



Preface to the First Edition





The Christian church has been interpreting its Scriptures since its earliest days. Within the pages of the New Testament we find Jesus interpreting Moses and the prophets, and opening the Scriptures to the travelers on the road to Emmaus (Lk 24:27, 32). In Philip's encounter with the Ethiopian eunuch, who was reading from the prophet Isaiah, he posed a basic question: Do you understand what you are reading (Acts 8:30)? As the New Testament church grew and Christianity expanded into different lands, the task of interpreting sacred texts was constantly present and pressing.

Gradually, the canons of the Old and New Testaments were formed. The church began to look to a collection of biblical books as its source for gaining a knowledge of God. So the work of interpreting the Scriptures took on major importance. For the church to grow in its theological understandings as well as in its mission and ministries, its canonical Scriptures must be understood. The biblical materials needed to be comprehended by contemporary persons and by successive generations. While the church believed it was being led by the Holy Spirit, it is the Spirit acting in conjunction with the Word of God in the Scriptures that brings new knowledge and wisdom for the people of God.

Through the centuries the church's biblical scholars and theologians have interpreted the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. This work has been carried out in formal ways by those who have been trained for this task. Yet the Christian Scriptures are also interpreted by persons who read the Bible and comprehend its meaning without having formal training and within the contexts of their own lives and circumstances. The practice of biblical exegesis takes place at a host of levels by a wide array of people. Indeed, whenever anyone reads the Bible and explicates its meaning, biblical interpretation is taking place.

The present volume focuses on the work of many of the most significant biblical interpreters through the last two thousand years. It brings together scholarly essays that show the methods, practices and interpretive stances adopted by a number of the church's most important biblical scholars. These writers, from the early church to the present, are leading biblical interpreters by virtue of their particular approaches; the importance of their insights or their development of theological perspectives is rooted in their interpretations of Scripture. Some who are included have pioneered distinctive viewpoints. Others have engaged in thorough expositions of Scripture over a long period of time. Still others have made particular advances in some aspect that shapes the interpretive process. While their contributions have varied, all who are included have made important advances to our overall understandings of the Old and New Testament Scriptures.

The biblical interpreters in this volume have been significant. But they are not the only interpreters who could or should be included in a book of this kind. The size limits of this work have made it impossible to include a longer list of interpreters. Perhaps a companion volume can some day be



produced. It is also fair to ask whether or not many other important biblical interpreters have been omitted or whether some who are left out could replace some who are included. To this the only reply is that those included are there by virtue of my own considered judgment, in consultation with others. But I bear responsibility for the list. I would not claim that it is exhaustive or by any standard to be a full list of the very most important biblical scholars. I would simply suggest that those studied here are important; I recognize that a strong case can be made that others, who are not surveyed here, could or should be included. This is an attempt to produce a work that will give a unique perspective on biblical interpretation during the last two millennia by studying approximately one hundred major biblical interpreters.

A number of other limitations to this work also appear. Studies of women interpreters are under-represented, as are studies of those who are not Western, white males. This volume is clearly oriented toward those who have produced significant work in the Western branch of the Christian church and whose writings have, on the whole, emerged from Europe or North America. This is where predominant writings have been produced since the Middle Ages. Further books should one day be created to highlight the contributions of those not represented in this volume. The work of non-Western and nonmale persons must also be examined. The present work is only a first step. It is a resource from which others should follow and which tries to help us understand major elements in the history of biblical interpretation through biographical studies of major biblical interpreters. I invite others to supplement this volume by producing additionally needed resources.

The overview pieces that introduce each section help synthesize and supplement the materials that follow in the biographical studies. These essays bring coherence to the study of the period by focusing on major trends, contributions and movements that helped shape the exegetical history of the particular epoch. The writers of these pieces have had to be selective and orient their work to a focus on major elements, without the luxury of being exhaustive or even to approach such a goal for each period. These overviews can be particularly helpful as introductions to each age, as well as by collectively providing a descriptive narrative of the ebb and flow of biblical interpretation through major identifiable eras. The essays on biblical interpretation in twentieth-century Europe and in North America are oriented to these particular times and places.

A work of this nature benefits from the help of many people. I commend the essay writers for their outstanding abilities to bring the salient points about each biblical interpreter into the short compass of a single article. These articles vary in length, according to the editor's requests. But none of the pieces is long enough in itself to present the fullest exposition of an interpreter's views. I wish to thank the writers for accepting these assignments, for working within or in close proximity to my requested size limits and for doing such a splendid job in producing these marvelous pieces. Their labors are the heart of this volume, and I am grateful to all the participants. I selected the writers on the basis of their special knowledge of the interpreter or their expertise. None have disappointed me!

Two friends have served as consultants who gave valuable insights and suggestions in the early stages of the project. Richard A. Muller of Calvin Theological Seminary and Gerald Sheppard of Emmanuel College of the University of Toronto generously shared their expert knowledge and perspectives to help shape the way this work was put together. I am grateful to them both. Their own respective overview essays are written from their vast reservoirs of knowledge and are eminent contributions in their own right.

My gratitude is also deep to Daniel G. Reid, Academic and Reference Book editor of InterVarsity Press. Dan willingly listened to early ideas about this volume, made important suggestions and helped conceptualize the work so it could be what it has become. He advocated for it and guided it

through the publishing process. He has been a marvelously cooperative, supportive and insightful editor whose careful work as well as friendship has enhanced the book and meant much to me.

Others too deserve thanks. My work with the late Ford Lewis Battles, while I was a student at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, was certainly formative in leading me to a love for the history of biblical interpretation. My teacher and colleague Jack B. Rogers has always been before me as a scholar who is vitally concerned with Scripture and its interpretation.

This volume is dedicated to four of my professors at Westminster College, New Wilmington, Pennsylvania: J. William Carpenter, Robert A. Coughenour, Thomas M. Gregory and Peter W. Macky. During my student days each helped deepen and strengthen my interest in biblical studies and interpreting the Scriptures. I am thankful for each of them. It is especially gratifying that Robert Coughenour has contributed an essay.

I would also like to acknowledge the wonderful friends in the community at Memphis Theological Seminary, where I serve. Special care, love and hope are marvelous blessings that we share together.

Finally, my family, LindaJo, Stephen and Karl, blesses my life in countless ways. For their ongoing love and the joys of life together, I am most grateful of all.

Donald K. McKim
Epiphany 1998



Preface to the Second Edition

It is a pleasure to present a new and expanded edition of the *Historical Handbook of Major Biblical Interpreters* (1998) as the *Dictionary of Major Biblical Interpreters*. This new work features fresh contributions from more than one hundred scholars. These contributions have been added to the entries in the former book to form a dictionary with more than two hundred entries on major biblical interpreters plus interpretive essays on biblical interpretation in the major periods of the Christian church.

The new edition has given an opportunity to provide a more wide-ranging resource for the study of the history of biblical interpretation through the work of important scholars from all periods. Once again, the list of those to be included in such a volume has been my decision, in consultation with others. Even in this expanded edition, there are names that could have or “should have” been included but are missing. Treatment of these figures will have to await yet another book!



The same general criteria for inclusion have been used here as in the *Historical Handbook of Major Biblical Interpreters*, as explained in the preface to that work. Nearly all the new entries are for figures who have died, leaving still the task of a book on contemporary biblical interpreters that can function the same way as this volume but focus on those who have made most recent contributions to biblical interpretation.

Once again, as well, and in the total scope of this new dictionary, there is a lack of sufficient entries on women biblical interpreters and on those from outside the predominant areas of Western Europe and the United States. A wider volume, still, needs to turn attention to these interpreters.

The accumulation of debts for this new work has grown. Once again, Daniel G. Reid, academic and reference book editor for InterVarsity Press, has been most supportive of this project and provided important comments and suggestions. Dan believed in the vision for the initial book, from the beginning, so my appreciation to him is great.

The person who has helped most directly—and without whom this work could not have been produced as efficiently, as accurately or as well on any count—is Joel Scandrett, associate editor, IVP Academic. Joel has been unfailingly helpful in all dimensions by offering advice, keeping records, corresponding with writers and overseeing the production of the book in significant ways. I cannot express enough gratitude to Joel for his wonderfully efficient work, his supportive spirit and his humor as we moved along with this journey. Joel has been an excellent colleague in every way.

The writers of the entries here make this book the helpful reference work we hope it will be. Many of the writers are particular experts on the figures on whom they have written. All are highly competent to provide the strong pieces that enable this book to be used as an authoritative reference source. I thank them greatly for their willingness to give their time and expertise as contributors. The same high quality for the entries of the earlier volume has continued into this expanded



edition through the cooperation of those scholars who have made contributions here. The earlier writers have also examined their previous entries, made revisions, updated bibliographies and otherwise enhanced their work.

Some scholars have helped in particular ways. I thank Anthony Thiselton for his expansion of the two period pieces: “Biblical Interpretation in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries” and “Biblical Interpretation in Europe in the Twentieth Century.” François Bovon, Mark Burrows, Brian Daley, Robert Kolb, Christopher Ocker and Thomas Olbricht have rendered help on portions of the book as well.

It is a great sadness to note the death of three writers who contributed to the *Historical Handbook of Major Biblical Interpreters*, James Cook, Gerald Sheppard and Richard Norris. All three made fine contributions to the earlier volume, and Jerry Sheppard in particular was a trusted advisor and author of two of the period pieces plus another entry. Two writers who contributed to this volume have also died, Alan Groves and Robert Hill. For their work, we are grateful as well. This book is dedicated to the memories of all these fine colleagues.

My family, as always, provides the love and support I need for projects such as this. To my wife, LindaJo, and our sons, Stephen and Karl, I give my deepest love and gratitude.

Donald K. McKim
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