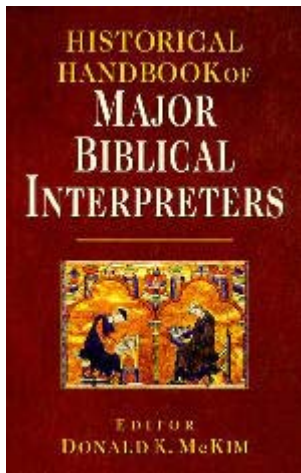


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McKim, Donald K., ed.

Historical Handbook of Major Biblical Interpreters

Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998. Pp. xxiii + 643, Hardcover, \$29.99, ISBN 0830814523.

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Editions and works of reference seemingly similar occasionally appear simultaneously, suggesting a perceived need or, at least, shrewd awareness in distinct editorial offices of Francis Comford's famous academic principle of "ripe versus unripe time." To complement, therefore, Abingdon Press's *Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation*, edited by John H. Hayes, we have the present *Handbook*. I stress complementarity: the Abingdon dictionary is avowedly ecumenical in selection of topics and contributors, proudly eclectic in coverage of methods and personalities. This InterVarsity compendium focuses on a relatively brief list of great names, with their lives and works assessed (as expected from this publisher) from a conservative point of theological vision.

The Handbook appears in a single volume of clear, double-column type, enhanced with genuinely useful indices to persons, subjects, and contents. More than a hundred biographical entries are organized into temporal blocks ("periods of church history"): "Early Church," "Middle Ages," "16th & 17th Centuries," "18th & 19th" Centuries," "20th Century Europe," "20th Century North America." The biographical entries are arranged within these sections alphabetically. This editorial arrangement encourages selective consultation rather than studious reading: to follow (for example) Jonathan Edwards with J.G. Eichhorn, or Kierkegaard with Bishop Lightfoot, sheds little comparative light. Scholarly practitioners of different linguistic, religious, and methodological traditions cannot convincingly be compressed into vaguely-similar chronological categories. This peculiar arrangement is somewhat ameliorated by

summary (but extremely competent) bibliographic and methodological survey essays prefacing each chronological section. Readers (or those simply consulting) this encyclopedia might have better been served if these essays had been redacted into a comprehensive introduction keyed and cross-referenced to the biographical entries arranged in traditional alphabetical order. That comprehensive essay could be separately issued as a valuable alternative to handbooks such as Brevard S. Childs's *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979).

A singular strength of these biographical entries and the several introductory essays resides in the relatively full coverage of relevant, traditional Anglophone and German scholarship. A notable weakness is the failure to incorporate more recent French (and, in general, Roman Catholic) scholarship. Many a biographical and exegetical article pertinent to this *Handbook*, for example, can be found in the *Dictionnaire d'histoire et de géographie ecclésiastiques* (Paris: Letouzey & Ané, 1912--). Readers will also have a different understanding of biblical hermeneutic traditions from perusing the eight volumes of the series *La Bible de tous les temps* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1984-89), edited by C. Mondéseret, A.-M. La Bonnardière et al., or the English version, with notable substitutions and additions, in publication by Notre Dame Press (1977--; eds. C. Kannengeiser, P. Bright, P. Blowers et al.). Readers may also wish to consult another recent encyclopedic volume: *Augustine through the Ages*, ed. A.D. Fitzgerald et al. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), especially for additional information on biblical studies in late antiquity, the medieval era, the Reformation and its Catholic response.

Each of the several introductory essays will inform student and scholar. The criteria of selection for the biographical entries, however, are neither clear nor justified. In the first two sections (comprising the early church through the late medieval period), the biographical entries suggest inclusion because of recognizable names rather than profound importance for biblical study: Origen of course, but what of the Cappadocians Basil, Gregory of Nyssa, and Gregory Nazianzus. The entry on Justin Martyr points appositely to the significance of his allegorical method—what then of the far greater influence of the Donatus Tyconius? Puzzling, in turn, is the omission in Part I (“Early Church”) of consideration of the first stage of biblical interpretation: the corpus of writings from the inter-testamental period and the NT itself.

In the section on eighteenth and nineteenth century interpreters, B. F. Westcott and F. J. A. Hort receive an informative joint entry much indebted to Bruce Metzger. But only in that entry do we meet K. Lachmann and C. von Tischendorf, without whose philological acumen and industry Westcott and Hort's “overthrow[al] of the Textus Receptus” would not have been possible.

The two sections on the twentieth century “European” and “North American” interpreters (no convincing justification is given nor probably could be for that

geographical distinction) suggest a criterion of selection based not on any clearly-defined methodological principles and traditions, but on what (it is assumed) an evangelical reader will seek to know. The entry on E.J. Goodspeed thus has understandable difficulty in defining exactly what was the contribution to hermeneutics of that fine papyrologist and skilled translator of the apocrypha. Two conservative archaeologists (W. F. Albright and G. E. Wright) receive entries, and J. Gresham Machen, that prolific and vociferous opponent of liberalism on any front, enjoys full discussion. But solely in G.T. Sheppard and T.H. Olbricht's swift, precise marches through the corridors of recent scholarship in their respective prefatory introductions will the reader encounter the names of those studying Qumran texts and some notice of recent Jewish textual and Israeli archaeological scholarship.

In the final section on North American scholarship we finally encounter women. (The reader will search in vain in the parallel European section for any entry for Beryl Smalley, she who did so much to advance our understanding of biblical scholarship in the medieval period.) The entry on Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza is simply a tract for "feminist biblical interpretation for literature." Phyllis Tribble receives a sympathetic, but objective, review of her contributions to rhetorical criticism.

Nonetheless, several of the entries in these final two sections are admirable. The fine assessment of the NT exegete Hans Conzelmann illuminates the scholar, his texts, and his contributions. The concise, detailed discussion of C.I. Schofield describes, illustrates, and analyzes as well as can any brief synopsis of life and works the remarkable impact of Schofield's Darbyite (but where in this volume is John Darby Nelson, that nineteenth century purveyor, if not inventor, of dispensationalism) fundamentalist, premillennarian, dispensational cosmology on English readers of the Bible.

In sum: editor and publisher are to be congratulated for an economic, reliable reference work. But those who would seek a broader, more nuanced, and therefore more accurate gazetteer to map the contours of Biblical interpretation over the past two millennia must seek supplementary guides to the complex terrain of biblical hermeneutics, methodologies, and exegetes.