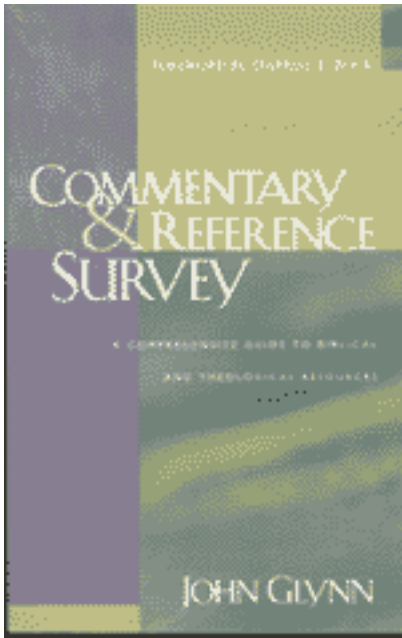


RBL 06/2004



Glynn, John

Commentary and Reference Survey: A Comprehensive Guide to Biblical and Theological Resources

Ninth edition

Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2003. Pp. 311. Paper. \$18.99.
ISBN 0825427363.

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An annotated bibliography that covers most theological disciplines will certainly fill a gap in the market. For a beginning student, it is notoriously difficult to see the wood behind the trees or vice versa. The ninth edition of Glynn's *Survey* certainly makes a serious attempt at solving this problem, as I am not aware of any works that are at the same time so comprehensive (311 pages) and cover so many books.

The *Survey* consists of twenty-one chapters, fifteen of which cover exegetical resources in the broadest sense of the word, one covering church history, another one systematic theology, two chapters dealing with computer and Internet resources respectively, and, at the beginning and at the end of the book there are chapters on "how to build a personal reference library" and "the ideal reference library." This strong bias toward the biblical disciplines certainly tells the reader something about the theological inclination of the author, even if this does not appear to be much of a problem as long as one is aware of it and only reads the chapters on the subject Glynn knows most about: the Bible, as well as the sections on the Internet and digital resources. I will return later to problems with the final chapters.

The section on “how to build a library” (28ff.), completed by a section on the “ideal personal library” in the end (301ff.) is very instructive. Especially the hints and tricks on purchasing books for a reduced price seem to be helpful to the beginning student, especially as advice is offered for every level of theological studies/interest, including the interested layperson. The discussion of various commentary series (42ff.) is also helpful, though one will always have to refer to one’s own judgment and definition of Glynn’s categories of “evangelical,” “technical,” “liberal,” “conservative,” “moderate,” “critical” and the like (see 22–23)

The core of the *Survey*—the annotated bibliography on the books of the Old and New Testaments—is a must for every librarian (certainly one serving a seminary in the United States) who is looking for an up-to-date library as far as English exegetical literature is concerned. Theologies, introductions to various genres, context, and so forth are all treated in separate sections. Glynn highlights his own favorites, which is helpful, though sometimes his comments are slightly cryptic. What is one to make of a judgment such as, “Employs metaphor and imagery of the courtroom” (50, referring to Walter Brueggemann’s *Theology of the Old Testament*)? Here, as well as in the sections on the individual books of both Testaments, Glynn is at his best. Something might have been left out, but this is compensated by references to future commentaries and suggestions on which commentaries to use in combination with each other (never use only one). There is a slight bias in favor of prophetic books as opposed to Numbers and Leviticus (the latter are much larger but are covered by an equal amount of entries as some of the Minor Prophets). Furthermore, it is a pity that in the section on archeology a number of titles by, for example, Dever, Finkelstein, and Mazar, are missing.

New Testament studies are also represented in this volume. There are sections covering most of the quest for the historical Jesus (divided into “conservative,” “critical,” and “Jesus Seminar,” though sometimes one wonders why the Cambridge Companion is conservative and a book by Graham Stanton critical). Then all the books of the New Testament are treated sufficiently to allow a fruitful exegetical study in the vicarage or seminary classroom, which is true for the sections on New Testament background (including anthologies of primary sources) and the Jewish background of the New Testament. Unfortunately, some translated European authors, such as Eduard Schweizer, are missing from the scene here. Missing also are most volumes of the Feminist Companion series (both Old Testament and New Testament). Later on in the book attention for feminist hermeneutics is also rather minimalist. The student will also be greatly helped by the overview of dictionaries, encyclopedias, and atlases of the biblical world (205ff.) as well as by the subsections on Biblical Hebrew and Biblical Greek. Why textual criticism has found its place here and not in the sections on either the Old Testament or New Testament is unclear to me.

Surprisingly enough, the section on hermeneutics, which is in itself rather complete (certainly for a beginning theologian), includes entries on the interpretation of wisdom literature and parables as well as on rhetorical criticism! Some passages here sound apologetic, which is probably part of the book's confessional identity. In general, however, the biblical sections of the *Survey* are more than just useful.

One weakness of the work lies exactly in this biblical bias. If one considers the whole canon of theological disciplines, even only as far as they are related to the Bible, much is missing in, for example, systematic theology. In the latter chapter (17), some oddities can be observed: for example, Karl Barth's *Church Dogmatics*, which is available in English translation, as well as Calvin's *Institutes*, to name only two Reformed theologians, are missing from the section on "Classic Theologies." That the same weakness exists in the section on "Catholic Theology" will be clear (von Balthasar only features with *Mysterium Paschale*, whereas his other, more important works are missing, to offer just one example). Surprising also is the amount of space allotted to various subjects: the paragraph on "Satan and the Powers of Darkness," with its twelve entries is longer than the one on the "Trinity" (eleven entries), and the paragraph on "The Last Days" is exactly twice as long as the one on "Jesus Christ." Altogether there are seventy-four titles on eschatological issues, thirty-five on charismatic issues, but only seven on the cross and ten on salvation. To me this seems to be a slightly unbalanced division of space and attention. It is true, of course, that one might want to think that "we know" about Jesus Christ and that we ought to do more reading in the realm of charismatic experience, but to dwell longer on the last days than on Christ himself seems to be unfitting.

The chapter on church history also has a few surprises in store, and the strongly confessional character of the *Survey* becomes clear. For example, Kelly's classic on the early Christian creeds is missing, and the section on Catholic Church history is an oddity in its own right. In this section there is no single book on the actual history of the Roman Catholic Church apart from the *HarperCollins Encyclopedia*, but plenty of works on priesthood (sexual abuse, homosexuality, etc.), saints, popes, friars and nuns—more often than not with a polemic touch. I wonder whether this really covers the essentials of Roman Catholic Church history. As the section itself is placed between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, one wonders whether the history of this Church begins and ends just there. What follows—the Reformation, Luther, Calvin—climaxes in relatively long sections on American evangelists, religion in the South, and so forth. Apparently church history ends there.

Probably the most serious weakness of the work lies in its total neglect of "application." Even if popular commentaries are listed, one will wonder what happened to homiletics and all other practical disciplines (nothing on "how to conduct a sensible Bible study.")

This leaves one with the impression of a very intellectual but practically rather helpless pastor who knows his or her way around in the Bible but wonders what books he or she will pick to prepare a Bible study, which should be more than just a lecture.

Finally, it is surprising that not one non-English title appears. Even if I could not truly expect any German titles in the book, it would have been good to have at least encountered something on contextual interpretation or, as it seems to be a growing “minority language,” something in Spanish.

In conclusion, I would suggest that one should use this book with care, simultaneously paying attention to the sections on biblical references and the how to build a library, which are clearly Glynn’s strength, but looking for other resources on systematic, historical, and practical theology at the same time.