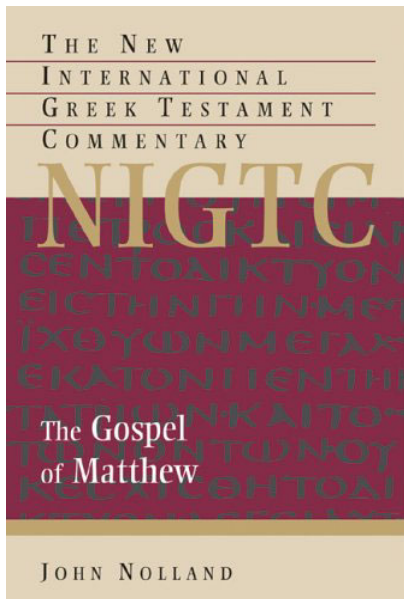


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Nolland, John

The Gospel of Matthew

New International Greek Testament Commentary

Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005. Pp. xcvi + 1481.
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Nolland describes his major interest in his commentary as “the story Matthew has to tell and how he tells it” (xvii). Using an eclectic approach and concentrating on redaction criticism and literary criticism, Nolland focuses his interest on the text before us, with less attention to what lies behind the text, although using some source criticism or form-critical analysis of the traditions in the commentary proper.

So what comes out of Nolland’s approach? He argues in his introduction that the author is an unknown Christian, a conservative editor of his sources (Mark, the “Q” tradition) who uses them to construct a unified text. Other sources include oral tradition, larger blocks of material (eschatological discourse, passion narrative), smaller units of linked material, and so forth. Such materials also served as a constraint on Matthew’s editorial work, which means that Matthew is a trustworthy reporter. Nolland’s discussion of sources, date, and editorial principles makes clear the conservative historical interpretation of his work.

Nolland dates Matthew early, before 70 C.E. (14–17), holding that a later dating presupposes a post-70 date for Mark. Scholars most often date Matthew in the 80s or 90s (a position I personally share), “[b]ut this is not to any significant degree because they

have been able to identify in Matthew features that reflect what is definitely known of a situation in the 80s or 90s” (14). Noland does not bring into the discussion Matthew’s heightened apocalyptic eschatology, which fits into the 90s along with the Apocalypse and 2 Thessalonians as a reaction to heightened social pressure or persecution (cf. Matt 5:11–12 and the need to confess, 5:13–16). Matthew writes for a Jewish-Christian audience resident in an urban environment, although one cannot name a specific *polis* as the location (18)

Noland regards Matthew as a “highly rhetorical work” (xviii), although I am unsure what he means by this. The index of subjects has no entry under “rhetoric”; the only *schema lexeos* listed is “chiasm” (many references). The commentary proper does not discuss rhetorical structuring, rhetorical modes of proof, ornamentation of language, or *ethos*, *pathos*, or *logos*. In brief, Noland simply makes an assertion. Pages 23–29 list “Elements of Mathew’s Narrative Technique” (repetitive formulae, framing, chiasm, parallelism, linguistic echoes, theme setting episodes, sectional overlaps, etc.).

The introduction concludes with “An Annotated Structural Outline of Matthew,” divided into twenty-two sections. (44–62) Noland does not make clear what Matthew’s structuring devices are; rather, the outline reads like a sequential listing of topics with annotations. I tried to infer Noland’s structuring principles but could not do so.

The commentary proper is more impressive. Each section begins with Noland’s own translation of the Greek text, followed by discussion of significant textual variants and relevant bibliographies. The translation is quite literal, meant to serve his interpretation, not liturgical reading. One nod to the modern world is Noland’s use of inclusive language where he deems it possible. The interpretation is detailed, accounting for practically every word in the Nestle-Aland 27th edition philologically and logically. There is a constant defense of the historical accuracy and the correlation of Matthew’s text with the other Synoptics (see, e.g., the discussion of Nazareth at 2:14 [122]).

As a result, Noland does not stress the unique stress in Matthew’s text. For example, he states that Matthew’s phrase ἀφήκεν τὸ πνεῦμα to describe Jesus’ death (27:50) “is a natural development from Mark’s ἐξέπνευσεν. He makes no use of Ezekiel 37 and does not tie the phrase to the resurrection of the holy ones in 27:52 (1210–15); instead, he is more interested in suggesting that they are translated to heaven like Enoch and Elijah (1217). He also does not stress that Jesus enters Jerusalem as its judge, not noting the omission of δίκαιος καὶ σφύζων from the Old Testament citation in 21: 5, the significance of the change in chronology in Jesus entering the temple immediately to cleanse it, and the heightening of the cursing of the fig tree. The concern for harmonization prevents identifying the significance of Matthew’s editorial changes to Mark.

Noland provides two massive bibliographies: a “General Bibliography” (il–xcviii); and a “Bibliographical Appendix: Works Prior to 1980” (1273–1468)—in all, 244 pages of bibliography plus extensive bibliographies before each section of the commentary. This raises a question for me: What is the value of such massive bibliographies? Noland himself says that “the scholarship has been more a backdrop for attention to the Gospel itself than something I set out to provide comment on as such in the commentary” (xvii). His commentary does not make use of most of the resources. They will clearly be useful only to scholars who have major library resources available to them—and some knowledge of the authors cited. No parish pastor will find these bibliographies helpful; such comprehensive coverage is actually a problem. His index of modern authors suggests that even he did not really interact with that extensive bibliography.

For what audience is this commentary intended? That is a major problem. Scholars will miss critical interaction with the modern scholarship represented in the massive bibliographies, while students and pastors will find the commentary too detailed, the bibliographies too extensive. There is little attention to how Matthew might be used in proclamation or teaching.