that belong to a series with the label of mediocrity. But it does mean that volumes in series should ideally be judged only on individual merit. Thus comments on the major NT series now available (e.g., BNTC/HNTC, ICC, Hermeneia, NIGTC, etc.) will be found not only in the following paragraphs but also below under individual authors. Sets prepared by one scholar are a different matter and are discussed below (1.4).

1.2.2 Series worth noting but not pursuing

A few series are worth identifying, even if only the exceptional volume in the series achieves mention in these pages. The Living Word Commentary (ed. E. Ferguson; Austin: Sweet) testifies to the effort of the noninstrumental Churches of Christ to provide elementary commentaries for their laypersons. The series is in some ways theologically akin to the Tyndale Old Testament and New Testament Commentaries but generally a shade lighter. It has no relation to the Living Bible except the similarity in name; it must also be distinguished from the Living Word series (IVP/), which is not so much an attempt at formal commentary as a series of lay-oriented expository studies full of application and life.

The Armory Commentary compiles many years of the Salvation Army’s annual Bible Reading Notes. Everyman’s Bible Commentary (Moody) is too elementary to be very useful; The Layman’s Bible Commentary (John Knox) is singularly undistinguished. Collins/Fontana have come out with a series of thirteen books designed to explain “everything that really matters for the modern reader” of the NT. In some cases (e.g., Mark, Luke, John, Romans, Galatians), these are succinct commentaries on the TEV; elsewhere they provide essays (Acts) or brief introductions. They are elementary and sometimes misleading even if, on the whole, they are engagingly written. Pitched at about the same level, but for Southern Baptist readers, is the Holman New Testament Commentary series, only a few of whose growing list of entries are mentioned in these pages. Included are such matters as “life application,” a prayer relating to the text, and sometimes a teaching outline and discussion questions. Fortress continues to publish its series Proclamation Commentaries: The New Testament Witnesses for Preaching. These short books, written by established scholars, are supposed to help the preacher come to grips with the essential themes of the NT documents. Occasional volumes from the series are mentioned in these notes, but as a rule the commentaries are not very helpful to the preacher interested in systematically expounding the Scriptures, even if they are useful handbooks for helping students discover the way much contemporary scholarship understands the biblical texts. In short, they are useful compendia for students; preachers interested in biblical exposition should begin with something more challenging. The Knox Preaching Guides series is no better; neither is Interpretation Bible Studies (Geneva Press). The Layman’s Bible Book Commentary (24 vols.; Broadman) is very elementary and frequently resorts to slippery language to sound more conservative than it really is. The Communicator’s Commentary Series (Word) is a trifle better than those just mentioned, partly because the individual volumes are usually longer than those in the other series; but application is read back into the text with alarming frequency and with too little awareness of the hermeneutical steps being taken. At best these commentaries are worth a quick skim after the preacher’s serious exegetical work is well in hand, in order to retrieve any homiletical stimulus that may be present. Another series too thin to merit much notice in these pages is the College Press Bible Commentary Series, a product of the Independent Christian Churches and the noninstrumental Churches of Christ. The volumes that have appeared so far are gently conservative, fairly consistently partisan to their theological heritage, and usually aimed at the lay student or poorly trained pastor, but they are not robust enough to be the primary support for well-trained students and preachers. There are a few exceptional volumes in the series, noted below. A new set, The Complete Biblical Library, edited by Ralph W. Harris (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing, 1991), is an extraordinary melange. It includes an expanded interlinear (the textus receptus plus “important variants”), its own text-critical apparatus, various versions, and verse-by-verse commentary designed for the beginning layperson. In other words, the more technical material is almost useless to the lay reader, and the comments are so lacking in depth as to be almost useless to any mature reader, lay or otherwise. Some sections are better than others, but the series as a whole is too expensive ($639.20) for the little it offers. The Free Will Baptist Commentary (Randall House) includes one or two volumes worth a
quick skim (e.g., Jack W. Stallings on John) but is so elementary and so defensive on "free will" that it can safely be overlooked. The new *Focus on the Bible* commentary series (Christian Focus Publications/) is far from complete, but its volumes usually lie somewhere between the BST and the Tyndale Commentaries. The *Westminster Bible Companion* series (/Westminster John Knox) is an attempt to break into the popular-level market largely held by evangelicals (e.g., TNTC, IVPNNTC). So far it does not approach the well-established series in either quality or reliability. The *Life Application Bible Commentary* (/Tyndale House Publishers) is a slimmer and more popular counterpart to the NIVAC (see below) with most of its weaknesses and few of its strengths. The series of *Feminist Companion* volumes to various biblical books continues to grow, written by Athalya Brenner on Old Testament books, and by Amy-Jill Levine and others on New Testament books. It will ordinarily not be noticed in the following pages, since the volumes offer comments only on those passages of relevance to that interest, not on the entire text. In other words, these volumes are "companions" to biblical texts, not commentaries on them. Moreover, despite the valid insights that frequently turn up in these companions, the approach, monofocal as it is, seems almost calculated to encourage misinterpretation of the text being studied.

Finally, a new series of books with titles all beginning with *The Teaching of* has been launched by Christian Focus/. Sponsored by the Proclamation Trust, this series is something of a new genre: part commentary, part sample expositions of select passages, part summary of themes—all in brief compass and all designed to help the preacher think through how to preach from the biblical book in question. I have included only one volume of the series in these notes (Lucas and Philip on John).

### 1.2.3 More substantial series

Better known and more substantial series, whose individual volumes normally receive separate treatment in the pages of this book, include the following:

The *Abingdon New Testament Commentaries* (/Abingdon) are designed to be "compact, critical commentaries on the writings of the New Testament." They are written with the theological student in mind but are reasonably accessible to others. By including sections on literary genre and structure, they have a more contemporary feel than some older commentaries. By and large, however, their interaction with alternative interpretations is thin—and this can be more than a little irritating when of various possible interpretations, the reader's interpretation of the passage is not even mentioned, and more than a little dangerous when the reader is not made aware that there are alternatives.

The *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament* (/IVP), edited by Thomas C. Oden, brings together in fresh translation passages from the patristics that comment on biblical books. The unwary—those largely ignorant of the patristic contexts—may be lured into misappropriation of ostensible parallels. The better trained will find this series a wonderful resource for expanding their horizons.

The *Anchor Bible* (/Doubleday) is a decidedly mixed series. It is ecumenical, moderately critical, and designed to extend through both Testaments, including the Apocrypha. Each volume offers introduction, a new translation, linguistic and exegetical notes, and sometimes a more detailed exposition. But the length and complexity of the treatment vary enormously: e.g., Brown on John and on the Johannine Epistles is immensely detailed, while Albright and Mann on Matthew have produced a volume with a lengthy introduction and almost no exegesis.

The *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* is a large-scale project, in some ways rivaling the NIGNT series: both in the degree of interaction with secondary literature and in its reliance on the Greek text, BECNT is a major evangelical contribution. At the same time, because it provides the Greek both in Greek font and in transliteration, translates any foreign-language expression, and is edited for readability, the series aims to draw readers all the way from serious scholars to pastors and students to "the motivated lay Christian who craves a solid but accessible exposition." Protestations of readability aside, I suspect that most readers will be serious pastors, students, and scholars. More than some series, BECNT tries to integrate exegesis and serious confessional theological reflection.

The *Believers Church Bible Commentary* is the product of Mennonites (in particular, Mennonite Brethren) with a high view of Scripture, a
commitment to the “believers church” tradition, and (usually) a gently Arminian soteriology. The series is accessible, pious in the best sense, but rarely at the front rank.

The series of Black New Testament Commentaries/ Harper New Testament Commentaries aims to provide lucid comment on the NT text and a fresh translation without requiring a detailed knowledge of Greek. A few of the volumes in the series are distinguished (e.g., Barrett on 1 and 2 Corinthians). On the American side some of the volumes in the series have been taken over by Hendrickson. New volumes to replace earlier entries are being published on the American side only by Hendrickson, so the “H” in HNTC has changed its referent!

The Blackwell Bible Commentaries series is very new. It aims to cover every book in the Bible. Only a few NT volumes have appeared so far: see Edwards on John and Rowland on Revelation. The series is innovative: it is devoted primarily to the “reception history” of each book of the Bible, “based on the premise that people have interpreted, and been influenced by, a sacred text like the Bible is often as interesting and historically important as what it originally meant.” The aim is to reflect on the influence of the Bible on literature, but also on art, music, and film. The series will prove both interesting and useful if it expands the horizons of readers who might otherwise be rather narrowly locked into the present, but not for a moment should we sanction the view that each “reception” of the text is as valid as any other “reception.”

The Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible has just been launched (see Jaroslav Pelikan on Acts, below). It aims to provide rich theology in reasonably compact space, ignoring most of the debates kicked up by historical criticism and increasingly viewed as arid. The concern is not unjustified, but the reaction may be a bit over the top: the fact is that so much of God’s gracious self-disclosure in the Scripture lies in actions and words that are powerfully embedded in history, so that the historical dimension must not be marginalized too hastily. Certainly the series bears watching.

The Broadman Bible Commentary is a product of scholars related to the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC). The series is compact, expository, not technical, not particularly insightful, frequently bland, and sometimes speculative. The reformation in the ranks of the SBC during the last two decades has dictated that an alternative and more conservative series, The New American Commentary, be produced by the same press. Quite a few volumes have now appeared. Its authors have been drawn from Baptist ranks both within and outside the SBC. The early volumes are generally competent enough, pitched at a middle level.

The Church’s Bible, edited by Robert Louis Wilken, is a new undertaking that probes how the biblical books were interpreted in the first centuries. Transparently it is akin to the ACCS series (see above) but is somewhat more technical. Only one volume has appeared so far (see Kovacs on 1 Corinthians).

The College Press NIV Commentary has a slightly misleading name, since College Press is a product of the Restorationist movement. This series is an attempt to break into a slightly more scholarly market. Most of the contributions that have appeared so far are decidedly on the light side, but some of the volumes are stronger.

The Eerdmans Critical Commentary is fairly recent, with only two volumes out so far, both published in 2000. It promises to be a major undertaking, rivaling ICC or the larger volumes of AB for its attention to detail, and adopting a moderately liberal stance. For the two initial volumes, see comments on Philemon and on the Pastoral.

The Epworth Preachers Commentaries is a series more exegetical than expository, but too brief to be of great help. The series is taking on new life; after several years with no new volumes, a spate of them has appeared during the past decade and a half. It is more interested in narrative structures than in helping preachers, but it is certainly worth scanning.

The Expositor’s Bible Commentary (Zondervan) is a twelve-volume work of large pages and small print designed to offer exegetical and expository comment on the entire Bible, using the NIV text as the basis. The NT portion embraces vol. 8–12. The series is committed to evangelicalism but suffers serious unevenness—a flaw made worse by the fact that more than one NT book commentary is bound in each volume (e.g., the synoptics in vol. 8, John and Acts in vol. 9, etc.). It is usually more technical than the old EB (1887–96). In recent printings, individual commentaries have appeared in paperback or bound with others in
paperback. The publisher is committed to bringing out a substantially revised edition of the series, and the first of the revised volumes, vol. 13 covering Hebrews–Revelation, has just appeared (so the series will become a thirteen-volume set instead of a twelve-volume set). All the contributors are new, and the typeface is much more pleasing.

Though seriously dated, the five volumes of the old *Expositor's Greek Testament* are still worth owning and reading along with more recent works. Pick it up secondhand, as it is now once again out of print.

*Hermeneia* (SCM/Fortress) is a full-scale critical commentary series that devotes considerable attention to parallel texts. Unlike the ICC, allowance is made for readers without a classical education by providing translations (usually from the Loeb edition) of cited Greek and Latin authors. Several of the volumes are translations of German works, and initially this included some extremely dated books (e.g., Bultmann on the Johannine Epistles), but these are being replaced (in this instance by a major commentary written by Strecker). Haenchen on John, however, should have been put to pasture long ago. "Parallelomania" (to use Sandmel's famous expression) and a naive appeal to history-of-religions assumptions frequently surface in the volumes of this series, but the series remains invaluable for the serious exegete and expositor. A few volumes are outstanding (e.g., Attridge on Hebrews).

The *International Critical Commentary*, a project more than a century old, is now being renewed. The old volumes include some major commentaries that still set a high standard, even if they are now seriously dated. Greek and Latin texts are cited without translation: this will prove a drawback to many modern readers. Only a few volumes of the modern updating have appeared, but they are of exceptional quality (see notes on Cranfield on Romans, Davies and Allison on Matthew, Barrett on Acts)—though so pricey as to be beyond the reach of many students and pastors.

The *Interpretation* series of commentaries (John Knox) focuses less on detailed exegesis than on the thrust and themes of the biblical books, presented in a way best calculated to help the preacher and to relate the text to a wider context. The aim is admirable; the execution is mixed, partly because the thinness of the exegesis sometimes allows room for rather too much speculation.

The *Interpreter's Bible* (SPCK/Abingdon) is a well-intended but largely failed project to mingle historical scholarship and homiletical hints. Its successor, the *New Interpreter's Bible* (/Abingdon), is considerably stronger. Its contributors vary more substantially than do the contributors to most series—both in their theological stance and in the level at which they write.

The *IVP New Testament Commentaries* (/IVP) are designed to fit into the fairly narrow slot between the TNTC and the BST—in other words, they are still commentaries, but they are brief, simple, and designed to be immediately nurturing. Quite a few have now appeared, and if several are bland, several others are outstanding (W. Larkin on Acts, I. Howard Marshall on 1 Peter, Linda Belleville on 2 Corinthians, Rodney Whitacre on John).

The *Moffatt* series, with rare exceptions, is not much more than a major disappointment.

The *New Cambridge Bible Commentary* (CUP), based on the NRSV, "aims to elucidate the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures for a wide range of intellectually curious individuals." [Picky observation: in the name of political correctness, the disjunctive quality of an expression like "Hebrew and Christian Scriptures" suggests that "Christian Scriptures" refers only to documents of the New Testament. Marcion triumphs.]

Only a few volumes have appeared so far, and they are tilted toward the extensive use of rhetorical criticism, narrative criticism, and social-scientific tools. Granted such focus, the volumes are happily accessible but not in the front rank.

The *New Century Bible* (MMS/Eerdmans) normally adopts a moderately critical stance. Primary attention is devoted to understanding what the text says without raising many broader theological, expository, or other concerns. Some of the volumes in the series are dry; a few offer excellent value for the money.

The *New International Biblical Commentary* (/Hendrickson) has adapted the old GNC series to the NIV and is still adding new volumes. On the whole it is competent without being technical or overly long. Only some of the volumes in this series will receive comment in the pages that follow.
New Testament Guides (Cornell/JSOT) are so slim that they rarely receive notice in the pages that follow.

The New Testament Message (/Michael Glazier) is a Catholic series of slim books that vary between being, more or less, commentaries (working through the text roughly paragraph by paragraph) and thematic surveys.

A new series of Narrative Commentaries (Epworth/TPI) may become, in the NT, the American equivalent of the revised Epworth Preachers Commentaries. On the whole, it is disappointing.

The New Clarendon Bible on the NEB has ground to a halt. Only a few volumes were published, and no more are projected. That is probably a good thing: the books that appeared were too brief and too bland to be useful—again with one or two notable exceptions.

The New International Commentary on the New Testament (/Eerdmans; sometimes referred to in the UK as the New London Commentary, MMS/) is a still-incomplete series of commentaries that adopts conservative critical views and is concerned to offer an exegesis of the Scriptures themselves. The text of these commentaries demands no special knowledge: the footnotes presuppose some knowledge of Greek and (occasionally) Hebrew and Latin. With the death of F. F. Bruce, its editor for many years, editorial direction passed to Gordon D. Fee, who has commissioned writers not only to complete the series but to prepare new volumes to replace some of the older entries (e.g., Moo on Romans, replacing Murray).

The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Paternoster/Eerdmans) is up-to-date, bibliographically almost exhaustive, exegetical, and within the evangelical tradition, broadly understood. Volumes keep appearing, some of them outstanding. One or two volumes have been criticized, not unfairly, by clergy who find their contents too technical and tightly packed to be useful. For clergy and others well trained in Greek and exegesis, the series is one to watch.

The NIV Application Commentary series (/Zondervan) provides fairly lightweight commentaries, easily accessible, that are then filled out by application of various kinds. At one level this aim is commendable: it works against the view that biblical interpretation has the right to remain a cool and distanced discipline with the interpreter standing over the text. Yet there are converse dangers. Shallow handling of the Word coupled with immediate application may unwittingly foster the view that Scripture has primarily utilitarian value. The applications themselves may be driven by many different agendas, so that false connections are constructed between text and application. Lazy preachers may so rely on the applications provided by this series that they fail to devote themselves to the hard work of cultural reflection and appropriate application—just as lazy preachers may so rely on the immediate conclusions of commentaries in general that they never really learn how to do exegesis. Once its limitations and dangers are acknowledged, however, this series can be a useful pump-primer in the move from text to application.

The Pelican series is generally undistinguished, but it boasts a few commentaries that are quite outstanding, including Sweet's work on the Apocalypse (now available in the USA as the TPI New Testament Commentary series).

The Pillar Commentary Series (/Eerdmans) started life as a non-series. Eerdmans published three independent commentaries (Carson on John, Morris on Romans, Hughes on Revelation) and put them all in the same binding. They then decided it was worth filling out an entire series, and the other NT books have now been commissioned. Several further volumes have appeared, with more on the way.

Preaching the Word is the title of a series of expository works, edited by R. Kent Hughes, designed to cover every book of the Bible. Because these expositions go right through the biblical book being covered, each volume can be pretty substantial. Strictly speaking, these books are not commentaries, but because they belong to the vision of exposition that systematically works through texts, they do comment on the thrust of each passage, and sometimes on the details, while providing models of how to expound Scripture within this homiletical tradition. The English Bible used is either the NIV or the ESV. They should not be any preacher's first recourse, but it is highly salutary for preachers to learn how fellow preachers have handled the same text—provided, of course, that such material does not become an excuse for plagiarism.
For comparative purposes, it is sometimes worth using the indexes at sermoncentral.com.

_Sacra Pagina_ is a relatively new series edited by Daniel J. Harrington, SJ. (/Liturgical). The volumes released so far reflect the best of modern critical Catholic scholarship. The commentaries include fresh translation, critical analysis, and theologically sensitive exposition within the Roman Catholic tradition. They vary more than many series in the depth of coverage they provide: more so than for many series, buy only the best volumes.

_Standard Bible Studies_ (/Standard Publishing) is a series of commentaries designed for the ordinary reader. Most of these books reflect a very poor level of competence. The volume by Paul R. McReynolds on Mark is an attractive exception.

_The Two Horizons New Testament Commentary_ is a new series (see Fowl on Philippians) that is seeking to bridge the gap between biblical studies and systematic theology. It aims to read the New Testament texts theologically, section by section (rather than verse by verse or phrase by phrase).

_The Torch Bible Commentaries_ are brief, exegetical, and sometimes theological; but frequently the help they provide is too lean precisely where it is most needed.

_The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries_ are designed for the frequently-targeted well-read layperson, but many pastors profit as well. The series is conservative but focuses most attention on explaining the meaning of the text with minimal interaction with the voluminous secondary literature. Originally based on the AV/KJV, with Greek and Hebrew transliterated and explained, the series is being rewritten based on the RSV or NIV (at the individual author's discretion), and space is being assigned more equitably. Several of the volumes of this new edition are, within the constraints of the series, outstanding (e.g., Marshall on Acts).

_The Wesleyan Bible Commentary_ is a six-volume work published in 1979 and reprinted in 1986 (/Hendrickson). It is "a set of commentaries within the Wesleyan frame of reference," and uses the ASV. The series is not technical, and most sections are written with warmth and piety.

Unfortunately, the competence of the authors is quite variable, and most of the work was seriously dated before it went to press.

_The Westminster Commentaries_ are dull, dated, and dry.

_The Word Biblical Commentary_ is a full-scale series that aims to cover every book in the Bible. The series offers fresh translation, an original (and annoyingly repetitive) format, thoughtful interaction with the literature, and a commitment to handle both exegetical and literary/critical concerns. A few of the volumes that have appeared are already standard reference works. Do not let the "evangelical" label fool you: although some of the contributors sit comfortably within that tradition, in other cases the label applies only by the most generous extension.

_The Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary_ is a four-volume work edited by Clinton E. Arnold (2002, £23.99 per vol., £95.99 for the set/$39.99 per vol., $159.99 for the set). It is sometimes worth skimming in conjunction with commentaries on the text at hand, but the best of the major commentaries usually include all the relevant background materials anyway. To use this four-volume set by itself is unwise: it might encourage the unwary reader to think that the background is the foreground, with the result that what the text actually says quietly dissolves from view.

1.2.4 One-volume multi-author commentaries

One-volume commentaries are too brief to be useful in detailed exegesis and exposition, but they have the advantage of providing at least something on every book of the Bible—an advantage when the student or minister is young or able to maintain only a very small library. The _New Bible Commentary_ (IVP/Eerdmans, latest revision 1994) is condensed, evangelical, and brief. It is primarily exegetical, but a little space is devoted to discussing critical theories and occasionally to ongoing application of the text. In its various editions it has become something of a standard around the English-speaking world among evangelical readers of single-volume commentaries. Several other volumes have aimed for more or less the same evangelical market. Some of them deserve honorable mention: _A Bible Commentary for Today_ (Pickering and Inglis/ 1979) = _The New Layman's Bible Commentary_ (/Zondervan
that are helpful to the preacher, but he should not be used on his own (see comments, above, on his Matthew commentary). The same could be said for the devotional classic by Lehman Strauss, *Galatians and Ephesians* (/Loireaux 1980, $14.99). The best of the lighter commentaries is doubtless that of Walter G. Hansen (IVPNTC; 1994, £9.99/$15.99). Less penetrating is *L. Ann Jervis* (/NIBC; 1999, $11.95), who holds that union with Christ is more of a central theme in Galatians than justification. Somewhat more traditional is *Leon Morris* (IVP 1996, £12.99/$16.99).

Many popular expositions have been written on Galatians, but only a few deserve skimming, let alone thoughtful reading. One of the best is John Stott's *Only One Way: The Message of Galatians* (BST; 1992, £8.99/1988, $12.99). William Barclay's little study *Flesh and Spirit* (St. Andrew Press 1978, £3.25/) is helpful, and the price is right. W. A. Criswell (1980) is now out of print, but in this case the loss is not great. The Baker reprint of *Charles Erdman* is now itself out of print. The contribution of *Carolyn Osiek* (NTM; 1981, £1.00/$6.95 pb) is one of the thinnest in the series. One can safely miss *Kenneth L. Boles*, who covers both Galatians and Ephesians in one volume in the College Press NIV series (/1993, £21.99). *Edgar H. Andrews* (Evangelical Press 1996, £7.95/) is worth skimming; of less urgency are both *Bruce B. Barton* in the Life Application Bible commentary (/1994, £14.99) and *John B. Fenton* (Bible Reading Fellowship 1996, £4.99/).

The work by Gerhard Ebeling, *The Truth of the Gospel* (Fortress 1985, £19.25/o/p) is a cross between running exposition and an essay in systematic theology. Based on the Greek text, which is then both transliterated and translated, the book is fresh and stimulating, but like so many other tomes written from a Lutheran and existential perspective, it is frequently right in what it affirms and wrong in what it denies—especially on crucial topics such as faith, truth, law, and works of the law. The study by John Barclay, *Obeying the Truth: A Study of Paul's Ethics in Galatians* (T. & T. Clark 1988, £24.95/$49.95), is very strong when it focuses on the exegesis of the last two chapters, and worth careful reading for that reason. But I am not sure that Barclay, who has bought into more of E. P. Sanders than seems justifiable, has rightly sorted out how Paul thinks of the relationship between law and grace. Somewhat irritating is Barclay's tendency on occasion to be so kind to Paul's opponents that he makes Paul sound like a twit.


### 3.11 Ephesians

The best English-language commentary on Ephesians is now that of *Peter T. O'Brien* (Pillar; 1999/$40.00). He has thoughtfully absorbed and filtered the best material from earlier commentaries, but he has made his own contribution by sticking close to the text, tracing the theological argument with care and precision. He is able to deploy the various tools in the arsenal of New Testament exegetes without giving too much weight to any of them; he is able to reflect on historical and social circumstances without swallowing the theology implicit in much social science. More technical, but not stronger theologically, is the new ICC contribution by *Ernest Best* (1998, £39.95/$69.95), who on many passages is superb, but who tends to set the author of Ephesians (whom he judges not to be Paul) against Paul, treating some of the arguments in the epistle as falling below Paul's standards. Strangely, he thinks that the principalities and powers, though hostile, are capable of being redeemed. The “household code” is “pastorally unrealistic” and “defective” even within a first-century setting. Best has also written the slim guide in the NTG series (1993, £6.95/$13.25). *Andrew T. Lincoln's* commentary (WBC; 1990, £18.99/$29.99) is excellent on many points. But on grounds that strike me as entirely unconvincing (and which O'Brien takes on), Lincoln argues that Paul himself did not write Ephesians, and occasionally this stance affects his exegesis (e.g., on 4:7f). On the whole, however, it does not, and the commentary on most passages is superb, both in dealing faithfully with the text and in
theological reflection. Lincoln’s grasp of the eschatology of the epistle is profound. Not as thorough, but nevertheless an important work, is the English translation of Rudolf Schnackenburg (T. & T. Clark 1991, £29.95/$59.85).

The longest commentary is that of Markus Barth (/AB, 2 vols., 1975; vol. 1, $39.95, vol. 2, $34.00). It is painstakingly detailed, but even so the theology sometimes dictates the exegesis. More-advanced students can scarcely afford to be without it. But Barth’s treatment of certain themes crucial to the epistle sounds more like his father than like Paul. In some ways, a more useful commentary is that of C. L. Mitton (NCB; 1982, o/p/1981, $17.00). This is a good and accessible work in general, even if Mitton continues to support his earlier defense of non-Pauline authorship. He apparently had no opportunity to interact with A. van Roon’s substantial defense of the traditional position, in The Authenticity of Ephesians (SuppNovT 39; Brill 1974, £77.75/$133.50). (Intriguingly, Lincoln reviewed van Roon at one point and offered additional reasons to support van Roon’s position. Thus his commentary marks a change from his earlier published stance.) The metamorphosis from GNC (1984) to NIBC is accomplished successfully in Arthur G. Patzia’s work on Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon (1991, £6.99/$9.95); the result is a competent but unexciting middle-level commentary, easily accessible. David S. Dockery (/NAC; forthcoming) has been advertised, but has not yet appeared. The NIV Application Commentary by Klyne Snodgrass (1996, £24.99/$22.99) is workmanlike, but not noticeably insightful. The Sacra Pagina contribution by Margaret Y. MacDonald (/2000, $39.95) covers both Ephesians and Colossians. The strength of her work is her close comparison of the two epistles: by examining the subtle differences, she puts their different perspectives into sharp relief and ties the perspectives to the reconstructions she develops with the aid of social-science approaches. But although the work is very competently done, too often the differences are exaggerated, and I suspect that the reconstruction of readers’ social identities is more fragile than she thinks. Francis Beare (IB 10; details above) is scarcely worth scanning. Ernest Scott (Moffatt; 1939, o/p) is erratic and uneven. Francis Foulkes (TNTC; 1989, £8.99/$12.00) offers good value for its size. The ACNT contribution to Ephesians and Colossians, by Walter F. Taylor, Jr., and John H. P. Reumann, respectively (1985, £12.99/$18.00), is adequate but undistinguished. A separate ACNT volume by Theme Perkins (1997, £12.99/$19.95) is not up to the standard one expects from her, and is in any case priced too high for a mere 160 pages. The commentary by Adrienne von Speyr (Ignatius 1996, £9.95/$12.95), translated from the German, is frankly traditionalist (opponents label her “patriarchalist”) on the relevant passages. It is fairly brief, and is essentially Catholic devotional literature.

H. K. Moulton (with Colossians; Epworth 1962, o/p/) has a good eye for practical lessons, but should not be used on its own. E. K. Simpson, in an earlier edition of NL/NIC (1957/1958, o/p), provides some helpful comments on individual words, but on the whole the work is an erudite disappointment. His vocabulary is impressive, but not much else. The replacement by F. F. Bruce (on Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon; 1995, £19.99/1994, $32.00) marked a notable advance; his work is well worth reading, even though Lincoln has on most points now eclipsed him, and O’Brien has eclipsed both of them. One should also not overlook Bruce’s more popular exposition (Pickering and Inglis 1978, £2.95/o/p). Neither J. A. Allan (TBC; 1959, o/p) nor G. H. P. Thompson (CBC, with Colossians and Philemon; 1967, £14.95/$23.95) is very significant. A. Shevington Wood (EBC 11; £14.99 pb/$23.95) is not worth much time. The recent volume by Walter L. Liefeld (IVP-NTC; 1997, £9.99/$14.99) packs a lifetime of thoughtful study of this epistle into fairly small space.

Brief commentaries on the so-called prison epistles (Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon), bound in one volume, have been written by J. Leslie Houlden (Pelican; 1977, o/p) and George B. Caird (NClar; 1976 o/p/$19.95 pb [the latter figure is larcenous]). They pack a great deal into small scope, especially the latter. By contrast, the work on Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians by George Johnston (CB; 1967, o/p) is disappointingly thin just where one needs the most guidance. The Interpretation commentary on Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon by Ralph P. Martin (1992, £13.50/$34.00) is too slender to be worth much time. The book by
John MacArthur (Moody 1995, £14.25/$21.99), shares the same strengths and weaknesses as his treatment of Matthew. I have already mentioned the ACCS volume (above, on Galatians).

The old-fashioned standby on the Greek text is J. Armitage Robinson, now regrettably out of print. It can still be very useful, though its best points have been culled by Bruce and Lincoln. B. F. Westcott (o/p) is almost as good, and his additional notes repay rapid perusal. S. D. Salmon (EGNT; / Eerdmans 1952, o/p) completes this older classical trio. Charles Hodge (reprint, BoT 1991, £8.99/$21.99 hb and $17.00 pb) is even older, but solid, often very suggestive theologically. One should certainly not overlook John Calvin’s Sermons on Ephesians (reprint, BoT 1974, £16.95/1979, $34.99), which can still be marvelously suggestive to preachers. The classic work by George Stockhardt has now been translated (/Concordia 1987, $14.95).

Of the more popular treatments, the studies by H. C. G. Moule (/Kregel [1937] 1977, o/p) still offer good value for money when they can be picked up secondhand. The eight volumes of sermons by D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones (BoT 1976–85, various prices from £12.95 to £16.95—some of them hardback only, some available in paperback/Baker 1983, £179.95 for the set) are eminently worth reading, but only if you read very quickly. Worth reading, too, is John R. W. Stott, God’s New Society (BST; 1984, £9.99/1988, $13.99). Lionel Suain (NTM; 1981, £1.00/o/p) is not worth the time. The expositions by James M. Boice (/Zondervan 1988, o/p) and R. Kent Hughes (/Crossway 1990, $19.99) are models of their kind, demonstrating the shape of faithful expository ministry, and thereby serving as models for preachers. Homer A. Kent (Moody 1971, £6.75/$9.99), is not as good. The little book by Donald Guthrie, Exploring God’s Word: Bible Guide to Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians (Hodder & Stoughton 1984, o/p/Eerdmans 1985, o/p), is designed to encourage inductive Bible study among laypeople. Other popular commentaries include Bruce B. Barton in the Life Application series (/1996, £14.99); Leon Morris (/Baker 1994, $17.99); Steve Motyer (Crossway 1994, £4.99/Baker 1996, £10.99); Stuart Olyott (Evangelical Press 1994, £5.95/); and R. C. Sproul (FoB; 1994, £4.99/). Popular treatments in a less conservative tradition include Larry J. Kreutzer (Epworth 1997/$17.00); Martin Kitchen (Routledge 1994, £32.50 hb, £10.99 pb/$49.95 hb, $14.95 pb); and Bonnie Bowman Thurston, covering, astonishingly, Colossians, Ephesians, and 2 Thessalonians (Crossroad 1995, £10.99/$16.95).

For those who read French, the commentary by Charles Masson (CNT, o/p) is outstanding, though well culled by Lincoln. Specialists may also want to read Edgar J. Goodspeed, The Meaning of Ephesians (/University of Chicago Press 1933, o/p).

### 3.12 Philippians

The best commentary on the Greek text of Philippians is the magisterial work by Peter T. O’Brien (NIGTC; 1991, £29.99/$42.00). O’Brien has read and thought through everything of importance, with the result that he gives reasons for his exegetical decisions. At the same time, this commentary is theologically rich, even if its prose is sometimes pedestrian. The treatment of the so-called Christ hymn (2:5–11) is superb. Virtually as good (though with slightly different strengths), and more accessible, is the NIC volume by Gordon D. Fee (/1995, $38.00). The zest of Fee’s prose makes him exciting to read, and his scholarship is always rigorous. Occasionally the dogmatism of his style and passion for the truth, which makes him so enjoyable to read, makes his work slightly irritating, because he is casually dismissive of points of view not easily written off. Equally accessible to students and pastors who have not kept up their Greek is Gerald Hawthorne (/WBC; 1983, $29.99). Hawthorne’s strength is the culling of scholarship up to his time. But his work presents some highly implausible comments (e.g., on 1:27–30, where his reading of the Greek is just about impossible, and on the “hymn,” where he opts for the Byzantine reading to solve the parallelism). Moisés Silva (/BECNT; 1992, $19.99) is excellent for its relative brevity, and is especially strong in tracing the flow of the argument, but it is rather brief, interacts with little of the literature, and is in any case overstripped by O’Brien. The recent BNTC/HNTC commentary by Markus Bockmuehl (1997, £17.99/1998, $24.95) is very good. Bockmuehl has read everything relevant, and is as comfortable in the Greco-Roman background as in the Jewish background. He is able to wrestle with historical issues as well as with theological matters. The NIV Application commentary is by Frank...
3.13 Colossians/Philemon

I will not discuss again in this section commentaries on Colossians that are bound with commentaries on Ephesians, most of them popular, one or two of them important (see entries on Ephesians under Mac-Donald, Thurston, Martin, and Patzia); or commentaries on Colossians bound with commentaries on Philippians (see previous section, entries under Osiek, Ash, Barton, and Harrington).

Several major commentaries on Colossians press for attention. Probably the best is still that of Peter T. O’Brien (WBC; 1987, £19.99/1982, $39.99). Based on an exact exegesis of the Greek text, it is nevertheless presented with sufficient clarity to satisfy most readers who do not know the language. It is a mine of useful bibliography and helpful interaction with secondary literature (up to its time of writing), and wends its way through voluminous material without losing its theological moorings. I hope the author will update the work. A little more up-to-date is the NIGNT volume by James D. G. Dunn (/1996, £45.00)—very useful but not as theologically nuanced as O’Brien. The AB volume by Markus Barth and Helmut Blanke (1994, op/$39.95), though longer than the previous two, is not up to their standard. With respect to the work of E. Lobse (Hermeneia; 1971, £24.99/$43.00), the reader should not be put off by its rejection of Paul’s authorship, for it too contains a wealth of clear and useful comment. A little more Greek is required of the reader, though parallels are usually provided both in the original and in translation. The 1987 German commentary by Petr Pokorný has been translated into English (/Hendrickson 1991, $24.95), but it adds little to the other two. Despite the relative dates, Pokorný does not seem to know of O’Brien. Pokorný comments only on Colossians; the other two include Philemon.

On the whole, I have been reticent about the NIVAC, but do not avoid the volume on Colossians by David E. Garland (/1998, $27.99). Another recent commentary is the replacement TNTC volume by N. T. Wright (1987, £9.99/1988, $14.00). In some ways this work is superb, and it is written with verve and style. I am not entirely persuaded by Wright’s reconstruction of the situation Paul is confronting. The BCBC volume by Ernest D. Martin (1993, £13.95/$24.99) is one of the stronger ones in the series. The contribution to the ANTC series by David M. Hay (2000, £12.99/$22.00) is not exegetically detailed, but it devotes considerable space to the role this epistle has played in the development of Christian thought and to its bearing on some contemporary issues. The IVPNTC entry by Robert W. Wall (1993, £9.99/$22.99) cannot compete with volumes already mentioned, nor is it one of the stronger volumes in its series—though it is nicely written.

In a class by itself is the inaugural EGGNT volume by Murray J. Harris (with Philemon; Eerdmans 1991, op/$30.00). This is not quite a commentary, yet it is more than a commentary. Harris intends to help students and pastors read through the Greek text intelligently, making appropriate exegetical decisions at every point. He has gleaned the best of the grammars and commentaries with this purpose in mind and thus saves the student a lot of time. Nevertheless, his work does not replace the best commentaries, which offer far more theological reflection based on the text (but without always showing how it is tied to the text). Those who want shortcuts will give Harris a miss; those who want to improve their own exegetical skills on the way toward biblical theology will find him a very helpful guide. His book presupposes that the reader has had at least a couple of years of Greek. In some ways the work feels dated, as Harris has no patience with (knowledge of?) linguistic developments, including aspect theory. Access to patristic comments can be found in Peter Gorday (/ACCS; 2000, $40.00), bound with 1–2 Thessalonians, Philemon, and the Pastoral Epistles.
The EKK volume on Colossians by Eduard Schweizer has been translated into English but is no longer available (Augsburg 1982, op). His work combines full knowledge of the relevant literature with some down-to-earth exegesis. I have often encouraged exegesis students to work through C. F. D. Moule (CGT; 1957, £13.99 pb/$49.95 hb or $21.99 pb), a slim book that helpfully encourages the student to work with the Greek text. F. F. Bruce is useful as usual in his NIC volume on Ephesians (replacing Simpson), Colossians, and Philemon (1984, £22.99/$42.00). At about the same level is Ralph P. Martin (NCB; 1982/1981, op), in some ways a better work than his corresponding volume on Philippians. Less detailed and technical, and with some direct aids for the preacher, is his work Colossians: The Church's Lord and the Christian's Liberty (reprint, Wipf & Stock 2000, $21.00).

The EKK volume on Philemon is separate from the EKK volume on Colossians (see above), and there is no ET, but the German original by Peter Stuhlmacher is generally excellent (1975). Somewhat slimmer on Philemon is the volume by Allen Dwight Callahan, Embassy of Onesimus: The Letter of Paul to Philemon (TPi 1997, $17.95). Markus Barth and Helmut Blanke, who wrote the AB commentary on Colossians (see above), have also written the ECC series volume on Philemon (2000, £22.95/$40.00). It is very large (539 pp.) and includes a substantial examination of slavery in Paul's day as background for the exegesis. It is slightly ponderous in style. But perhaps the best general-use commentary on Philemon is the commentary by Joseph A. Fitzmyer (AB 2000, $21.95).

The reprint of J. B. Lightfoot, already mentioned (see on Galatians), makes available his usual thorough but now dated treatment of the Greek text, to which the ICC by T. K. Abbott (1897, £50.00/$100.00) adds surprisingly little. G. Johnston (1967, op) is disappointing, as is E. F. Scott (see on Ephesians). F. W. Beare (IB 11; op) still repays study. H. K. Moudon's helpful little work was noticed in the Ephesians section. In addition to William Barclay's DSB on Philippians, Colossians, and the Thessalonian epistles (St Andrew/Westminster 1975, £6.50/$29.95 hb or $12.95 pb), one of the best in the DSB series, there is his useful book entitled The All-Sufficient Christ (St Andrew 1978, £6.95). Herbert Carson wrote the old TNTC volume (1960, op), but it was one of the weaker entries in the series and has now been eclipsed by its successor (by N. T. Wright; see above).

Specialists will be interested in the collection of essays on Colossians edited by Fred O. Francis and Wayne A. Meeks, Conflict at Colossae (Scholars Press 1973, op). The study by Norman R. Petersen, Rediscovering Paul: Philemon and the Sociology of Paul's Narrative World (Fortress 1985, op), is a mixed bag. Its vocabulary is drawn from the world of sociology, which is sometimes deployed in too heavy-handed a fashion. On many points Petersen is creative and suggestive, but he does not appear to know enough about first-century social history (as opposed to sociology) to warrant his conclusions. The recent book by Brian J. Walsh and Sylvia C. Keesmaat, Colossians Remixed: Subverting the Empire (Paternoster 2004, £11.99/IVP 2004, $22.00) is really a species of exposition: it moves from commentary to application in a seamless way. If you share the authors' view that globalization and current American foreign policy stand as premier evils today, you will probably think the dominant applications worked out in this book are wise and even prophetic; if instead you think that both globalization and current American foreign policy are mixed bags, you will probably find this book over the top or even a bit silly at times. But it is a great read.

Gordon H. Clark (Presbyterian & Reformed 1989, $6.95) oscillates between the insightful and the ill-informed. William Hendriksen (NTC; 1979) has already been mentioned under Philippians. The ET of the exposition by Jean Daille [b. 1594 in France] produced by Klock and Klock (1983) is now out of print; the commentary by John Eadie is back in print (Wipf & Stock 1998, $26.00). The very substantial work of John Davenant, whose Latin original first appeared in 1627, was translated into English in 1831—and that translation has just been reprinted (two volumes in one; BoT 2005, £19.00/$35.00). The expository commentary by Charles Erdman, one-time Professor of Practical Theology at Princeton Seminary, is again out of print. H. C. G. Moule is as useful here as anywhere as a supplement to a more substantial commentary (reprint, Kregel 1982, $6.99). Patrick V. Rogers (NTM; 1981, £1.00/op) adds little. The BST contribution by R. C. Lucas, Fullness and...
3.14 Thessalonians

The best all-round commentary on the Greek text of these epistles is that of Charles A. Wanamaker (NIGTC; 1990, £29.99/$40.00). Wanamaker is thorough and usually sensitive to both literary and theological flow. For students and pastors who can handle Greek, this commentary falls into the "must" column. His handling of the rhetorical elements of the epistle, though, is sometimes overdone. A little more accessible is the WBC volume by F. F. Bruce (1986, £19.99/$39.99). Characterized by Bruce's thoroughness and care for detail, the work is especially valuable in its introductory remarks, its careful delineation of the background, and its useful excursus on "The Antichrist." Richer on the Greco-Roman background and his bearing on the interpretation of these two epistles is the work of Abraham Malherbe (AB; 2000, op/$50.00). Occasionally one wants to remind the author that background information must not be a substitute for penetrating theological understanding. Gene Green (Pillar; 2002, £28.99/$42.00) displays similar strengths in the Hellenistic context, but preserves a better balance of strengths, making it a very useful volume for pastors and students. A standard is the BN'TC/HNTC volume by Ernest Best (Black 1972, op/reprint, Hendrickson 1995, $29.95), which is thorough and moderately conservative in most of its conclusions. No less competent is the work by L. Howard Marshall (NCB; 1983/$17.00), which tends to build on the work by Best and carry the discussion through the literature published since Best's commentary appeared. It is therefore wise to read Marshall in conjunction with Best. Marshall replaces the earlier NCB volume by Arthur L. Moore, which was adequate and helpful within its space limitations but far too brief to be a first choice. The SP volume by Earl Richard (1995, £26.99/$34.95) is clear and focused on philology. It adopts many interesting positions, some of them plausible, some of them implausible. Richard argues that 1 Thessalonians is earlier (mid-40s) than most people think, but holds that it is a composite of an earlier missive (2:13–4:2), full of joy, inserted into a later one (1:1–2:12 + 4:3–5:28) written to respond to specific concerns. Further, 2:14–16 constitutes a further interpolation, and 2:13 and the first part of 3:11 are redactional comments. In line with much contemporary scholarship, he thinks that the literary, theological, and sociological problems of 2 Thessalonians can be untangled only by subscribing to a theory of pseudonymity. See the insightful review by A. D. Weima in JBL 116 (1997): 761–63.


Leon Morris has contributed two commentaries on these epistles and has revised both of them. His contribution to the NIC series (1994, $32.00) tends virtually to eclipse his entry in the TN'TC series (1985, £9.99/$14.00). He has also now added the Word Biblical Themes volume to his treatment of these epistles (1989, $9.99). Robert L. Thomas (EBC: now in paperback, bound with the Pastorals; Hodder 1996, op/Zondervan, $15.99) is determinedly exegetical but somehow manages to detect pretribulational dispensationalism where many of his readers will not find it. Something similar could be said for D. Edmond Hiebert (rev. ed.; Moody 1995, op), though this one is written with more