

## PREFACE

From time to time writers of biblical commentaries are put on the spot by being asked, ‘Why another commentary? Don’t we have more than enough?’ One can attempt to offer a more theological answer, suggesting that canonical texts, because of their testimony to the particular subject matter that they purport to convey, have a richness and value that cannot be exhausted by any one interpreter and so there is always the possibility of further insight from another close study. When such a reply does not have the desired effect, this writer has also given a more pragmatic response and appealed to the needs of a well-established and respected series. While there are, of course, excellent large one-, two- and three-volume commentaries on John’s Gospel, Black’s New Testament Commentaries have endeavoured to provide more moderately sized commentaries that are accessible to serious students yet reliable and up to date in their scholarship. In the Black series this commentary is a successor to that written by J. N. Sanders and B. A. Mastin and first published in 1968. The bulk of that commentary was in fact produced by Sanders during the late 1950s and Mastin then performed the valuable task of editing and completing Sanders’ work after the latter’s untimely death. There is much still to be learned from their commentary, but the more than four decades that have elapsed since most of it was written have seen major changes in scholarly approaches to the New Testament and in Johannine studies. More recent approaches have included those associated with a newer literary criticism with its interest in narrative and readers, social-scientific, rhetorical and cultural criticisms, feminist readings, readings from various social and political locations, renewed quests for the historical Jesus and a concern for the theological interpretation of the New Testament as Scripture. More specifically within Johannine scholarship, different theories about the Fourth Gospel’s relationship to the Synoptics, about a signs source on which the Gospel draws, about a community behind the Gospel, about expulsion from the synagogue and about the depiction of ‘the Jews’ have waxed and waned in popularity. There has been much of value in the resulting mass of secondary literature and this commentary has attempted to distil and pass on some of its insights. At the same time this secondary literature also provides a salutary reminder of the inevitable cultural conditionedness of biblical interpretation and the passing nature of its

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various methods and theories. The best tests of their validity remain how well they explain the evidence within the text and how much light they shed on the message of that text. There is no escaping, however, the fact that judgements on these matters are strongly influenced by the concerns that readers bring to the text.

This commentary's concerns centre on the literary, historical and theological dimensions of the text, although its writer remains acutely conscious that the brevity of the discussions is not able to do any of these justice. In line with the aims and scope of this series, and particularly its commentaries on longer narrative texts, the commentary proper does not attempt to interact explicitly with the major commentators or other scholarly contributors to the interpretation of John's Gospel. Despite the temptation to name names at various points, this self-denying ordinance has been strictly observed, since anything other than a relatively full engagement with other scholars risks the appearance of arbitrariness. As should be apparent, not least from the select bibliography supplied at the end, the commentary does, however, build on interaction with a great deal of this secondary literature, and others who are familiar with it will no doubt be able to recognize its great indebtedness to the views of predecessors and to attach particular names to the various positions discussed. The purpose of avoiding explicit interaction with other interpreters is not simply to keep the commentary within reasonable bounds but also to keep the focus on the conversation with the text. In the process, it is hoped that the commentary's part in the conversation has provided some fresh insights and will be a stimulus to its readers' further engagement with the message of this both enthralling and enigmatic, both provocative and profound Gospel.

Again, in line with the rest of the series, the translation provided is the commentator's own. It deliberately errs on the side of literalness rather than elegant or idiomatic English style in order to indicate as far as possible both some of the interpretative options allowed by the Greek text and the foundations for the interpretations of the text adopted in the commentary. The translation does, however, attempt to employ inclusive language for humans, wherever such use is considered not to be too distortive of the original or simply too cumbersome stylistically.

Finally, I am grateful to Professor Morna Hooker, the General Editor, for her astute observations on the original draft, which have ensured that the final version has greater clarity at various points.

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