez) Exodus route. And I think it unfortunate that the Guide refers to the enemies of the Maccabees as "Syrians" (pp. xiv-xvi). As the editors are aware, the Seleucids were Macedonian Greeks and their troops a mixed lot of international mercenaries (pp. xiv-xvi).

The first 335 pages of the *IBC* are occupied by general introductory articles, most of them on the expected subjects: canon, text, history of interpretation, archaeology, etc. (Surely a typo is responsible for the statement in the archaeology article on p. 208: "Carbon 14 dating became available in 1933." Willard Libby, father of the technique, announced the first successful carbon dates in 1949, as *Discovering Archaeology* 1/6 [Nov.-Dec. 1999] 44, 51-54, has so recently reminded us.) The editors are to be commended for including an essay on rabbinic exegesis. But Jewish interpretation should have been pursued further. Medieval scholars such as Rambam and Rashi influenced Christian as well as subsequent Jewish interpreters. Other topics are less typical of the one-volume commentary genre, arising from the *IBC*'s pastoral and or Roman Catholic doctrinal interests. These include "The Eucharist in the New Testament," "The Bible and Preaching," "The Bible and the Charismatic Movement," "The Bible and Prayer in Africa," "Liberation," "To Heal and to Transform: WomenBiblical Studies," "Family: An African Perspective," "Antisemitism in the Bible and After," "The Bible and Ecology," "Nationalism and Christian Faith," etc. One subsection containing six articles is entitled "Unleashing the Power of the Bible." Other articles are not found where one might expect them. Four articles on Jesus, one on Paul, and one on Paul and Peter, are included in the general introductory section, not in the New Testament section. There is no introductory section as such for the Old Testament, only introductions to the respective literary/canonical divisions of the Christian canon, the Pentateuch, the Prophets, etc. Especially valuable is A. Saldarini's "The Pentateuch as Torah in the Jewish Tradition," a sort of second introduction to the Pentateuch/Torah. He shows that Torah="teaching" (p. 344) and effectively disposes of several mistaken Christian stereotypes.

L. Boadt's contribution on Genesis provides a good lead into the entire Torah, though his views on source criticism seem a bit uncertain. He grasps the humor in parts of the ancestor traditions, though perhaps not to their full bawdy extent in the wife-swapping story and parts of the Jacob saga. One should always remember that Pharaoh was a god (it says here) in the tales where he ends up with the dirty end of the stick. Someone apparently thought it advisable to add a brief introduction to Exodus by M. Schwantes ahead of J. Craghan's treatment. It notes the importance of Exodus for liberation theology, but seems to suggest the need for a modified approach. N. Lohfink is the author of an excellent shaded note on "Covenant" (pp. 444-45).

G. Braulik introduces Joshua-Kings as "The Deuteronomistic History," showing how that notion differs from the "Former Prophets," and tracing the hypothesis through the work of M. Noth, R. Smend, and F. M. Cross. E. Cetina accepts the Deuteronomic hypothesis and gives a strong liberationist reading of the book. Rahab, the marginal foreign woman became the model for a true member of God's people. The Gibeonites became integral parts of the covenant people. Joshua's war was against the rich, royal, and powerful in the Canaanite city states, those opposed to the covenant, not the poor. In name and in deed, Joshua is linked to Jesus and to Josiah. T. Mafico extends the liberation theme into Judges. He notes parallels between the judges and African spirit mediums during the struggle for liberation from colonial rule. Deborah, the woman liberator, is also given African parallels.

Protestant and Jewish readers will profit from the discussions of the Deuterocanonical materials. The major works 1 and 2 Maccabees, Tobit, Judith, Wisdom, and Sirach are accorded full-scale treatment. The Greek additions to Esther and Daniel are dealt with as sidebars to those books.

The NT section begins with four articles on the canonical Gospels and one on the Nag Hammadi texts. P. Shuler notes the data that must be explained to deal with the Synoptic problem and goes on to explore "the Two Gospel Hypothesis" (Matthew first, then Luke, then Mark) and "the Two Document (better, 'Four Source') Hypothesis" (Mark first, plus Q, plus special M, plus special L). He probes the difficulties and benefits of the two schemes. Shuler does not press to a strong conclusion. The editors add a shaded note offering additional views (p. 1239). A. Leske, author of the section on Matthew, seems to favor the "Two Gospel" notion, leaving Markan themes such as "the Messianic Secret" dangling (cf. p. 1304 on Matt 16:20). I am unconvinced by his attempt in Matt 22:41-46 to transfer the royal covenant from David to the people through a strained exegesis of Isa 55:3-5 and thence to the Son of Man, the true representative of servant Israel. Jesus is still "Son of David," but in a different sense (p. 1315). Leske's colleagues, G. Howard and D. Peabody, commenting on the parallel Markan passage remark, "Gentile theological interests are apparent" (p. 1359).

Despite an occasional near brush with Christian triumphalism, the editors and contributors have managed on the whole to preserve the Jewishness of Jesus and the early church and to avoid anti-Semitism. The zeal with which T. Okure handles John's problematic term "the Jews" (p. 1446) is commendable.

I occasionally had the impression in the "Second Reading" sections that the homiletical and the exegetical had been homogenized. But the *IBC* is not for the scholar's professional library. It is a substantial work that the scholar can read for illumination beyond the historical-critical realm. And one may with a clear conscience commend it to the pastor or layperson. The scholarship is of a high order and the work upholds the editors' dictum, "the historical approach to the Bible is not only legitimate but also necessary" (p. xxiii).