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Review Essay

Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception

Volume 1: Aaron–Aniconism; Volume 2: Anim–Atheism | edited by Hans-Josef Klauck, et al. | Berlin: de Gruyter, 2009 | xxxiv pages + 1224 columns; xxvi pages + 1208 columns | ISBN: 978-3-11-018355-9 (hardback) €238.00; ISBN: 978-3-11-018370-2 (hardback) €238.00

The reception history of the Bible has been, and continues to be, developed in a number of different ways. Much of the intellectual groundwork of reception history was done in the philosophical tradition that culminates in the philosophical hermeneutics of Hans Georg Gadamer. Gadamer's work began to be deployed in the context of literary studies by, amongst others, Hans Robert Jauss, and in a theological context in the work of Ulrich Luz on Matthew's gospel. Luz's work has provided a model of detailed scholarly collation of instances of reception of that gospel, and has provided extensive resources for reflection on the meaning of that history. Luz works from within a particular faith tradition, and his work remains principally concerned with the theological, ecclesiastical, and (in quite a conservative sense)

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artistic reception history of Matthew's gospel. Other reception history of the Bible (such as the ongoing *Blackwell Bible Commentary* series) has been more agnostic in outlook and eclectic in interests, often incorporating a less traditional range of sources.

The *Encyclopedia of the Bible and its Reception* (*EBR*) shares elements of these different approaches. It takes seriously what is still quite a new (and by no means universally accepted) subject area, and treats it in a fairly traditional way. This is most evident in its physical character which bears family resemblances to works such as Gerhard Kittel's *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, not least in its sheer scale: at the time of writing, *EBR* exists as three—of a projected thirty—hardback volumes of well over a thousand pages each of fairly dense double-column text to be published between 2008–2017 (which by our reckoning will total over thirty million words). It also exists as an online edition. The range and specialist detail of the series is evident from the volume titles. To take two examples from existing and forthcoming volumes:

> *Volume 3: Athena–Birkat ha-Minim*
> *Volume 6: Diatessaron (approx.)–Dysphemism (approx.)*

That detailed specialism is equally evident in the entries themselves, as some examples will show. Opening the first volume at random, we find two short entries for "Agricola, Martin," and "Agricola, Mikael" which read as follows:

> **Agricola, Martin**
> Martin Agricola (ca. 1486–1556) was a German music theorist, teacher, and composer. Agricola worked as a music teacher at the Protestant Latin School in Magdeburg from 1525 until his death and was among the first to take up the role of music in the Lutheran program for education. His works include the organological treatise *Musica instrumentalis deudsch* (Wittenberg 1529) and *Ein Sangbüchlein aller Sonntags Evangelien* (Wittenberg 1541) with German chorale settings arranged according to the church calendar.
>
> **Bibliography**: A. M. Busse Berger, "Agricola [Sore], Martin," *Grove Music Online* (accessed October 21, 2008).
>
> **Agricola, Mikael**
> Finland's reformer Mikael Agricola (ca. 1507–1557) became fa-

> miliar with the translation of the Bible during his studentship in Wittenberg (1536–39), and he published the Finnish New Testament in 1548. He translated about a quarter of the Old Testament (Psalms, Minor prophets, parts of other books). Agricola also wrote prefaces, summaries, and marginal notes to the biblical books. His translations served as the basis for the first edition of the Bible in Finnish in 1642.
>
> **Bibliography**: *Mikael Agricolan teokset* [Works of Mikael Agricola] (Helsinki 1987 [1931]). S. Heininen/M. Heikkilä, *Kirchengeschichte Finnlands* (Göttingen 2002) 60–72.

These are both clear, helpful reference entries, which nonetheless indicate, even in a volume of this magnitude, how little space can be allocated to minor figures. These short entries are not cross-referenced (presumably because this would be impossible with a project of which only 10% is as yet in print), and as a consequence it is not clear how one would reach some of these articles. Browsing is one possibility, and the print edition certainly has this serendipitous quality, though it may be that the online version is ultimately more useful in this respect, particularly if it is able to pick up wider web searches, and guide the reader to the richness of its resources.

The encyclopedia's longer articles involve a different set of challenges, which go the heart of reception history. Take the article on antinomianism, for example. This is divided into three major sections: New Testament; Judaism; and Christianity. Section I on the New Testament (by Moisés Mayordomo Marin) recognizes that antinomianism is used loosely to refer to ideas which consider "obligation to fixed religious or social laws somehow irrelevant for salvation or moral behaviour." The place of the term in discussions about gospel and Law and the emergence of a new perspective on Paul in the last thirty years, in which "covenantal nomism" looms large, is taken as an indication that care is needed not to read back the controversies of later times into the New Testament. There is then a coverage of those passages in the New Testament (especially the Pauline corpus) which might be taken in an antinomian way, but the conclusion is that "on any account it is difficult to consider Paul an antinomian." The Gospel of Matthew and Revelation are then considered, but the same general conclusion emerges.

Section II on Judaism (by Joseph Davis) has an interesting discussion of redemption through sin with particular attention to the Sabbatian movement of the seventeenth century, and Maimonides' view of the conventional, rather

than normative, nature of Torah law. Spinoza, Moses Mendelssohn, and Buber are mentioned in an article which explores the effects of deep-seated antinomian traditions in Judaism.

Section III examines the rest of Christianity. This is divided into four parts each by different authors. The first on the Greek and Latin Patristics (by Peter Gemeinhardt) covers gnostic texts, especially the patristic references to the Carpocratians. The second part, on Medieval Times (by Bernard McGinn), focuses on "The Heresy of the Free Spirit" among Beguines and Beghards, with some attention given to Marguerite Porete's *Mirror of the Simple Annihilated Soul*, which McGinn points out does not deserve the description "antinomian." The third part is on the Reformation Era (F. C. Ilgner). The major concern here is with the first and second antinomian conflicts, the first involving Johann Agricola, the second George Major. The fourth part, on Modern Europe and America (by Kate Bowler), starts with Wesley's antinomian tendencies, and mentions Anabaptists and Quakers in passing, before moving through the English Civil War period and (briefly) Laurence Clarkson's views on the same. The New England antinomian controversy in 1636–37 gets a longer treatment, especially a key point in Anne Hutchinson's trial when she made a claim to "immediate revelation" which was crucial to her conviction. There is a final reference to the Oneida community and John Humphrey Noyes's advocacy of freedom from the constraints of the law which is typical of many such millenarian movements in both Europe and North America.

In sum, this longer multi-authored article is organized around a diachronic survey of instances of reception history. That diachronic structure is a familiar convention of projects of this sort, but it may be the case that it has unforeseen consequences when used for reception history. To see why requires reconsidering the context of the article in thematic terms. Consider the central point of the Anne Hutchinson condemnation, which is that she claimed "immediate revelation" as the basis of a superior theological appeal. This move—which is also inherent in the medieval mystical texts—required an examination of the appeal to inner conviction and the subordination of the Bible to it. Such a move is also implicit in the writings of some of the radical Reformation writers like Hans Denck and Sebastian Franck. A few more sentences on Abiezer Coppe might have clarified the consequence of his belief that the divine indwelt him on his ethical responses. Likewise, the consummate example of antinomianism, the writings of the English poet, artist and visionary, William Blake (1757–1827), might have been introduced to

the way in which the biblical material informed this current of thought. A clearer synchronic assessment might thereby have shown that throughout the survey of history there is recourse to a superior source of theological insight, whether through the Spirit or vision, that puts in an inferior place the written words of the Bible, including the biblical injunctions. In the light of this, the selection of the New Testament material could have been organised, and expanded, to include the way in which the potential for such appeals are deeply rooted in the New Testament. 1 Cor 2:10–16 is an obvious passage (which was often appealed to by those of an antinomian bent), but there is also the way in which the Johannine Jesus appeals to "what he has seen and heard from the Father" as the basis of his authority. Such issues would have been illuminated by attention to one of the more important monographs on the debate about antinomianism, David Como's, *Blown by the Spirit*,[1] which does make an attempt to see how the early modern debates were inspired by New Testament passages and offers a succinct discussion of antinomianism.

Our point here is not a particular criticism of the scholarship in question, but rather a theoretical one. We would suggest that taking a conventional diachronic approach to reception history, and placing the Bible at the beginning of that history means that the selection of significant biblical passages precedes (and one might argue, overlooks) what has really counted for those who have lived by (in this case) antinomian ideas. It may be the case then that reception history benefits from a different kind of approach to the selection of biblical material, allowing the reception to determine the issues raised, rather than allowing the diachronic nature of reception history to dictate the way in which the biblical evidence is discussed.

What is clear is that there is neither a consensus view, nor a self-evident way, governing how reception history should be conducted. It is worth attending then to what the editors say about the project in the introduction (Vol. I, ix, xi):

> *The Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception* (*EBR*) pursues the twofold task of (1) comprehensively recording—and, indeed, advancing—the current knowledge of the origins and development of the Bible in its Jewish and Christian canonical forms and (2) documenting the history of the Bible's reception in Judaism and Christianity as evident in exegetical literature,

[1] David Como, *Blown by the Spirit: Puritanism and the Emergence of an Antinomian Underground in Pre-Civil-War England* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004).

> theological and philosophical writings of various genres, literature, liturgy, music, the visual arts, dance, and film, as well as in Islam and other religious traditions and contemporary movements. With this broad program of reception history, *EBR* moves into new terrain in recognition of the fact that biblical texts not only have their own particular backgrounds and settings but also been received and interpreted, and have exerted influence or otherwise have impact in countless religious, theological, and aesthetic settings. […]
>
> *EBR*'s two major foci—the Bible and its reception—are reflected in the five main domains under *EBR*'s purview, each of which is overseen by its own "main editor" and comprises four to six specific areas managed in turn by their own "area editors." One domain each is dedicated to the formation of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament and the New Testament, including the contextual and archaeological history of surrounding events, society, religion, culture, and economy. Two more domains cover the influence of the Bible in the Judaic and Christian traditions respectively, while the fifth domain encompasses biblical reception and influence in literature, art, music, and film, as well as in Islam and in other religions that do not ascribe exclusive authority to the Bible but in some way draw upon its traditions. While not omitting anything that may shed light upon biblical traditions, *EBR* aspires to completeness only in its coverage of the scriptures themselves and their formation. Inasmuch as a complete accounting of the global history of their reception and influence over two millennia is impossible, *EBR* documents that history in ways that pragmatically account for the major themes and issues and provides the necessary guidance for further research.

These entries from five different domains are freely intermingled in the text (which, as an encyclopedia, is governed by alphabetical order) meaning that the contents can seem somewhat arbitrary when leafed through: this is not a fault of the work, as it will not be apparent when used for its intended reference function. Nonetheless, for those not sympathetic to reception history, projects such as *EBR* can look like arbitrary collections of material. This mat-

ter is at the centre of reception history, and the issues at stake are succinctly expressed in the mission statement of *Relegere* itself:

> The journal has been founded on the conviction that the study of reception and religion must not limit itself to a mere cataloguing of influence or a simple recounting of the trajectories of foundational religious texts across time. Beyond this basic research, reception history needs to be more thoroughly understood on a conceptual and theoretical level; reception history must actively interrogate the taken-for-granted idea that foundational texts are somehow fixed, that their essential natures can be distinguished from their subsequent reception.[2]

This is the particular challenge of reception history: it an enterprise that by its essence requires the relinquishment of the hermeneutic parameters established by a given tradition. To put it another way, to fully engage with the hermeneutical questions raised by the philosophical traditions that underpin reception history, involves not allowing them to be reined in by tacit agreement amongst theologians as to what constitutes appropriate interpretation. Luz has managed to do this by relinquishing some parameters (not least as part of the ecumenical Evangelisch-Katholischer Kommentar series in which much of his work on Matthew has appeared), but has held to others, by remaining broadly committed to the conventions of a Christian hermeneutic. But for scholars who wish to undertake reception work from (whatever their personal beliefs) a methodologically and historically agnostic position, then the sort of emancipation offered by this project (a liberation from the boundary setting of any single tradition) simultaneously means that the project demands new hermeneutical paradigms: we have all this material, but what should we do with it?

The research and cataloguing of the *EBR* project is essential foundational work, but it does not divide cleanly from the conceptual and theoretical material, and therefore offers a great opportunity in foregrounding the hermeneutical issues at stake, and addressing the philosophical background to reception study. As yet, the *EBR* series has not really seized this opportunity (to take the most obvious instance, the introduction to this thirty-volume series is just three pages long), but this is a project still at an early stage. The website currently houses a range of helpful resources, including

[2] http://www.relegere.org/index.php/relegere/about/editorialPolicies#focusAndScope.

the editors' preface, sample entries, a list of keywords, and so on. As the series grows, there is a real opportunity here for the editors to commission (and indeed write) some reflective pieces on what reception history is. In doing so, they would maintain a living connection to the philosophical material that enabled such a radical departure from more traditional ways of studying the Bible in the first place. This could make a theoretical contribution that would match the enormous contribution in terms of collation and dissemination of biblical reception history that the project has already begun to make.