

Blackwell Bible Commentaries

Guidelines for Authors

- 1. Aim.** The Blackwell Bible Commentaries series, the first to be devoted primarily to the reception history of the Bible, is based on the premise that how people have interpreted, and been influenced by, a sacred text like the Bible is often as interesting and historically important as what it originally meant. The series emphasizes the influence of the Bible on literature, art, music, and film, its role in the evolution of religious beliefs and practices, and its impact on social and political developments. Fundamental to the aims of this series is the conviction that what people believe a sacred text means, and how they actually use it can be studied with the same degree of sensitivity and rigour as its 'original meaning'. By its nature, the emphasis of the series is emphatically an interdisciplinary project.

Until quite recently this whole dimension of biblical studies has been for the most part totally neglected by modern biblical scholars. The goal of the commentary writer has been to get behind the centuries of accumulated Christian and Jewish tradition to one single meaning, normally identified with the author's original intention. The most important and distinctive feature of this new type of commentary is that it will present readers with many different interpretations of each text, in such a way as to heighten their awareness of what a sacred text, can mean and what it can do, what it has meant and what it has done, in the many contexts in which it operates. The Blackwell Bible Commentaries will consider patristic, rabbinic (where relevant), and medieval exegesis, interpretation from the Reformation and early modern period, as well as insights from various types of modern criticism, acquainting readers with a wide variety of interpretative techniques. Where relevant, reference will be made to questions of source criticism, date, authorship, and other historical critical and archaeological issues, but since these are comprehensively covered in existing commentaries, such references will be considered briefly as part of the history of interpretation.

- 2. Readership and style.** This commentary series will provide a much-needed resource for all those interested in the influence of the Bible on western culture, both specialists and general readers. Authors will keep in mind the needs of students of literature, art, music, history, politics, religious studies and the social sciences, as well as students of theology and biblical studies. The style must be clear and non-technical, avoiding unnecessarily complicated syntax and specialist terminology. Little previous knowledge of the Bible and the history of biblical scholarship can be assumed. Brevity and conciseness are essential. Thus, it may frequently be possible to include only one worked example and then provide brief references to a number of parallels. General issues, such as literary critical insights affecting many passages, may best be dealt with once, possibly in the Introduction, and referred to elsewhere as required. The size and market price of the volumes will vary; limits set on length are designed to make the volumes accessible to as wide a range of readers as possible. The hallmark of the series is that each volume offers a concise survey of the main patterns of interpretation. No attempt will be made to be encyclopedic, but what is included in each volume should be typical of the main kinds of interpretation of the particular biblical book.

- 3. Methodology.** As relatively little research on the reception history of the Bible has been done until recently, authors will find that they have to do a certain amount of original research themselves, and this will entail moving into disciplines in which many of us are not trained. In addition, authors are encouraged to make use of the enormous amount of study done in other

areas of the humanities where much patient study of primary sources relating to the history of interpretation of the Bible is already available.

The series aims to maintain the highest standards of academic excellence, so that it may stand alongside series like the *Evangelisch-Katholischer Kommentar*, where reception history has been of particular concern, the *International Critical Commentary*, *Hermeneia*, and *Biblischer Kommentar*.

3.1. The series editors have posted on the BBC webpage a bibliography for authors working on volumes in the series, and they intend to update this periodically, with help from the authors. Although there are not yet any chapter-by-chapter commentaries on specific Biblical books like those proposed here, there is a steadily increasing number of general studies and reference works specifically devoted to the history of biblical interpretation. Many standard reference works (such as *Biblia Patristica*, the *Cambridge History of the Bible*, H. de Lubac, *Exegese médiévale*, G. Schiller, *Iconography of the Christian Church* and Daniélou, *Bible and the Liturgy*) have indices of scriptural references as well as valuable bibliographies. Also, lectionaries and hymnbooks have indices of scriptural references. Last but not least, computer-generated concordances facilitate the location of names, keywords or images in a rapidly increasing number of texts, while the computer "search" facility makes a vast amount of relevant data instantly accessible in the case of the many texts already available on disk.

3.2 Scope/ Selection of Material. Given the wide influence of the Bible and the richly varied appropriation of each Biblical book, it is a difficult question which interpretations to include. While each volume will have its own distinctive point of view, the guiding principle for the series as a whole is that readers should be given a representative sampling of material from different ages, with emphasis on interpretations that have been especially influential or historically significant. The aim of the series is to be comprehensive in our coverage, within the limits of the space available, including ancient and contemporary, popular as well as academic interpretations. Volumes will let the texts and their interpretations speak for themselves. Important and influential examples of antisemitic, imperialistic, oppressive, racist, sexist uses of scripture have to be included as well as beautiful, uplifting, liberating interpretations. Readers will be given as representative a picture as possible of the many meanings the biblical text has had through the centuries; they can then make up their own minds on the 'value' or 'morality' or 'validity' of particular interpretations. The series editors suggest the following principles of selection.

3.2.1 The overriding criterion will usually be a quantitative one: a glance at various indices of biblical references shows which texts have had a particularly prominent role to play in a given context.

3.2.2, In addition, room will be found for interesting and ingenious solutions to problems in the text, such as inconsistencies, ambiguities, obscurities and the like, which have puzzled commentators down the ages, and for which the pre-critical commentators had an answer that sometimes escapes modern interpreters.

3.2.3. Where the original meaning in its context has been, for whatever reason, significant, or influential, in later times, it should be given due space. Where it is clearly less influential than later meanings, it need not be handled in such great detail, and reference to other commentaries, where it is dealt with at length, may be given. For example, the discussions of 20th century liberation theologians often hinge on a reconstructed original social context (e.g. 8th century BCE Israel), and this is an essential part of their argument, whereas the original meaning of Isaiah 7:14, or of some of the laws in Exodus, is of minimal significance in comparison with how they have affected later ages. Nevertheless, the series aims to make clear the importance of modern historical criticism within the whole framework of the history of interpretation.

3.2.4. The Bible' in the title of the series will in due course include the Wisdom of Solomon,

Ecclesiasticus, Judith, and other works not in the Hebrew Bible. While the main emphasis will be on its reception history in the church and western culture, Jewish interpretations of the Hebrew text will be included, where they are especially interesting or significant. Some texts simply could not be properly discussed without extensive reference to Jewish usage: e.g. Genesis 1 and Ezekiel 1 in the mystical tradition, Jephthah in rabbinic tradition and Ephraim of Bonn's Aqedah. Much of the Jewish material runs in parallel with the history of Christian interpretation. Patristic and rabbinic tradition grew up side by side, constantly interacting with each other, for example, and in the context of mediaeval disputations some Jewish interpretations were explicit responses to Christian dogma or polemic.

3.2.5 Significant Muslim interpretations such as the Qur'anic versions of the stories of Abraham, Hagar, Job, Jesus and Mary might also be referred to where possible, noting parallels in the gnostic, patristic and rabbinic literature.

3.3. It is assumed that **authors** who have agreed to undertake the task of writing such a commentary, will be committed to sound research in whatever field the relevant sources are located.

3.4. The series editors are available to advise authors, on matters relating to other disciplines. Many authors have found that they have been able to gain the information they need as the result of informal contact, but the editors will be happy to put authors in touch with those with relevant expertise in the Bible in art, music and literature.

3.5. A **website** has been set up on the internet as an additional resource (<http://www.bbibcomm.net/>), to facilitate communication among all those involved in the project. It provides contact details and authors, up-to-date information about the progress of the series. Contributions from authors of individual volumes are encouraged.

4. Format.

4.1 While the format of volumes will vary, to allow authors to present the variety of material in as clear and logical a form as possible, the normal format of a BBC volume will consist of an extended introduction to the reception history of the relevant biblical book, followed by a chapter-by-chapter commentary (or, in the case of some longer books, a commentary on selected or grouped chapters). The chapter-by-chapter arrangement ensures that the Biblical text is always central to the discussion. Authors have found that the interpretations they have accumulated tend to direct the pattern of presentation in their volumes, and it is to be expected that there will be some variety in which material is presented in the different volumes to accommodate the shape of the interpretative tradition related to the particular book. Some authors have found that a consistent reference to a number of key authors throughout the commentary has helped them to give shape to the material. This is offered by way of suggestion, as a way of giving the volume coherence, rather than prescription as authors may find that there are other ways of shaping the material which give it coherence.

In addition to describing how single verses or images have been used down the ages, some volumes will contain accounts of how a longer passage, a chapter or a story, or perhaps even in some cases a whole short book, has been interpreted. Not all Biblical books will require the same treatment.

4.2. In general, material on each verse, image, passage or story should be arranged in broadly chronological order, although thematic considerations may sometimes dictate the ordering of the

material. Each section will begin with some account of what the text means in its literary context, within the individual book, and as appropriate, within the Bible as a whole.

4.3. In the interests of conciseness, the biblical text should not be quoted apart from isolated words and phrases needed for the discussion. Authors should however be aware of the most widely used English versions and, where possible, make reference to them in order to make the commentary useful and intelligible to readers using different modern translations. These might include the King James Authorized Version (AV), the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), the Jerusalem Bible (JB), the New International Version (NIV) and the Jewish Publication Society version (JPS).

4.4. The insights of modern archaeology, together with questions of date, source, authorship and historicity should be discussed as part of the history of interpretation in the modern period. As such historical questions hold pride of place in most other commentaries, the new series need only discuss significant or influential discoveries and theories quite briefly, referring to fuller treatment elsewhere. Thus, for example, one would expect to find discussed the theory of the 'Four Servant Songs' in 'Second Isaiah', or the various views on the original words of Jesus, but only as part of the history of biblical interpretation, towards the end of the discussion of each passage or section.

4.5. To give some coherence to the commentary, an attempt should be made where appropriate to draw together some of the salient points of the discussion in a brief analysis of the effective power of the text on its readers and users. What is it in the language of Genesis 22 or Isaiah 6:3 or John 3:16 that has meant that it has the effect that it has? The point of this summary discussion is to focus on the text as the cause of later interpretation, and it will reflect the author's grasp of the whole gamut of the history of interpretation.

4.6. Each volume will have an introduction with the following main functions.

4.6.1. It should introduce the author, and his or her perspective. It should include an account of how s/he plans to tackle the task, and introduce the reasons why this text should have led its later interpreters to understand it in the way they did. Wherever possible one should try to let the interpretations speak for themselves, though it is accepted that some authors may want to summarise so that their commentary has a more narrative and less anthological 'feel' to it.

4.6.2. It should contain a comprehensive sketch of the reception history of the whole book (as distinct from the history of its modern interpretation reflected in most scholarly commentaries). Significant uses of a particular book should be surveyed in the introduction. The Introduction is the place to say something about the main texts or types of text, e.g. commentaries, works of literature, theology, art, music and film - referred to most frequently throughout the commentary.

4.6.3 Systematic cross-referencing and a subject index will provide access to where the main discussion(s) of each topic can be found, whether in the introduction or in the main body of the commentary.

David Gunn, Judith Kovacs, Christopher Rowland and John Sawyer (editors) June 2007