

5-1-1989

The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary

David W. Dahle

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholars.wlu.ca/consensus>

Recommended Citation

Dahle, David W. (1989) "The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary," *Consensus*: Vol. 15 : Iss. 1 , Article 12.
Available at: <http://scholars.wlu.ca/consensus/vol15/iss1/12>

This Book Reviews is brought to you for free and open access by Scholars Commons @ Laurier. It has been accepted for inclusion in Consensus by an authorized editor of Scholars Commons @ Laurier. For more information, please contact scholarscommons@wlu.ca.

Through the parable of the seeds Borsch takes another similarly thought provoking direction by concluding that these parables might teach us "to be careless while caring". There is much that happens in the growth of seeds that must be left up to the invisible and uncontrollable powers of nature. Similarly, there are aspects of the life and witness of Christians that must be left up to the invisible forces. While we should pray and be concerned (care), we should also be "care less", trusting in God's grace and mercy.

If there were anything of which Borsch would be guilty it would be stretching some of the limits of both the interpretation of certain parables, and the meaning of parable itself (after reading the epilogue one may well ask what is not a parable?). But this is a relatively minor offense given the scope of the work. In terms of a book which briefly surveys the approaches scholars have taken to the parables in general and on an individual basis with some fresh and challenging insights, it is a book worth considering for inclusion in the parish or pastor's library.

Norman R. Hennig

St. Matthew, Mildmay and St. Paul, Neustadt, Ontario

The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary

Allen C. Myers, editor

Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company,
1987

1116 pp., U.S. \$29.95

The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary is a translation and revision of the 1975 edition of the Dutch *Bijbelse Encyclopedie* edited by W.H. Gispen. According to the editors, the English edition contains 286 totally new entries and is about 40% larger than the 1975 edition.

As a way to assess this Bible dictionary I shall compare its features with *Harper's Bible Dictionary*, the recent cooperative project of Harper & Row and the Society for Biblical Literature. *Harper's* was edited by Paul J. Achtemeier and published in 1985.

Although *Eerdmans* has approximately 100 pages less text than *Harper's* it is more comprehensive in its coverage with nearly 5000 entries compared to *Harper's* 3700, and also contains more written text. The increased coverage is due to *Eerdmans'* editorial policy of including all names found in the Bible whereas *Harper's* includes, with some exceptions, only names that occur at least three times. In order to obtain such increased coverage in fewer pages, *Eerdmans* has used smaller, and thus more difficult to read, print than *Harper's*.

Although *Eerdmans* has more written text, *Harper's* has more photographs (16 pages in colour and over 500 black-and-white photographs

compared to about 120 black-and-white photographs for *Eerdmans*), more maps (16 pages in colour and 72 black-and-white maps compared to 12 pages in colour for *Eerdmans*), and more charts and line drawings. The colour maps for both dictionaries were produced by Hammond, Inc., but *Harper's* are more useful because of the seven-page index of places included with the maps.

The range of topics covered by both dictionaries is immense, going beyond just entries on persons, places, plants, animals, and objects mentioned in the Bible and on all the biblical books (including the Apocryphal, Deuterocanonical, and Pseudepigraphal books) to entries on important ancient Near Eastern civilizations, extrabiblical writings such as the Dead Sea Scrolls, archaeological sites, biblical criticism, and the early Church. For students of the biblical languages *Eerdmans* provides very helpful transliterations and translations of all terms in Hebrew, Greek, or other languages, whereas *Harper's* provides translations of such terms, but does not give transliterations. *Harper's* is especially good in its articles on archaeological sites, since those who have written the articles are often those who have participated in the most recent excavations. The abundant use of photographs is a further aid to understanding these sites. *Harper's* goes beyond what one would expect in a Bible dictionary by also including two long articles on the influence of the Bible on art and literature up to the present time.

In theological stance *Eerdmans* is "primarily evangelical in focus", but its editors have attempted "to display greater sensitivity to the broad spectrum of interpretation" by "presenting as objectively as possible divergent perspectives" (v). A major difference between the two dictionaries is in their choice of specialists for writing (and for *Eerdmans*, revising) the articles. *Eerdmans* uses 48 contributors (6 of whom were also contributors to the 1975 edition) "including not only Reformed, but also Baptist, Brethren, Disciples, Episcopal, Mennonite, Methodist (and Wesleyan), Pentecostal, Presbyterian, and Independent, as well as Roman Catholic and Jewish" scholars (v). *Eerdmans* indicates which entries are new and which have been extensively revised but does not give the academic affiliation of the contributors nor indicate which entries they revised or newly contributed. *Eerdmans* does not indicate how many authors contributed to the 1975 edition on which this edition is based. *Harper's*, on the other hand, has 179 contributors from seven countries: their academic affiliations are given and their authorship of entries is indicated by the use of their initials. Although *Harper's* contributors do not write "from any confessional perspective, but rather from the broad perspective of expert biblical knowledge" (xix), it is possible to see from their academic affiliations that they represent a much wider range of religious affiliations than *Eerdmans*, including several Lutherans. No Lutherans contributed to *Eerdmans'* revision.

Eerdmans' theological stance can be seen by its presentation of more literal interpretations along with interpretations reached through the historical-critical method. *Harper's*, on the other hand, only makes use of the methods of historical-critical interpretation. An example of their

approaches can be seen in their entries on the Pentateuch and its sources. *Eerdmans* gives as much space to the traditional view that Moses was responsible for the Pentateuch as to the Documentary Hypothesis of modern scholars, even though concluding that the historical-critical approach is important for understanding the sources for the Pentateuch. *Harper's* discusses only the Documentary Hypothesis.

In conclusion, I can say that I am happy to possess both dictionaries. For its comprehensiveness, wider range of theological interpretation, and greater attention to linguistic details I find *Eerdmans* a valuable resource. For its more pleasing format (larger print, more pictures, maps, and charts), wider range of authors, and more up-to-date biblical criticism I value *Harper's*. A further plus for *Harper's* is the newly published (1988) companion volume, *Harper's Bible Commentary*, with its extensive cross-references to the dictionary.

David W. Dahle

Camrose Lutheran College, Camrose, Alberta

The Living Voice of the Gospel

Francis J. Moloney

New York/Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1986

U.S. \$8.95

Francis Moloney wishes to bring to laypeople the insights that have been gained by careful and responsible scholarship. The growing sophistication of believers, especially among the young, suggests to him that the time is ripe for scholars to communicate with laypersons on a more challenging level.

After a general introduction regarding the appropriate reading of a gospel the author devotes two chapters to each of the four gospels, outlining first the general argument and the major theological issues found within the gospel under consideration, and then examining a particular section from that gospel. In the concluding chapter Moloney reflects on the dynamism that has always characterized the revelation of the Word of God in Scriptures and in the Tradition.

Moloney presents data which demonstrate that the gospels are at variance with one another at significant points. "There are *two very different* versions of the birth of Jesus of Nazareth" (93), he observes, and the gospels often diverge widely in the way in which they portray such incidents as Peter's confession of faith, for instance. Careful comparison of the Matthean Sermon on the Mount with the corresponding material in Luke, leads Moloney to conclude: "If we claim that the gospels are historical, in the modern sense of the term, then either Luke or Matthew must have their