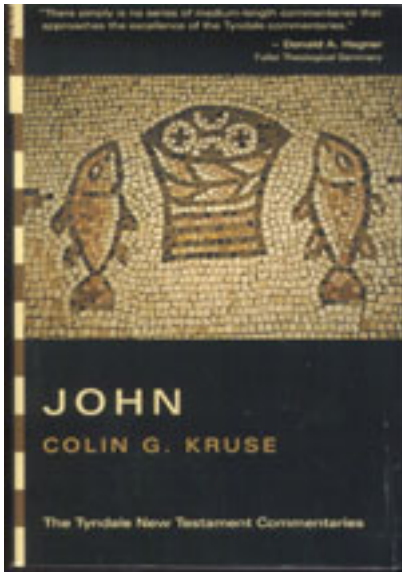


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Kruse, Colin G.

John

Tyndale New Testament Commentaries

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This commentary on the Fourth Gospel is a welcome addition to the Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (TNTC) series. It certainly offers a great deal more than a revision and replacement. Kruse does not claim in any way to be breaking new ground in Johannine studies: the main thrust of this commentary is to help the ordinary reader better to understand the biblical text. His concern is above all with the *meaning* of the text. In his preface Kruse acknowledges that he has profited from other commentaries, especially the one written by Carson. Unfortunately, Kruse failed to explain his methodological approach, but it is clear that it is in line with the approach followed in the rest of this series, as pointed out by Morris in the general preface. This is an exegetical, rather than a homiletical or critical, commentary. Even though not all the critical questions are discussed, it clearly reflects an awareness of the problems that engage the attention of New Testament scholars. Where it is felt that formal consideration should be given to such questions, they are discussed in the introduction and sometimes under the heading "Additional Notes." The reader who wants an exposition of traditional Christian theology from a conservative perspective will be amply rewarded, since it is exactly for such readers of the Bible that this book was written. It reads fairly easily, contains very little specialized theological terminology, and expresses each thought clearly and without ambiguity.

Kruse comments excellently on the individual verses and deals with the problems of interpretation. He consistently quotes the entire verse or the part under discussion in italics, explains it in relation to its immediate context, and, where necessary, points out and discusses a Greek word that is considered to be of particular significance. Greek words are carefully sifted and denoted in transcribed form, which demonstrates that he does not simply assume that his readers are familiar with Greek. I do, however, hope that such readers will become aware how important and useful some knowledge of Greek is, for example in 2:13–22, where he discusses the different Greek words used to denote the temple in the original, each with a different nuance of meaning. With reference to 2:24–25 he points out how the same verb *pisteuein* is translated differently to adapt the meaning to the idiom of the day. Under the frequently occurring (twelve times) category of Additional Notes the author offers a fuller explanation of particular themes such as *monogenes* (70), Son of Man (89), signs (96), Spirit (106), judgment (117), and the like. This provides the reader with a complete view of how the particular theme is used throughout the Gospel.

Kruse also brilliantly guides the reader, according to his understanding, through a situation, event, dialogue, or comment by the author of the Fourth Gospel. For example, in dealing with 8:12–20, he approaches the text as follows: “The evangelist continues. . .” (v. 12); “Not all were willing to accept Jesus’ claim to be the light of the world” (v. 13); “In response. . .” (v. 14); “Confronting his opponents Jesus said. . .” (vv. 15–16); “Alluding to Deuteronomy 17:6; 19:15, Jesus said. . .” (vv. 17–18); “The Pharisees thought Jesus was appealing to a human father as his second witness” (v. 19); “The evangelist concludes this part of his account by describing the place where Jesus’ exchange with the Pharisees took place” (20). By doing this he consistently kicks off by contextualizing a verse just before he quotes the entire verse or part of it and then continues discussing its meaning.

This new edition is no doubt a considerable improvement on the book written by Tasker and also covers much more ground, as should be expected, since it exceeds it in size by 158 pages. Functionally, the select bibliography that precedes the introduction (omitted in the Tasker edition) provides valuable assistance and additional references to the more devoted and serious readers of the Bible. Whereas Tasker addresses only the conventional epistemological questions of apostolic authorship, date, and purpose in his introductory chapter, Kruse adds considerable additional information that will help the reader to construct a setting and theological framework in which the individual verses and pericopes can be interpreted and understood. Additional aspects covered in the new, upgraded edition include distinctive features of the Fourth Gospel. In the discussion of its composition, the scenario of the Fourth Gospel is compared with that of the Johannine letters. In the discussion of the historical reliability of the Gospel, Kruse highlights only a

few relevant aspects that emerged from the period from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries. He also shows how, in the twentieth century, certain trends in the interpretation of the Fourth Gospel became dominant, with special reference to the work of Fortna (a Gospel of signs), Martyn (a two-level drama), and Culpepper (narrative criticism). In only fourteen pages he concisely and economically addresses the main theological themes (God the Father; Jesus the Son; the Holy Spirit; eschatology; eternal life/salvation; witness; faith and signs; love and obedience; the church; sacramentalism; and, finally, “the Jews” in the Fourth Gospel). Unfortunately, no reference is made to the dualism and agency concepts that are also present throughout the Gospel. Reference to the spiral style and interwovenness of the various theological themes should have been included. In order to adapt to the idiom of the day, Kruse used the NIV translation, not the RSV used by Tasker.

As mentioned, this book has many good points, but it was surprising to realize that John, the disciple of Jesus, is still regarded by Kruse as the author of the Fourth Gospel, ignoring the proposed and more commonly accepted theory that this document was composed through some stages (see, e.g., Brown 1975’s commentary, xxxiv). The sources referred to in the select bibliography are relevant but outdated. Of the fifty-five sources mentioned, only ten were published after 1995, the most recent in 2001. At new sections in the text, Kruse could have elaborated more, for example, on page 52, which contains a very concise discussion of 13:1–20:31. Here he could have dealt more thoroughly with the two complementary themes of Jesus’ departure and discipleship, which run parallel and could have been used to assist the reader in contextualizing his or her reading of this section. One could therefore comment that Kruse could have given more relevant orientation at the beginning of each new section or pericope in order to contextualize the applicable verses more effectively.

On the whole, this expanded, revised, and new commentary on the Fourth Gospel is a welcome contribution to the current literature on this book. The hours spent reading it were indeed well spent. This book provides an invaluable source for ordinary readers of the Bible who seek to truly understand the Fourth Gospel and is highly recommended to such readers.