

Preface

Commentary writing is, so I have learned, no simple feat. There is the mammoth task of doing your own translation, an immense volume of primary and secondary literature to read and interact with, and the struggle of trying to find something new or incredibly profound to say in every single verse when you find yourself most of the time agreeing with those who ploughed the textual terrain before you. I'm reminded of Calvin's words in the preface to his Romans commentary where he virtually apologizes for writing another commentary on Paul's letter despite so many fine volumes already existing:

Since so many scholars of pre-eminent learning have previously devoted their efforts to explaining this Epistle, it seems unlikely that there is any room left for others to produce something better . . . It will, however, I hope be admitted that nothing has ever been so perfectly done by men that there is no room left for those who follow them to refine, adorn, or illustrate their work. I do not dare to say anything of myself, except that I thought that the present work would be of some profit, and that I have been led to undertake it for no other reason than the common good of the Church.

All I can say is that I have labored here as best as I can and I hope that the fruit of this work is fresh, stimulating, and challenging for those who belong to the new covenant communities of the twenty-first century. As it is, much of the content was formed through the regular delivery of sermons and in the context of worship at the Highland Theological College student chapel, where we all learned that Colossians speaks much to our contemporary age.

Colossians is my favorite book of the Pauline corpus and Philemon is a much underappreciated child of the canonical family. What links both books together I believe is the New Testament message of reconciliation. Christ is able to reconcile us to God the Father (Colossians) and he gives us the grace to be reconciled to each other (Philemon). They contain a message that our much hurting world is in desperate need of hearing. I have tried to avoid writing a commentary on other commentaries. For the

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most part I've started with my own translation, had an occasional glance at Jimmy Dunn's and Peter O'Brien's fine works to get some bearings, and then tackled the text myself armed with nothing but lexical aids, consulting the sundry secondary literature only after this. Done this way I believe that the commentary is much my own rather than an eclectic combination of everyone else's. In the secondary literature, I have found the works by Robin McL. Wilson, Markus Barth, Joseph Fitzmyer, N. T. Wright, Charles Talbert, Andrew Lincoln, Murray Harris, and M. M. Thompson to be the most helpful, and I certainly cannot forget to mention the pleasure of working through John Chrysostom's homilies and J. B. Lightfoot's commentary as well (how on earth did they do it without word processors and Bible software back then?).¹

I have to thank several people for their support and assistance in the lead up to this volume. First, my co-editor Craig Keener has been a pleasure to work with. Craig has a rare combination of erudite scholarship and pastoral sensitivity. I am most grateful that Craig took a chance on working with a zany redhead Australian to launch a commentary series. His input into both this volume and the series as a whole has been priceless. Second, the editorial team at Wipf and Stock is second to none. K. C. Hanson and Chris Spinks have done a cracking good job of getting this series going and were supportive of the project from the beginning. K. C. has a wealth of experience in commentary production and he gave me some golden advice as a new editor. Third, I have to thank my family as always, including my wife Naomi and my daughters Alexis and Alyssa. Fourth, several people read and offered helpful comments on an earlier draft, including Lynn Cohick, Sean Du Toit, and Ian Smith, and I am most grateful for their remarks. Fifth, I would like to dedicate this book to my good friend Ben Myers, who is making theology in the antipodes fashionable again and is my *syndoulos* in the kingdom of Christ. His dedication to the theological craft is inspiring. May his tribe increase!

1. Unfortunately the commentaries on Colossians by Jerry L. Sumney and Douglas J. Moo came out too late for me to be able to make use of them.