



Hahn, Scott, ed.

Catholic Bible Dictionary

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Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth

New Jersey

“More than a generation has passed since the appearance of the last major Catholic Bible dictionary,” says Scott Hahn in the preface to the *Catholic Bible Dictionary* (hereafter *CBD*). Technically he’s correct, but the multi-volume *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (Thomson/Gale, 2003) underwent a major revision at the turn of the century at which time thousands of entries were updated with hundreds more being added. So while it may be technically true that no Catholic Bible *dictionary* has appeared in more than a generation, this isn’t true of major Catholic reference works. Having said that, the *CBD* is a handy and affordable volume that can easily be added to the personal library of any interested student while the *NCE* will most likely be confined to the shelves of major research libraries.

From what I can discern from Hahn’s title as general editor and his comments in the preface and acknowledgements, the *CBD* was produced by a team of scholars. He thanks Matthew Bunson, Curtis J. Mitch, John S. Bergsma, Brant Pitre, and Christopher Bailey for their “hard work, expertise, and editorial assistance” (xi) but we’re left to guess what part they played. There’s no telling who the team that produced this volume is or what any of them did in particular. Authors’ initials do not appear at the end of individual entries and there isn’t a list of contributors or an author index so in the end all praise and criticism will fall squarely on Hahn’s shoulders.

The entries themselves range in length from a single sentence (e.g., “Beor,” 105) to several pages (e.g., “Covenant,” 168-75; “Jesus Christ,” 433-47; “Sacrifice,” 791-802). The longer articles include outlines that are helpful for readers who might want to skip to the parts most pertinent to

their studies in the event they don't need all of the information provided. Each biblical book, to include the deuterocanon, receives a helpful entry. The evenhanded approach to issues of authorship and dating is impressive as the opinions of both church tradition and critical scholarship are noted. The overall approach to interpretation used in the *CBD* is explained in the article on "Biblical Criticism" (111-19), which explains its theological basis as well as its methodological limits.

As a Catholic reference work there is constant reference being made to Catholic documents such as *Lumen Gentium*, *Dei Verbum*, and most frequently, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. There are also entries on subjects unique to the Catholicism such as "Papal Primacy" (670-72); "Pontifical Biblical Commission" (718); or parts of larger entries such as the one on "Mary, the Mother of Jesus" (584-88), which addresses "Mary in Salvation History" and details her roles as "The Ark of the New Covenant" (586); "Queen Mother" (586-87); "The New Eve" (587-88); and "A Type of the Church" (588); or "Eucharist" (255-60), which has a section on "The Real Presence" broken up into explanations of "The Bread of Life" (256) and "Transubstantiation" (257).

As with any work of this nature some articles are better than others. The article on "Covenant" is superb (as we'd expect from Hahn who has devoted much of his career to the subject) in being clear, detailed, and highly informative. The article "Tongues, Gift of" isn't quite so good as it's marked by ambiguity. On the one hand we're told that tongues in Acts 2 are known languages but then the issue is vague when addressing 1 Cor. 14. The author simply describes speaking in tongues as "speaking 'to God' and uttering 'mysteries in the Spirit'" (922), but we're never told whether this is supposed to be known or unknown languages, which impacts current debates on glossolalia.

I might complain about the length of certain entries as well. "Trinity" (924-26) gives basic information but a subject of such importance deserves a much fuller treatment, especially given the length of entries dedicated to less important subjects like priesthood. Or the strange selectivity of other articles could be mentioned, e.g., "God" (317-24), which has a section on the "Names of God" and lists only El, Elohim, Yahweh, Adonai, and Yahweh Sabaoth. But what of the many other compound Yahweh names (Yireh, Shalom, Nissi, Tzidkenu, et al.)? Another complaint one could register is the lack of attention to subjects that would be useful. There is no article on eschatology, for example, and one must read the entry on "Millennium" (618-19) to catch a glimpse of Catholic eschatological views.

But whatever the shortcomings of the *CBD*, the positive features far outweigh them. This is a volume that shows how to communicate sophisticated theology and biblical studies in a manner that students at various stages of development will find helpful. Having a *Nihil Obstat* and *Imprimatur* help to set the Catholic reader at ease and assure them that this volume is free from doctrinal error. It helps the non-Catholic reader to see that the positions taken are

those of the Catholic Church and can be seen as representative. This proves valuable to the non-Catholic seeking to challenge Catholic teaching, which should only be done once it is identified and understood. With this in mind it becomes easy to suggest the *CBD* as a useful tool for anyone engaged in biblical study.