

## Introduction

New books in the field of NT studies continue to flood the shelves (whether wooden or 'virtual') of the booksellers. In this survey, I have attempted to identify and comment on a selection of these. My criteria for inclusion have been fairly arbitrary: I have included those titles on the NT, and related subjects, which (a) have been available to me; (b) seem to me to be significant and worthy of note; (c) are primarily exegetical and theological rather than expository; (d) I think could be of benefit to students and/or preachers. Thus, I have not attempted to be exhaustive, but perhaps I may point readers to some usable resources which they might not easily have discovered for themselves.

## Study Aids

Two very practical books appeared at about the same time. *The Pocket Dictionary of Biblical Studies*<sup>1</sup> and the *Handbook of Biblical Criticism*<sup>2</sup> both offer concise definitions (and sometimes discussions) of concepts and technical terms which often prove problematic to students of Biblical Studies. The articles in the former book are fairly brief (a short paragraph) and generally conservative. Those in the latter tend to be longer and more reflective of a mainstream critical position. The *Handbook* also has the advantage of suggesting materials for further investigation. Not only will these books be useful to students, but they will also help anyone who wishes to read modern theological books which use any technical vocabulary.

## Historical Context

Christianity is rooted in history and thus it is vital to be aware of the world in which the events of the NT took place. The publication of the third edition of E. Ferguson's *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*<sup>3</sup> is therefore to be warmly welcomed. This has been a standard reference book for many years, but it has now been improved by updated bibliographies and further discussion of several topics, such as the Dead Sea Scrolls. This is an excellent tool for students and others who want a comprehensive guide to the ancient context (political, social, religious, etc.) of early Christianity, yet who do not

wish to be overwhelmed with detail. Ferguson encourages the reader to engage directly with the ancient world by including selections of primary sources. Clear black and white photographs and illustrations add to the value of this book. D.A.deSilva's *Introducing the Apocrypha*<sup>4</sup> provides a resource by which even readers who would not accept the so-called Apocrypha as part of their Bible may nonetheless appreciate how these Jewish documents can increase our awareness of the history, religion and politics of the NT world. This is a serious study, but it is clearly written and might be read by any intelligent reader. Unfortunately, books which introduce the ancient world to modern readers can sometimes seem rather dry. Not so in the case of *The Lost Letters of Pergamum* by B.W. Longenecker.<sup>5</sup> This remarkable 'historical novel' provides us with a series of fictional letters between 'Antipas' (a fictional character inspired by Rev. 2:13) and Luke, in which Luke responds to questions about Christianity from a somewhat sceptical Roman citizen. This correspondence provides much information about the ancient Greco-Roman world along the way. I enjoyed this book very much and found its ending rather moving. Nonetheless, it has to be recognized that the 'historical novel' genre leaves a measure of confusion in the reader's mind as to what is history and what is fiction. Longenecker is aware of this and provides endnotes which identify those elements of the story which can be defended historically and those which cannot. Readers will be able to read this book quickly, will learn a lot here and may be spurred on to further investigation.

O. Skarsaune has written a fascinating book entitled *In the Shadow of the Temple*,<sup>6</sup> which traces the relationship between the Christian Church and the Jews. This wide-ranging book takes the reader through discussions of ancient Judaism, early Christianity and developments in the early Church, constantly emphasizing the value of appreciating Jewish influence on Christianity. An excellent study for the keen reader.

A couple of atlases have come to my attention recently. SPCK have produced *The Essential Atlas of the Bible*<sup>7</sup> – a well produced atlas for a general readership using high-quality graphics and lots of photographs. While the

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visual aspects of this atlas are very attractive, I was, overall, somewhat disappointed with it. Discussions of particular issues are rather brief and selective, and the text assumes standard critical views without discussion, but my main criticism of this atlas is the limited number of actual maps. On an entirely different scale is the *Tübinger Bibelatlas*.<sup>8</sup> This is a scholarly atlas which is full of large, detailed maps (comparable to OS maps) relating to biblical times and beyond. The text, brief as it is, is in both German and English, so the book is perfectly usable by those without German. These maps will be far too detailed for most general readers, but for students, teachers and those who are fascinated by geography and archaeology, this is a goldmine which can be purchased for a comparatively reasonable price. Libraries should certainly consider purchasing this book.

### Reading the Biblical Text

*Let the Reader Understand*,<sup>9</sup> by D. McCartney and C. Clayton, is an important discussion of the principles of biblical interpretation from a Reformed theological perspective. While it does deal with academic issues (making it an excellent resource for students), it also addresses issues which would be of importance to preachers, and indeed to any Christian (e.g. Scripture in worship and witness, guidance), and should be accessible to a wider readership. Much more briefly, R. Briggs has written *Reading the Bible Wisely*.<sup>10</sup> Briggs' work is based on detailed scholarship, but here he writes briefly and simply on how to read the biblical texts, drawing on the biblical concept of 'wisdom'. This readable book will help readers think through how they read Scripture, even if they do not accept all its arguments. Another very helpful book is S. Moyise, *The Old Testament in the New: An Introduction*.<sup>11</sup> In ten short chapters, Moyise surveys the way in which OT texts are employed in the NT documents. Generally, the discussion is careful and helpful, if necessarily brief; aware of scholarship but not dominated by it. I was disappointed, however, that Moyise too quickly disparaged the interpretation found in some of Paul's contested letters.

One important aspect of biblical interpretation is translation. *The Word of God in English* is a study of

translation method written by a Professor of English and a key figure in the translation of the *English Standard Version* of the Bible. It thus serves, not only as an independent study, but also as a defense of the *ESV*, which has been the subject of considerable scrutiny in the last year or two. While the debate over translation method will continue, Leland Ryken's book is an elegant and easily read argument for an 'essentially literal' approach to Bible translation.

Also important, volume 3 in the *Scripture and Hermeneutics Series* has just appeared.<sup>12</sup> This volume is devoted to examination of the use of the Bible in politics, with particular reference to the work of Professor Oliver O'Donovan. Each chapter is devoted to an aspect of O'Donovan's work and then O'Donovan provides his own written response. This book is very important, although it is perhaps rather difficult for those who have not read O'Donovan's writings to gain the full value from it. This series continues to be a source of good, if demanding, discussion of how Scripture may be read for the good of the Church.

### Biblical Theology

The discipline of 'Biblical Theology' is receiving more and more attention and reflection in recent years, which can only be a good thing for the Church as it attempts to engage responsibly in interpretation of the whole Bible. An international conference held at Wheaton College was devoted to the topic and has resulted in a collection of papers, *Biblical Theology: Retrospect and Prospect*, edited by S. Hafemann. As with many collections of essays, they cover a range of topics without working systematically through the issues – some essays deal with methodology while others are discussions of specific biblical texts. Nevertheless, this is a very stimulating collection which includes contributions from distinguished scholars such as W. Dumbrell, G. H. Wilson, G. K. Beale and C. R. Seitz. More systematic in its approach is *The Ways of our God*,<sup>13</sup> which represents the mature thought of Professor C. H. H. Scobie, a key figure in reflection on Biblical Theology in recent years. Scobie's early chapters are particularly helpful surveys of the key

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methodological issues relating to the discipline. The bulk of the book is an attempt to actually do biblical theology and is perhaps somewhat less successful. In his trying to cover such a vast amount of material, one sometimes has the feeling that exegetical decisions which really require some justification are simply assumed. This is, nevertheless, a useful resource for students and preachers, even if it is only a starting point. S. Hafemann has written his own 'Biblical Theology' for a general readership, entitled *The God of Promise and the Life of Faith*.<sup>14</sup> This traces the story at the heart of the Bible from creation, through covenant, fall and redemption. There is a particular emphasis on the place of suffering in the life of the Christian. Although this is serious theology, Hafemann writes clearly and with pastoral concern and this book would be of value to any serious reader. Some biblical theology studies have been more narrowly focused. In the 'New Studies in Biblical Theology' series, D. Pao has written a book on the Pauline theme of *Thanksgiving*,<sup>15</sup> which is both academically rigorous and pastorally helpful, while J. D. Hays has written a study of race, entitled *From Every People and Nation*.<sup>16</sup> Hays' book addresses an important contemporary ethical issue and deserves serious attention. Hays focuses mainly on the black-white race issues which are dominant in the USA, but the outcomes of his biblical study will have much wider significance. D. Wenham has devoted many years to the study of the relationship between the teaching of Jesus and the writings of Paul. Now he has taken his more technical research and presented it for a general readership in *Paul and Jesus: The True Story*.<sup>17</sup> This is a useful book for Christians who wish to begin to reflect on the relationship between the teachings of Jesus and Paul from an informed and solidly evangelical perspective.

### Introductory Issues

D.A. Black has edited two useful volumes on introductory matters: *Rethinking New Testament Textual Criticism*<sup>18</sup> and *Rethinking the Synoptic Problem*<sup>19</sup> provide clear and up-to-date discussions of the main scholarly positions as articulated by important advocates of these positions. These volumes will be particularly useful to students seeking discussion of these important issues

which goes beyond dictionary article length but is not unduly technical. L. McDonald has built on his previous work on the NT canon by editing a substantial volume entitled, *The Canon Debate*,<sup>20</sup> which includes numerous important essays. This is certainly a book for teachers and students rather than for the general reader and, as such, it provides a useful collection of essays. It is unfortunate, however, that it does not better reflect the more conservative position of, for example, R. Beckwith. For most people, this is probably a book to refer to in the library. Also for specialists is M. Hengel's *The Septuagint as Christian Scripture*.<sup>21</sup> Hengel's books are always full of carefully researched detail and thorough documentation. In this volume he addresses the significance of the Greek OT for the canon of Christian Scripture, raising provocative questions which deserve attention. As forecast in my last survey, the new textbook *Exploring the New Testament: Volume 2, Introducing the Letters and Revelation* by I. H. Marshall, S. Travis and I. Paul has appeared.<sup>22</sup> This will, doubtless, join its partner as a popular textbook in academic courses, but it will also be a very useful guide for anyone who wishes to work through the issues relating to the NT documents. Scripture is treated with respect by the authors although I would differ from them at certain points. There is also regular encouragement to the reader to think for him/herself. C. Rowland's book, *Christian Origins*,<sup>23</sup> has been republished in a second edition. It is exceptionally helpful in its clear presentation of information on all aspects of NT context and content in numerous short chapters. Students will appreciate the 'bite-sized' division of material in particular. It will probably be of less use to preachers.

### Gospel Studies

The most recent major study of the historical Jesus is that by J. D. G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*,<sup>24</sup> which forms the first volume of a series entitled 'Christianity in the Making'. Dunn takes a generally positive approach to the Gospels as the products of carefully remembered oral tradition which was passed along and preserved within the early Christian communities. This is not an easy book, and, although Dunn indicates that he has deliberately tried to make it accessible to non-specialists, many such

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readers would possibly find its 900 pages of solid discussion rather daunting. Nonetheless, ministers and students should certainly consider reading this book, whole or in part, for careful engagement with the Gospel texts in their historical context.

Also worthy of note is the revised second edition of G. Stanton's textbook, *The Gospels and Jesus*.<sup>25</sup> Stanton is clear, concise and generally conservative as he engages with historical, theological and literary questions. The book is readable and will be of use to students in particular.

D. Bock's *Jesus According to Scripture*<sup>26</sup> is not really a commentary, nor is it an original contribution to 'Life of Jesus Research'. Rather, it follows the structure of a synopsis and comments on each unit of text with respect to its place within the individual Gospel and also the different features of any parallel passages. It is extremely useful for students and preachers and would be accessible to a wider readership also.

*Gospel Women*<sup>27</sup> is a collection of careful studies by R. Bauckham of the women who are named in the Gospels. This is not a 'role of women in the Church' book. Rather it is a collection of essays which are sensitive to historical, literary and theological features of the texts and also to contemporary trends in biblical interpretation. There are rich resources in this book on women who have not often been the centre of attention. For example, there are almost 100 pages on Joanna. This will not be an easy read but it will certainly be a rewarding one.

### Pauline Studies

Two textbooks on Paul's life and writings have appeared in the last year or so. J. McRay, a noted NT archaeologist, has written *Paul: His Life and Teaching*.<sup>28</sup> The book is divided into the two parts suggested by the title. The first part reflects McRay's particular expertise, helpfully outlining Paul's life with a high view of the historical value of Acts and all the Pauline letters and illuminating his discussion with supporting non-canonical evidence. McRay's own photographs add to the value of this section. Unfortunately, the section on

Paul's teaching is rather idiosyncratic and does not provide a rounded presentation of Paul's theology. This is likely to mean that this book will not become a standard textbook since there are several other volumes which do the job more effectively. The other textbook is *The Cambridge Companion to Paul*, edited by J. D. G. Dunn.<sup>29</sup> This volume joins this valuable series which already boasts a useful volume on 'the Historical Jesus'. It contains seventeen fairly short essays, plus an introduction by the editor. Several of the contributors are conservative, although others represent a fairly wide range of perspectives. An interesting feature of this collection is a section devoted to discussion of how Paul has been interpreted at various times in history. Evangelicals will want to read other books along with this one, but this collection of essays gives a good, fair and digestible indication of the current state of Pauline studies.

At a more technical level, and continuing a recent flow of substantial studies which engage critically with the so-called 'New Perspective on Paul', S. Gathercole has written *Where is Boasting?*, which is the published version of his PhD thesis, written under the supervision of J. D. G. Dunn at the University of Durham. Gathercole provides both a study of 'boasting' in Paul and an evaluation of the 'New Perspective'. The bulk of the book is devoted to discussion of Jewish literature and perhaps only students and teachers will have the patience to work through this material. The shorter section on Romans 1-5 should be of wider interest.

*Paul, the Law and the Covenant*<sup>30</sup> by A. Das is a careful exegetical study of Pauline texts (mainly from Romans and Galatians) written in direct response to the arguments of E. P. Sanders and those who have followed after him. This is an excellent, detailed study which should be read widely by those who follow this ongoing debate.

Briefly, a paperback edition of C. E. B. Cranfield's essays, *On Romans, and Other New Testament essays*,<sup>31</sup> will bring his lively and thoughtful essays on a range of topics to a wider readership. His critical engagement with aspects of the work of J. D. G. Dunn will be of particular interest to many readers.

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## Commentaries

When I wrote my previous survey (May 2002), I was able to mention the publication of two substantial commentaries on Mark's Gospel but, as I had not then seen them, I was unable to comment on them. Now I can remedy that situation. R. T. France has produced *The Gospel of Mark* as his contribution to the excellent *New International Greek Testament Commentary* series and C. A. Evans has completed the commentary on Mark 9-16 for the *Word Biblical Commentary* series. In the former volume, France writes with clarity and deliberately avoids the common clutter of endless footnotes. The result is a careful exegesis of the Greek text of Mark which treats the text seriously as Scripture and which is a pleasure to read. It should prove very useful for preachers with Greek. The latter is a very detailed commentary which displays the astonishing competence which Evans has demonstrated over twenty years of prolific publishing. Unfortunately, page xxx (part of a bibliography) was blank in my copy.

Large commentaries seem to have been the order of the day recently. H. Hoehner has written a major commentary on Ephesians and is painstaking in his care over the text. He also provides an extensive and careful argument for Pauline authorship. G. Osborne has produced the commentary on *Revelation* in the 'Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament' series.<sup>32</sup> This series contains some excellent volumes already and Osborne has contributed a very strong addition. He maintains the pattern of engaging seriously with the Greek text of the NT, while making the comments to those who are not experts in Greek. Osborne is frank about his literalistic approach to Revelation in his youth, but now places his commentary as following the same basic approach as G. Beale's important volume, although with a stronger emphasis on future fulfillment. I found him, in general, to be a cautious and reliable guide. D. E. Garland has contributed the volume on *1 Corinthians* to the same series, although I have not yet seen this book.

Less exhaustively, G. Green has contributed a volume on *The Letters to the Thessalonians* for the 'Pillar' series.

Although there is plenty of careful and useful discussion, ultimately, Green doesn't resolve the knotty problems (especially those in 2 Thessalonians) and perhaps he does not help the reader to make sense of these difficult letters as much as one might have hoped. Also on a smaller scale, but more concerned with application of the biblical text, the latest volume in the E. P. Study Commentary is by P. Naylor on 2 *Corinthians*.<sup>33</sup> Typical of this series, it is solidly evangelical in its approach to the biblical text, exegetical and based on solid research (although not as detailed as the Pillar commentaries) yet readable and pastorally useful. Although Naylor's scholarship is evident from the endnotes, this serves to enrich the commentary without making it technical. A very useful tool for students, preachers and teachers.

On an entirely different scale, N. T. Wright has produced several further volumes in his project to provide accessible commentaries on the whole NT. *Matthew for Everyone* and *John for Everyone* both appear in two volumes. *Paul for Everyone* serves as the title for several volumes which together will cover Paul's letters. So far, two volumes have been published: on Galatians and Thessalonians; and on Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon. This series is quite a remarkable feat. Wright is always interesting, even when controversial. Although some readers may have reservations about recommending these books to a general readership because of some of Wright's views on justification, etc, there is nonetheless a warmth, a reverence for Scripture and a practicality about them that makes them an attractive means of reading the Scriptures.

Although not really commentaries, there have been two further recent additions to the 'Encountering the New Testament' series from Baker. *Encountering the Book of Hebrews* by D.A. Hagner and *Encountering the Book of Romans* by D. Moo are both fairly brief surveys of the text of the biblical document. This aspect of the book will not really provide the same resource as a standard commentary, but it is very accessible to readers who are developing their knowledge of the text. Certainly anyone who owns Moo's major commentary on Romans will find nothing new in this brief book, but perhaps they will find a more

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manageable approach to the whole of the letter. Some of the most interesting material is found in the various text boxes which are scattered throughout the books. There are also helpful suggestions for further reading.

### General NT Studies

Two large books deserve particular mention. The first is the latest major volume from N. T. (Tom) Wright, entitled *The Resurrection of the Son of God*.<sup>34</sup> As with Wright's previous books, this is an astonishing blend of exceptional scholarly competence and clear presentation. In what (Wright explains) was intended to be the final chapter of his *Jesus and the Victory of God* (1996) but which has now grown to a book of over 800 pages (!), Wright argues clearly that people in the ancient world knew exactly what 'resurrection' meant (the bodily raising to life of a dead person) but almost universally rejected the notion. He then goes on to argue that 'resurrection' is central to the proclamation of the early Christian communities. Along the way, the reader is provided with stimulating discussion of the theological and historical significance of Jesus' resurrection as Wright progresses through the relevant NT texts from Paul, etc., before finally discussing the Gospel narratives. There is a delightful irony in the fact that this book which robustly defends the historicity of the bodily resurrection of Jesus should have been written by the new Bishop of Durham.

The second large volume is *Lord Jesus Christ* by L. Hurtado.<sup>35</sup> This is certainly a book for more advanced students, teachers and preachers who are prepared to do some serious reading. The fundamental purpose of the book is to explore the evidence relating to the early Church's recognition of Jesus as a divine person, particularly in terms of worship. However, the scope of the book is such that it draws the reader into discussions of Jewish monotheism, non-canonical presentations of Jesus, second-century Christianity as well as substantial discussions of many NT texts. Hurtado's discussions of contemporary scholarship make this a particularly useful guide for students. Generally Hurtado is a helpful guide through the material, although I would take issue with some of his decisions. He concludes that devotion to Jesus

was not a late development but is characteristic of the earliest evidence.

On a much smaller scale, but of considerable importance is J. Piper's *Counted Righteous in Christ*, which robustly defends the doctrine of the imputation of Christ's righteousness. After a brief introduction, it is a careful exegetical study of the relevant NT texts. The debate is not over. I understand that a response has been written by D. Garlington, but Piper's book is an important contribution from a careful scholar with a pastor's heart.

The latest volume to stand in the tradition of the *McMaster New Testament Studies* series, edited by R. N. Longenecker, is devoted to *Community Formation in the Early Church and in the Church Today*, and is somewhat more wide-ranging than previous volumes, drawing in representatives of various modern ecclesiastical traditions. In fact, only four chapters are devoted to discussion of the NT materials. Perhaps for this reason, it does not seem to have been formally included in the series. D.F. Ford and M. Higon have edited an 'Oxford Reader' entitled simply *Jesus*. It is a compilation of three hundred and forty-three short extracts from writers of all varieties who have said something about Jesus through the ages. These range from extracts of the NT itself to the famous 'clay sparrows' text from the non-canonical *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*, to Athanasius, to Julian of Norwich, to Martin Luther, to the Book of Mormon, to Dorothy L. Sayers, to N.T. Wright. The content of the extracts ranges from the insightful to the moving to the bizarre! Be warned. Tender confession and heresy rub shoulders here. Yet, for those who have sufficient discernment, this collection makes for fascinating reading.

*The Brother of Jesus*, edited by D. Chilton and J. Neusner,<sup>36</sup> is a collection of essays on 'James the Just and his Mission' (according to the subtitle). There are eight chapters by various scholars, including a substantial biography of James. Several of the contributors are evangelical scholars with considerable expertise in the study of James (e.g. Bauckham and Davids). The text is largely uncluttered and a wide readership could benefit from this book.

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*Studies in the Book of Revelation*,<sup>37</sup> edited by S.Moyise, is a collection of articles by a very diverse range of scholars. Some of the essays are very insightful, although this collection will probably be of more importance to students and teachers than to preachers.

*The Return of Jesus in Early Christianity*<sup>38</sup> by J. T. Carroll *et al* is a useful study of this important theme in the NT and through history. These concise and quite readable essays contain much helpful theological reflection on the canonical text, although occasionally standard critical assumptions show through and the final note of expectation seems rather vague.

### Conclusion

Once again I have highlighted a range of books from which the reader will have to select those which seem best to serve the task of equipping him or her to be a faithful servant of Jesus Christ in whatever calling lies to hand. I have sometimes been asked to offer my particular recommendations, and I will do so here with this cautionary note: what is of great significance to me may not be so to another and so I urge the reader to consult more detailed reviews and other wise readers before parting with money. If at all possible, look at some of the content of a book you plan to purchase so that you can decide whether it is what you need. But do attempt, at least now and again, to read material which goes beyond the immediately useful to the thought-provoking, the stimulating, the idea-forming. Finally, read *everything*, thoughtfully, with discernment and with prayer.

### Recommendations:

For the teacher/student:

Ferguson, *Backgrounds*;  
McCartney and Clayton, *Let the Reader Understand*;  
Wright, *Resurrection*; Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*.

For the preacher:

Pao, *Thanksgiving*; Piper, *Counted Righteous*;  
Hoehner, *Ephesians*.

For the interested reader:

Hafemann, *The God of Promise*; Hagner, *Hebrews*;  
Moo, *Romans*.

1. Leicester: IVP, 2002.
2. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2001.
3. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003.
4. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003.
5. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003.
6. Downers Grove: IVP, 2001.
7. London: SPCK, 2002.
8. Stuttgart: Deutsche Gesellschaft, 2002.
9. Phillipsburg: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2002.
10. London: SPCK, 2003.
11. London: Continuum, 2001.
12. Carlisle/Grand Rapids: Paternoster/Zondervan, 2003.
13. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003.
14. Wheaton: Crossway, 2001.
15. Leicester: Apollos, 2002.
16. Leicester: Apollos, 2003.
17. London: SPCK, 2002.
18. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003.
19. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003.
20. Peabody: Hendrickson, 2002.
21. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2002.
22. London: SPCK, 2003.
23. London: SPCK, 2003.
24. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003.
25. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.
26. Grand Rapids/ Leicester: Baker/Apollos, 2002.
27. London: Continuum, 2002.
28. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003.
29. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.
30. Peabody: Hendrickson, 2001.
31. Edinburgh: T.&T. Clark, 2003.
32. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002.
33. 2 volumes; Darlington: Evangelical Press, 2002.
34. London: SPCK, 2003.
35. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003.
36. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2001.
37. London: Continuum, 2001.
38. Peabody: Hendrickson, 2000.

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