BOOK REVIEWS

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HOLMAN OLD TESTAMENT COMMENTARY: ECCLESIASTES, SONG OF SONGS. General Editor: Max Anders. Authors: David George Moore and Daniel L. Akin. Nashville, TN: Broadman & Homan Publishers, 2003, 367 pp., ISBN 080549482-0, $19.99.

Have you ever eaten hummus or drank soymilk? Both are hard to describe. Both are considered healthy choices of food, but each of us probably needs to try them to decide if they are something we would like to add to our diet. My take on the Holman Old Testament Commentary (at least the volume on Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs) is that it’s a healthy choice, but each of us probably needs to decide for ourselves whether we would like to add it to our Bible study diet.
First, here are some reasons why we might like to add it.

The commentary on both books (and, I believe, in other volumes of the series, as well) is presented in a unique outline. After an introduction to the entire book, each chapter is presented with an Introduction, “Commentary,” Conclusion, Life Application, Prayer, Deeper Discoveries, Teaching Outline and Issues For Discussion. Personally, I like the approach. I think the reason for it is quite valid and becomes clear as the book is read.

Recently I participated in a three-day preaching course. One of the thoughts presented (in bold “type”) was that preaching typically, and unfortunately, sides too much toward careful exegesis of the text and too little toward careful exegesis of the culture. In other words, preaching is far too often weak on application.

This commentary appears to want to help in that regard. Both commentaries have a section entitled “Life Application,” which, particularly in the case of Ecclesiastes, is short-changed. (Too bad!) But both include (what I think are) better application lessons in the sections entitled “Conclusion and Issues For Discussion.” The Song of Songs commentary does an excellent job incorporating (pages and pages of) very practical application into the entire outline. For a preacher or teacher who wants to be challenged about making his or her preaching or teaching practical/applicable/relevant (whether the reader agrees with the specific applications of the writer or not), the Song of Songs commentary is an outstanding model of giving attention to practical life application. I think most readers will be surprised by the approach, including the author’s very simple and direct application of the lover’s and beloved’s words and actions.

Part of the advertising on the back cover states: “When you’ve got the time, this series offers a detailed interpretation. . . . When time is short, this series delivers an essential understanding of the Old Testament with unsurpassed clarity and convenience.” This publisher’s blurb offers yet another reason to add the book to your Bible study diet. Frankly, I didn’t take the time to evaluate the detailed commentary carefully enough to express a solid opinion on that side. I do have some opinions, however, on the other side—“when time is short”—which suggest some reasons you may not want to add (many volumes of) this commentary series to your library.

Too often, I must confess, time has been short and I’ve tried to present somebody else’s message or lesson. That’s a poor substitute for anointed preaching and teaching that is inspired by God to the heart of the presenter and generally follows adequate personal preparation. Books
that provide a quick substitute that will still make a good impression may not be doing the user a valuable service. The use of the book for personal study is different. A reference book should invite personal reflection and conclusions. Admittedly, I need more time for a solid evaluation of this, but the commentary may end up being more of a devotional commentary that provides the neat and tidy (and appealing) conclusions of the author, rather than a critical commentary that lays solid ground for the reader to come to his or her own (hopefully) informed conclusions and understanding of the text.

The Ecclesiastes commentary records a brief “humorous exchange between a father and his son” shared by Stuart Briscoe (p. 100):

Son: How far is it to the sun?
Father: I don’t know.
Son: How far is it to Mars?
Father: I don’t know.
Son: How far is it to the end of the Milky Way?
Father: I don’t know.
Son: Dad, you don’t mind me asking you all these questions, do you?
Father: Not at all. How are you going to learn if you don’t ask any questions?

I got the impression while reading the Ecclesiastes commentary that the answers offered were somewhat contrived. They really did not address my questions—not just my textual questions but my life questions—as they purported to do. Effective preaching and teaching must do exactly that.

But, when considering this commentary, don’t forget the attention it gives to application. This commentary challenges the preacher and teacher, especially on the Song of Songs. This strength itself makes the book worth trying. But please don’t settle for quick sermon or teaching outlines! Instead, let this work stretch you and help you prepare your own anointed message or lesson.

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Theological Librarian David R. Stewart of Princeton Theological Seminary has undertaken the treacherous task of revising a classic reference work. After 23 years, there is little doubt that John Bollier’s *Literature of Theology* is in need of updating; indeed, much has changed on the landscape of research in theological scholarship and theological librarianship. Consequently, it may come as a surprise that the revised edition is “still primarily a guide to resources in print.” The “simple and indisputable reason,” according to Stewart, is that “it is here [in print] that the best resources are found” (p. 4).

Originally conceived as a joint endeavor between John A. Bollier, the author of the first edition, and Stewart, the former’s retirement left Stewart to undertake the project alone. At first glance, the reader may not notice the changes in Stewart’s design for the research guide and might even question the continued use of traditional theological categories. But upon closer inspection, it is evident that Stewart has completely revamped and updated the original work. In fact, while many sources cited in the original have only general relevance to theological study, Stewart’s revised selection is both relevant and timely.

Stewart’s selection of resources in *The Literature of Theology* is guided by a definite perception of his readers, their information needs and limitations. This is a research guide addressed to students and pastors, and while scholarly readers may question the omission of classic reference works in their original languages, it probably makes sense to limit the monographic citations to titles in English, as indeed he normally does. However, the author’s preference for English language works does not prevent him from identifying and including newer English translations of standard German theological reference titles, when they are available. Mark Biddle’s translation of Jenni and Westermann’s *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament* (1997) and Geoffrey Bromiley’s *Encyclopedia of Christianity* (1999- ) based on the *Evangelisches Kirchenlexikon*, 3rd edition are simply two examples. Stewart typically selects recent titles that are still in print for his research guide, although in some cases he includes out-of-print titles, such as Frank Magill and Ian McGreal’s *Christian Spirituality: The Essential Guide . . .* (1988) or Frances Young’s *From Nicaea to Chalcedon* (1983) still readily available from online booksellers.
One of the strengths of *The Literature of Theology*, and its greatest benefit for theological students, is to provide a brief, qualitative discussion of the literature of the theological topic covered in the chapter. Stewart both describes and broadly assesses the literature, an invaluable gift to readers—especially those turning to the subject for the first time. For example, in the introduction to chapter 4, on the history of the Church, the author notes that the “history of Christianity outside the western, English-speaking world, as understood and written by indigenous peoples . . . is not yet as well known as it might be.” By contrast, “the wealth of first-rate sources on the development of Christianity in the western work continues to proliferate” (p. 39).

Also invaluable are Stewart’s critical and informative annotations on individual works. Not merely an annotated bibliography, *The Literature of Theology, Revised and Updated* manages to capture the unique features and flavors of individual works in concise, descriptive prose. For example, turning to the section on theological terminology in chapter 5, the reader encounters the following assessment of Jaroslav Pelikan’s *Melody of Theology* (1988): “Neither a simple dictionary of terms nor a theological dictionary proper. . . . This book is meant to foster reflection rather than furnish quick definitions” (p. 57).

Although Stewart maintains the basic outline of Bollier’s original work, he has enhanced it with new chapters on Christian spirituality, Christianity and Literature, and (of course!) a bibliography of theological resources on the World Wide Web. One drawback of both the revised and original editions is the omission of a subject index. Perhaps the authors considered this feature unnecessary in so brief a work.

In short, David R. Stewart’s revision of *The Literature of Theology. A Guide for Students and Pastors*, more than maintains the quality of this classic work of theological reference! This book is a “must” for theological and academic libraries, but also an excellent addition to the personal libraries of students and pastors.

*Iren L. Snavely, Jr.*  
*Librarian*  
*Temple University-Harrisburg*
This book does not supplant other theological wordbooks or indeed dictionaries of the Bible. This book has been written so that it can be used by readers who do not know the biblical languages. For those who can, three lengthy works are recommended [by the editor himself] (p. vii)

G. J. Botterweck and H. Ringgren, Eds.  
*Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament.* Grand Rapids, 1974-2002.

E. Jenni, C. Spicq, and C. Westermann, Eds.,  
*Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, and  
*Theological Lexicon of the New Testament*.  
Peabody, MA, 1997.

G. Kittel and G. Friedrich, eds.,  
*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament.* Grand Rapids, 1964-1974.

With this introduction David Gowan describes the limitations of his volume, *The Westminster Theological Wordbook of the Bible*, and refers readers to three lengthy theological reference sources (named above) that are known to all biblical and theological scholars. The phrase “theological wordbook” precisely defines this book and how it ought to be used. The book does not offer articles on broad and general theological topics. Instead, it is simply based on the vocabulary of the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) and intends to offer the reader help in understanding all the English words of any theological significance, with reference to the original Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek terms that those words translate. From “abba” to “Zion,” theological words are alphabetically indexed and carefully written in engaging prose in an elegant and informative work. Over thirty contributors authored signed articles for Gowan’s volume.

Exploring groups of related words and drawing the reader into the meanings is the strength of this volume. For example, the terms “Abhorrence” “abhorrent,” “abomination,” and “abominable” are described in
their historical and biblical sense, and each word with its own connotations. It is this paradigm—of signifying the meanings and connotations of clusters of words—that makes this book so interesting and useful. For ease of use, the reader needs to become accustomed to the book’s categorizations when listing its theological vocabulary. “Animals (Beast, Dragon, Lamb, Leviathan, Rahab, Sheep and Goats)” is a sample entry. And “Create, Creation, Creator, Creature” is another type of entry. “Suffer, Suffering, Affliction, Persecution, Tribulation, Trouble, Woe” is still another. There are “see” references from the terms that follow the first word: i.e., “suffering, affliction, etc.” each referring back to the word “Suffer.”

In a section of the preface that begins, “[E]ssential criteria in planning the book,” Gowan states that his purpose (p.vii) has been to serve “two groups of potential readers: those without much theological training who seek a reference book they can use with ease and those who may be able to use more technical works, but either do not have ready access to them or do not need, for their immediate purpose, all the details those books provide.”

This useful and interesting compilation is a vocabulary, a “word-book,” of both the Old Testament and the New Testament. It offers the reader help in understanding all the English words of any theological significance in the translation (NRSV) with reference to the original Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek terms that those words translate.

The “wordbook” discusses the ways words are used in the Bible but does not enter into general discussions of the authority of Scripture, or the theories behind how any of the words developed in Christian history. Proper names are included only when the writers of Scripture use them for a theological purpose. So for example: “Adam” is included because of Paul’s comparison of Adam and Christ, but the name of “Paul” is not, for no writer uses him as a theological topic.

Every article in the volume is written by a distinguished biblical scholar and each major essay contains a bibliography of sources for further study. This volume is highly recommended for seminary libraries and for all university/college libraries that have religious studies programs or liberal arts curricula.

Albert Vara
Reference and Information Services
Paley Library
Temple University
AN INTRODUCTION TO THEOLOGICAL RESEARCH, Second Edition, Revised and Expanded. Cyril J. Barber and Robert M. Krauss, Jr. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2000, xiii, 172 pp., ISBN: 0-7618-1659-3, $24.50.

The strength of this work lies in its practical advice about research strategy, the range of works it cites, and the insights offered about certain works’ merits and limitations. For the college and seminary students at whom this book is aimed, its advice about gaining an overview of a topic is particularly good. For example, the advice about using a subject encyclopedia, including its articles’ bibliographies, is important for researchers to keep well in mind.

On page 7, the authors say that out of the “literally hundreds (perhaps thousands)” of tools related to their purpose, they will focus on “only a few (in reality, only those that experience has shown to be most valuable).” However, among Bible commentary sets, they glowingly include Lenski’s NT commentary, for which they give both the wrong number of volumes and wrong dates, but they omit the Word Biblical Commentary, which has greater evenness and has received more consistently positive reviews than many other series. D. A. Carson, in his New Testament Commentary Survey (5th ed.) gives due prominence to the Word volumes, but describes Lenski’s “grasp of Greek [as] mechanical, amateurish, and without respect for the fluidity of Greek in the Hellenistic period.”

Again despite their criterion of “most valuable,” Barber and Krauss include both the Interpreter’s Bible (IB) and The New Interpreter’s Bible (NIB). Here from page 70 is an example of some misleading statements:

In the years since the appearance of IB, many of the left-wing views espoused by the contributors have been discarded (sometimes even by those scholars who at one time held them), because archaeological evidence has proved the unity of a particular book or shown that the normal meaning of the text is the right one. This has called for a revision of the entire work.

Is even one of these assertions accurate? Then, they say although the NIB initially seems less critical in approach, “this irenic impression soon fades when one takes note of the adherence of the contributors to
form- and redaction-criticism, and other approaches to matters of interpretation that leave the neophyte at the mercy of the scholar.” Receiving no commendation whatever, the NIB also is faulted for including the “Apocryphal volumes . . . [that] should never be granted parity with the canonical books of the Bible.” (On the IB and NIB, see my article in the spring 2001 issue of Presbyterion, pp. 45ff.)

In their remarks (p. 41) about the Evangelical Dictionary of Theology, Barber and Krauss claim the emphasis is “slanted more toward Covenant/Reformed theology (as opposed to a theocratic one), and so this imbalance predominates. The resultant tendency is to present conclusions without giving the reader an understanding of how these opinions were reached.” A footnote defines “theocratic” as “God ruling over the earth through His Chosen representatives” and refers the reader to J. D. Pentecost’s 1958 book, Things to Come. Barber and Krauss also offer these assertions (p. 40): “Today’s theologians are seldom exegetes (as was B. B. Warfield), and often lack a sense of history. They are most often philosophers. This leads to the formulation of dogmas that are based on tradition and accepted uncritically.”

Among other flaws are: (1) failing to define anything of the nature, format, or sticking power of the knowledge whose explosion they indicate in inches and feet; (2) telling people that eventually “every page of every book” will be available from their personal computers; (3) overstating the prevalence of the card [sic] catalog and the role of Library of Congress Subject Headings volumes in students’ research; (4) failing to discern that the Society for Old Testament Study’s volumes that they distinguish from the Society’s Book List are actually cumulations thereof; and (5) listing only Mandelkern’s and Lisowsky’s Hebrew concordances and saying they are “indispensable” to OT study.

All of this is doubly disturbing in view of J. P. Moreland’s foreword about the need to resist what he claims is “the most anti-intellectual period in the history of Christianity,” and to “refuse to give slogans instead of answers, sound-byte messages instead of well-reasoned expressions of our views.” Moreland hopes An Introduction to Theological Research “will become a standard tool in every Christian leader’s library.”

I suggest purchase of this book, if it is used with caution. Besides the merits I mentioned first, there are occasional “real life” examples of student research assignments and good strategies for tackling them. The authors offer considered advice from a certain fundamentalist perspec-
tive, and much of it has merit despite the occasionally disconcerting rhetoric. Although the authors omit some important works and praise (or slam) some that do not deserve it, their choices provoke few quibbles.

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