INTERPRETING THE GOSPEL AND LETTERS OF JOHN
AN INTRODUCTION
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Sherri Brown & Francis J. Moloney, SDB

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In Memory of Frank Gignac, SJ
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Preface

Interpreting the Gospel and Letters of John is a project that both of the authors have had in mind for years. It has taken a long time to come to fruition. We have decided that one of us would write the Preface, and the other would write a Conclusion. I would like to start by sharing my experience that led to the writing of this book. In my years teaching undergraduates and early graduate students I have been called upon to teach at least one class on the Johannine Literature each semester. Across this time I have struggled to find a suitable textbook to guide the students through the material. There are, of course, many fantastic commentaries and thematic volumes available, written by top-notch scholars. Many undergraduates, however, come to the course with little to no background in the Bible or organized biblical studies. A close analysis of the text alone or sometimes complicated discussions of the historical and theological themes can lie well above their level of preparation. They need the background unfolded and a systematic approach to the entirety of the task at hand in order to make any sense of the text beyond basic Christian teaching. Lists of the required texts for class, then, began to get longer and longer as I wanted to find something that responded to all the questions that an undergraduate class might ask. Then I found that many offerings along the lines of introductions to the Bible or biblical interpretation provided much more information or a different focus than what we really needed to augment our Johannine study. Therefore, I began to consider constructing a textbook of my own.

As any scholar or teacher knows, while pointing out the weaknesses in the book options we have before us is easy enough, developing an alternative that meets all the perceived needs is another matter altogether. Over the years, therefore, this project has gone through different iterations. Every new student I encounter gives me more food for thought. Eventually I determined to compose a “full service” textbook that attempts to provide all the steps needed for a beginning student to approach the biblical literature in general with a focus on the Gospel and Letters of John in particular. This would include discussions of the origins of the Bible, a sound methodology for biblical interpretation, some detail of the overarching biblical narrative, and the introduction to Jesus, his
teachings, and his followers. Only when this was in place did I feel that I could begin guiding students through a detailed interpretation of the Johannine Literature. In the meantime, I had to hone my own skills at writing such material for my target level of students.

The task was daunting indeed, and I wondered whether I could manage it alone. Like any good student, therefore, I went to my own teachers for help and guidance. While enjoying the annual meeting of the Catholic Biblical Association at Gonzaga University in the summer of 2013 with my teacher and mentor Francis J. Moloney, I was struck with the notion that we should collaborate. His years of expertise with the literature alongside my recent experience in the undergraduate and early graduate classroom could make a winning combination, I thought. This was a stroke of genius. Frank, however, was not so sure of my sudden revelation. At the same time, we began to talk to Michael Thomson at Eerdmans about the project, and it did not take long for Frank to warm to the idea and then eventually get on board with his customary enthusiasm and work ethic.

The rest, as they say, is history. We have had some ups and downs as we sorted out our partnership and working arrangement, as well as a few starts and stops as we endeavored through other commitments and life changes, not to speak of the difficulty of working together across the thousands of miles that separate Omaha, Nebraska, from Melbourne, Australia. But these difficulties can be overcome, and we were fortunate to be able to work face-to-face on a number of occasions when Frank came to the USA for meetings or other teaching obligations. Now that we have seen it through to completion we are pleased indeed. Frank joins me in thanking Michael Thomson for his limitless trust in us and our vision as he encouraged and supported us along the way. In addition, the final text would not have come together as strongly as it has without the tireless commitment of Trevor Thompson. We are ever grateful. We would also like to thank all the teachers and students with whom we have shared our love of the Gospel and Letters of John over the years. We have learned so much from all of them. One of them deserves special attention. Frank Gignac, SJ, taught the Gospel of John to undergraduates at the Catholic University of America for decades. He did not do this course with us, but he taught each of us many things about the Bible, and about being a good Christian. He passed away while we were working on this book. We send it on its way in memory of all that he gave us.

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