

PREFACE

This book represents the culmination of reflection over many years. Some of the ideas in it go back to the time of my doctoral studies in Oxford in the early 1980s—especially my conviction that the *historical* investigation of what messages the New Testament authors conveyed to their original audiences must have *theological* significance when the texts are read in a Christian context today. Yet this work has reached its present form as a result of research I have conducted in the last few years. I was able to expose the germ of my thesis in the form of the Manson Memorial Lecture I delivered in the University of Manchester on 25 October 2001. The warm reception and helpful feedback I received on that occasion encouraged me to press on and I am most grateful for the invitation to present the lecture. The bulk of the manuscript was written during a full year’s research leave in 2002–3 that was made possible by a generous grant from the UK Arts and Humanities Research Board.

I have incurred many debts while thinking about or writing this book, of which I will mention a few in particular. Robert Morgan of Linacre College, Oxford, provoked my initial thoughts on New Testament theology back in my Oxford days and in the years since his writings have continued to stimulate my reflections; this year he has also offered detailed comments on some draft chapters. Alan Torrance of the University of St. Andrews was most helpful when I was formulating my model of socio-theological communion (chapter 2). Bruce Malina of Creighton University, Omaha, has assisted me with several points. I have also profited from responses to some aspects of this project by Richard Bauckham from St. Andrews and Werner Jeanrond of the University of Lund. While I am most grateful to all of these, they bear no responsibility for the views here expressed.

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The circumstances of the dedication of this book to the memory of my nephew, Anthony Stephen Esler (15 November 1985–12 March 2002), appear in chapter 10. The Greek is based on 2 Cor 5:8: “He is at home with the Lord.”

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