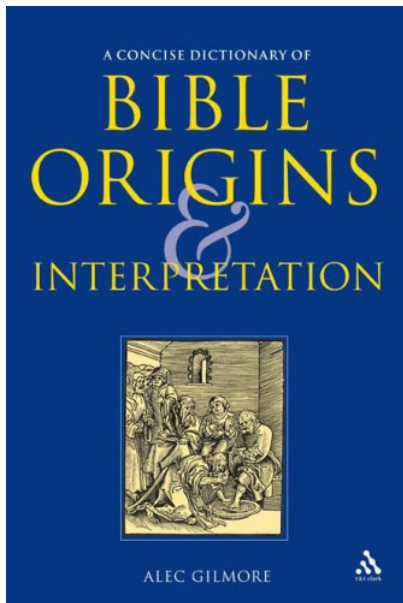


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Gilmore, Alec

A Concise Dictionary of Bible Origins and Interpretation

Second edition

London: T&T Clark, 2006. Pp. xiii + 228. Cloth. \$130.00.
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Jan G. van der Watt
University of Pretoria
Pretoria, South Africa

This is indeed a concise dictionary, at only 228 pages. The theme, however, creates rather large and general expectations: the dictionary deals with *Bible origins and interpretation*. Since it is so concise, an obvious question is: What was selected to be discussed from this broad field of Bible origins and interpretation, and what is the quality of the discussions?

What is the dictionary about? In the preface to the first edition, Gilmore explains that “The first part deals with original manuscripts, their production, compilation, and recognition, and trends to be left to a fairly limited number of specialists” (vii–viii). The other part deals with the story of the English Bible, from Tyndale to the New Revised Standard Version. A proper bibliography gives additional references to those who would like to know more on this subject. This is expected to be valuable to students.

Obviously, there are many different opinions and views on the issues dealt with in this dictionary, and it would be close to impossible to deal with all of them. Gilmore acknowledges that and does not claim to treat all the different positions. He tries to “avoid error, acknowledge variety, cover what seemed essential to an understanding of the issues and encourage readers to use it with an open mind and then to pursue more detailed and varied study in other places” (viii). The intention is, therefore, introductory

in nature. Selective treatment of essential material is the aim. Then there are the text boxes, which is a very positive feature in this dictionary. In these boxes, which are spread throughout the dictionary, additional material of different types is presented. In some cases it is anecdotal, in other cases relevant but peripheral. Some examples of what is discussed in the articles themselves are also provided in these text boxes.

Hermeneutical material is added (about one hundred new articles are added, bringing the total number of articles to close to a thousand) in this second edition. The increase in interest in translation theories and new methods of interpretation of course raised many new questions that are ideal for treatment in a dictionary such as this. With these questions came numerous new positions and varying opinions. Integrating the more hermeneutical and subjective material in a book that was more “historical and factual” (xi) was a challenge, as Gilmore acknowledges. He decided that the survey of hermeneutics should be confined to the last fifty years or so. Although in this period theories such as feminism, literary readings, and liberation theologies emerged, there are many technical terms that were used over a wider period. These terms are also included in the dictionary.

This book is thoroughly English, not only in its language but also in terms of the topics considered, specifically when it comes to major characters discussed as well as Bible translations focused upon. Obviously, a person from another background immediately notes this singular focus on English material. Potential readers should therefore be aware of this. It is not necessarily negative, since people who are interested in the English material related to the Bible will obviously find many valuable and interesting pieces of information in this dictionary. Some, however, need developing. For instance, the entry for “Aberdeen (Scotland)...” simply records: “Birthplace of Alexander Cruden”—that is all that is noted. Is that really all that Aberdeen, with its well-known biblical academic tradition, has to offer for inclusion in a dictionary on biblical origins and interpretation? The next entry reads as follows: “Adams, Joseph (1803–80). An engraver responsible for designing *Harper’s Illuminated and New Pictorial Bible*.” This might be an interesting piece of information for some, but the question is whether this is such an important person that he warrants an entry in this dictionary. Why are other “designers” not included, and what are the criteria for inclusion? On the other hand, inclusions such as that of the American, Eugene Nida, are to be commended. Nida is a well-known biblical scholar and Bible translator, especially known for his work with UBS. I often wondered where one could get more detailed information about important figures such as this, and this dictionary is the place to look. But to illustrate the point I made earlier, arguably the most influential lexicon for the translation of New Testament Greek to appear in recent times is the so-called Louw-Nida lexicon (*Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament based on Semantic Domains*). Jannie Louw played a major role in conceptualizing and producing this lexicon. His name, as well as this major lexicon (published by UBS), is not

mentioned. The standard BDAG also did not make it into this dictionary. This limits the functionality as well as usability of this dictionary. I struggled to determine what to expect and what not to. The only distinguishable criterion I could identify was that it focuses more on the English “story,” as Gilmore mentions in his introduction. But of course, Nida was an American, which causes one to wonder. These remarks are not without significance, since one of the requirements of a dictionary is to be as complete as possible, at least according to its own criteria.

What I found exciting in this dictionary was the interesting information in the text blocks, as I mentioned earlier. For instance, there is a block on some early curiosities, such as why there is a Bible called the Bug Bible, the Vinegar Bible, the murderer’s or unrighteous Bible, and so on. One can read the stories of Tischendorf and Codex Sinaiticus, the Dead Sea scrolls, or Erasmus versus the Vulgate. Technical terms such as *dittography*, *glosses*, *haplography*, and many others are explained with suitable examples.

One of the strengths of this dictionary is its discussion of technical matters related to the biblical text and textual criticism. As such it will be of value to any student who is starting his or her theological studies. Another strength is the focus on English Bible translations, most of which are discussed. The discussions are not lengthy but focus on essential material. For instance, the article on the Jerusalem Bible (1966) is about a column and a half long: it identifies the Roman Catholic character of the Bible, the nature of the translation, the positions of the biblical books, the translators, the contents of the introduction, special features, and the number of copies sold (the latter piece of information could of course “date” the dictionary).

By way of conclusion, I do not think the dictionary does justice to its title: *A Concise Dictionary of Bible Origins and Interpretation*. It is too fragmentary, too selective, and too focused and limited to the English context to warrant such a broad and inclusive title. On the other hand, much of what it offers is useful and interesting. I think that this dictionary should be helpful for a beginning student who is not familiar with the technical terms related to textual aspects of biblical criticism or perhaps the different Bible translations. The bibliography at the end, with suggestions for extra reading, is also valuable. However, as has been pointed out, this dictionary is highly selective and in many cases books that many would regard as standard works are missing in these lists. Something also needs to be said about the hermeneutical themes that were included in the second edition. This has added another useful dimension to this dictionary. It introduces one to the essence of themes such as African liberation theology, other liberation readings, feminist readings, reader response, and so on. I do not think it will be a major loss if one does not have this book on your bookshelf, but if you have it you will enjoy many of the interesting bits of information it has to offer.