

EDITORIAL

## Biblical Commentaries

Brian Douglas  and Stephen Platten

Commentaries on the Bible are very much part of the Christian tradition since its beginning and continue to occupy an important place within that tradition. They aim to set out for the reader of the Bible both an explanation of and reflection on what is being read, so that the reader may better understand what is being read and grow in the Scriptures as re-reading and reflection continues. Often the commentary follows the text in a step-by-step approach which moves from beginning to end of the biblical text, but other commentaries use a thematic or theological approach to the study of the text. Commentaries can empower the reader and lead to deep reflection and prayer, involving a continual engagement with the text and thinking about one's own journey of faith. While some biblical commentaries seek to be the servant of the text, often relying on original languages, other commentaries impress a particular theological slant or tradition on the reader. Other commentaries provide a more spiritual and mystical response. Biblical scholars will have their preference about which approach they use, and the result is that a variety of methodologies exist for the writing of commentaries. At the same time commentaries allow for new ways of interpreting the text and assist the church and its members in understanding the Scriptures in their own times and particular circumstances, particularly the theological significance of the text.

Commentaries often follow a pattern. An introduction deals with historical and literary matters and this is usually followed by a section-by-section discussion of the text. In some commentaries matters of original language are given greater importance, although there is criticism of the idea that only through knowing the meaning of the original language the text can be 'understood' more deeply. In other commentaries the needs of non-specialist readers are the focus. Ecumenism impacts on the writing of biblical commentaries and in the modern era commentaries from all traditions are consulted widely by scholars.

In recent times Professor David Ford (Regius Professor of Divinity Emeritus at Cambridge University) has written a new commentary on the Gospel of John,<sup>1</sup> which he subtiles *A Theological Commentary*. This gives a real clue about Ford's approach. This commentary certainly makes its mark. It was so well regarded that a copy was given to each of the bishops who attended the Lambeth Conference in 2022. Ford's commentary was also the subject of a session at the Society of Biblical Literature (SBL) in Denver, Colorado in 2022. SBL on its website self describes in the

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<sup>1</sup>David Ford, *The Gospel of John: A Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 2021).

following words: ‘SBL a membership organization with over 7,000 scholars, is the oldest and largest learned society devoted to the critical investigation of the Bible from a variety of academic disciplines. Through its work, SBL supports scholarly research and fosters the public understanding of the Bible and its influence.’<sup>2</sup> It was at the 2022 meeting of SBL that four scholars presented reflections on Professor Ford’s new commentary. These four scholars were Katherine Sonderegger from the Virginia Theological Seminary, Carlos Siliezar from Wheaton College, Illinois, Laura Holmes from the Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington DC and Jim Fodor from Bonaventure University, New York. Each scholar presented a panel reflection on the commentary and Professor Ford responded. There is a great deal to digest in the five pieces which consider the nature of biblical exegesis and the unique contribution that Professor Ford has made in his commentary.

*The Journal of Anglican Studies* is fortunate to have obtained not only these panel reflections but also Professor Ford’s considered response to each scholar and these are published in this edition of the Journal with the permission of the five authors. As Editor I offer my grateful thanks to Professor Ford and the four panel responders for their considered work. The panel reflections of each scholar are presented first, after this Editorial and then Professor Ford’s reflection follows. In reading these reflections it is possible to see some of the new directions for biblical commentaries in the modern era, but I will let the responses speak for themselves. These reflections will be of value to all with an interest in the text of the Bible and the task of writing and responding to a commentary.

Four bishops (Peter Carnley, Michael Ipgrave, Peter Selby and George Sumner) have written book reviews on the commentary. As Editor of the *Journal of Anglican Studies* I want to thank them most sincerely for their reviews and the insights they provide. They were specifically commissioned to write these reviews as scholarly bishops from three different provinces of the Anglican Communion (Australia, England and the United States of America with two still functioning as diocesan bishops). These four reviews are also published in this edition.

I found the panel discussion, Professor Ford’s response and the four book reviews a stimulating and meditative read which allowed me to reflect on what Professor Ford calls ‘the astonishing superabundance of meaning in the text, its continual generativity in multiple and often surprising ways’ and ‘its invitation to go further and further “into all truth” (16:13).’ Ford also points to the way the text involves ‘centring of that truth in a particular, category-transcending person.’ Ford’s aim was to encourage ‘habitual rereaders of this Gospel,’ in the hope that their ‘expectantly attentive’ rereading will expose them to what one panel responder (Jim Fodor) calls ‘the magnificent, yet challenging opulence of John’s Gospel.’

### **International Anglican Liturgical Consultations**

The International Anglican Liturgical Consultations (IALCs) are the official network for liturgy of the Anglican Communion, recognized by the Anglican Consultative Council and the Primates’ Meeting, and holding first responsibility in the Anglican Communion to resource and communicate about liturgy on a

<sup>2</sup>SBL website at: <https://www.sbl-site.org/default.aspx>

communion-wide basis. Historically, the Consultations developed as Anglicans met alongside the congress of the international and ecumenical society Societas Liturgica. The Consultations are held at least every four years, and each Consultation appoints a steering committee to hold responsibility for arrangements between those meetings. Recently an IALC online meeting was held in preparation for an in-person consultation in Seoul, South Korea in February 2024 where the Provinces of the Anglican Communion will be represented. The Consultation will consider the Eucharist and so the papers presented at this online meeting were intended to stimulate thinking in preparation for the in-person consultation. *The Journal of Anglican Studies* is fortunate to have some of the papers presented at the online IALC meeting, that is, the papers presented by Paul Bradshaw (University of Notre Dame, Indiana), Bryan Spinks (Yale) and Hilary Bogart-Winkler (Virginia Theological Seminary) and these are published in this edition of the Journal with the permission of the authors. *The Journal of Anglican Studies* is very grateful to these authors for sharing their work and to Neil Vigers at IALC for assisting in their publication. It is hoped that the publication of these papers can be part of the process to stimulate discussion and reflection on the Eucharist throughout the Anglican Communion in preparation for the Consultation on the Eucharist in February 2024.