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THE NEW TESTAMENT

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Patrick Gray is Professor of Religious Studies at Rhodes College, Memphis, Tennessee. He is the author of *Godly Fear: The Epistle to the Hebrews and Greco-Roman Critiques of Superstition* (2003) and *Paul As a Problem in History and Culture* (2016).

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Preface

One might think that, after nearly two thousand years, everything that can be said about the New Testament has already been said. Nevertheless, the production of scholarship devoted to the earliest Christian writings continues to proceed apace, yielding valuable insights and generating new ways of understanding familiar texts. The brevity of the New Testament and the relative paucity of fresh material for scholars to study means that original research more often results from the application of new models and methods rather than the analysis of new data. So specialized has this body of scholarship become that no one is able to master it in its entirety.¹

At the other end of the spectrum from this erudite literature written by experts for other experts, one finds what has come to be called the “introduction,” after the German *Einleitung*. The introduction was in many ways the product of the early modern period to which historians normally date the rise of the “academic” study of the Bible. One of the earliest and most influential of these was J. D. Michaelis’s *Einleitung in die göttlichen Schriften des Neuen Bundes* (*Introduction to the Divine Scriptures of the New Testament*), first published in 1750.² Michaelis attended to questions about the transmission of manuscripts, language, historical background, authorship, date, and other matters now considered standard components of “textbook” introductions to the canonical writings. In the wake of the Reformation, it had become increasingly clear that even interpreters sharing bonds of Christian faith frequently disagreed on such questions, though the history of Judaism

¹ E. J. Epp and G. W. MacRae, eds., *The New Testament and Its Modern Interpreters* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989) survey developments in post-WWII scholarship. More recently, see Scot McKnight and Grant Osborne, eds., *The Face of New Testament Studies* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004).

² A greatly expanded fourth edition of Michaelis’s work was published in 1788. On the “science of introduction,” see W. G. Kummel, *Introduction to the New Testament*, rev. English ed., trans. H. C. Kee (Nashville: Abingdon, 1975), 28–34.

and Christianity furnish ample evidence that disagreement over the interpretation of the Bible was nothing new. Enlightenment thinkers embracing a critical spirit of inquiry would join the fray, training their sights on the Scriptures and also on an influx of newly recovered texts that shed fresh light on the crucible of early Christianity. Their combined efforts would birth a prodigious and ever-expanding body of knowledge about the ancient world. From its first appearance, the introduction has afforded scholars the opportunity to digest the fruits of these labors for students and lay readers – correcting or refining or supplementing various answers to perennial questions about the history and literature of the New Testament – and to do so, furthermore, in a non-sectarian manner.³

Like *The Cambridge Companion to the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament*, edited by Stephen B. Chapman and Marvin A. Sweeney (2016), *The Cambridge Companion to the New Testament* stands in this tradition. Its purpose is to provide an overview of the earliest Christian writings, their historical and cultural contexts, and the methods used in their interpretation. As its title suggests, however, the present volume is a “companion” rather than, strictly speaking, an “introduction.” Many excellent textbooks have appeared in recent years to orient beginning students to the New Testament. The essays presented here will guide readers who already possess at least a broad familiarity with the New Testament and who wish to gain a deeper understanding of its contents in the context of current debate than one typically finds in introductory textbooks. Contributors do not, however, engage in technical analysis of highly specialized subjects or describe “the state of the field” as an end in itself. Rather, discussion of scholarship is put in service to explication of the texts themselves and to helping readers appreciate them in all their complexity. Individual essays may put forward provocative theses, but in every case, authors will summarize the current consensus on the topic at hand, such as it may be, and articulate the ways in which their own readings complement or diverge from that consensus.

The essays are divided into three parts. Part I (“Historical Contexts”) surveys the environment in which the New Testament was written and first read. Helen K. Bond sketches the social and

³ To say that such approaches to the study of the Bible are non-sectarian is not to say that they are without ideological aims of their own; see esp. Michael C. Legaspi, *The Death of Scripture and the Rise of Biblical Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

political milieu of the Roman Empire and, in particular, the situation of Jews in the Mediterranean before and after 70 CE. John T. Fitzgerald considers the religious and philosophical currents shaping this world. Sarah E. Rollens and Anthony Le Donne investigate what we know (and don't know) about the historical Jesus, how we know it, and assess the criteria by which scholars have attempted to reconstruct his life from the available sources. Margaret M. Mitchell examines the Apostle Paul, his place within the Judaism of his day, and the epistolary genre through which he communicated with the groups of Christ-followers he established.

Part II ("The New Testament Writings") turns from context to the texts themselves. Each essay treats the critical issues involved in the interpretation of a particular book or group of books and touches briefly on aspects of their reception history in later centuries. Michael F. Bird details the emergence of the gospel genre in his discussion of Mark, while Paul Foster offers an excursus on the Synoptic Problem and "Q" in his treatment of Matthew. Mikeal C. Parsons pays special attention to the continuity between Luke and Acts, which, taken together, comprise one-quarter of the New Testament. George Parsenius explores the distinctive literary and theological character of John. The letters are analyzed by Nijay K. Gupta (1–2 Thessalonians), Alexandra Brown (1–2 Corinthians), Matthew Novenson (Romans and Galatians), Jerry Sumney (Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon), Benjamin L. White (Pastoral Epistles), David M. Moffitt (Hebrews), and Patrick Hartin (General Epistles). Finally, Leslie Baynes places Revelation in the context of ancient apocalyptic literature.

Part III ("Methods and Modes of Interpretation") contains five essays pertaining to various theological, ideological, and methodological concerns. Julia Snyder takes up the process of canonization. James Barker reviews the historical-critical method that has been the dominant scholarly mode of studying the New Testament in the modern period. Elizabeth E. Shively (literary criticism) and James Crossley (social sciences and social history) look at alternative approaches that have taken hold over the last several decades. Kevin Vanhoozer concludes with a meditation on the relationship between history and theology and the status of the New Testament as Scripture.

Each essay includes a select list of English-language works for readers wishing to pursue further study.

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Abbreviations

AB	Anchor Bible
ABRL	Anchor Bible Reference Library
ACCS	Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture
ACW	Ancient Christian Writers
AJEC	Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity
ANTC	Abingdon New Testament Commentaries
<i>BBR</i>	<i>Bulletin for Biblical Research</i>
BETL	Bibliotheca ephemeridum theologiarum lovaniensium
BHT	Beiträge zur historischen Theologie
<i>BibInt</i>	<i>Biblical Interpretation</i>
BibInt	Biblical Interpretation Series
<i>BJRL</i>	<i>Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester</i>
<i>BT</i>	<i>The Bible Translator</i>
<i>BTB</i>	<i>Biblical Theology Bulletin</i>
<i>BTZ</i>	<i>Berliner Theologische Zeitschrift</i>
BWANT	Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Neuen Testament
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
<i>CIJ</i>	<i>Corpus Inscriptionum Judaicarum</i> , ed. J.-B. Frey, 2 vols. (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1936–1952)
CSHJ	Chicago Studies in the History of Judaism
<i>CTM</i>	<i>Concordia Theological Monthly</i>
<i>CurBS</i>	<i>Currents in Research: Biblical Studies</i>
<i>DJG</i>	<i>Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels</i> , eds. J. B. Green and S. McKnight (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1992)
DK	<i>Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker: Griechisch und Deutsch</i> , eds. H. Diels and W. Krantz, 7th ed., 3 vols. (Berlin: Weidmann, 1954)
ESV	English Standard Version
ETL	Ephemerides theologicae lovanienses

<i>ExpTim</i>	<i>Expository Times</i>
FC	Fathers of the Church
FCNTECW	Feminist Companion to the New Testament and Early Christian Writings
fl.	Years active (flourishing)
GBS	Guides to Biblical Scholarship
Ger.	German
Gk.	Greek
<i>HBT</i>	<i>Horizons in Biblical Theology</i>
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
HTS	Harvard Theological Studies
HUT	Hermeneutische Untersuchungen zur Theologie
ICC	International Critical Commentary
<i>IDB</i>	<i>Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible</i>
<i>JAAR</i>	<i>Journal of the American Academy of Religion</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
<i>JGRChJ</i>	<i>Journal of Greco-Roman Christianity and Judaism</i>
<i>JR</i>	<i>Journal of Religion</i>
<i>JRH</i>	<i>Journal of Religious History</i>
<i>JSHJ</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus</i>
<i>JSNT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament: Supplement Series
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
KJV	King James Version
Lat.	Latin
<i>LB</i>	<i>Linguistica Biblica</i>
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
LNTS	Library of New Testament Studies
LXX	Septuagint
MS(S)	Manuscript(s)
NAPS	North American Patristics Society
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
NIV	New International Version
<i>NovT</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
NovTSup	Novum Testamentum Supplements

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

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NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
NTL	New Testament Library
NTS	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
NTTSD	New Testament Tools, Studies, and Documents
OGIS	<i>Orientis graeci inscriptiones selectae</i> , ed. W. Dittenberger, 2 vols. (Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1903–1905)
OTL	Old Testament Library
RB	<i>Revue biblique</i>
RBS	Resources for Biblical Study
RHPR	<i>Revue d'histoire et de philosophie religieuses</i>
RSV	Revised Standard Version
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBLECL	Society of Biblical Literature Early Christianity and Its Literature Series
SBL SBS	Society of Biblical Literature Sources for Biblical Study
SJT	<i>Scottish Journal of Theology</i>
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
SP	Sacra Pagina
SVTQ	<i>St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly</i>
TENTS	Texts and Editions for New Testament Study
TLZ	Theologische Literaturzeitung
TUGAL	Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur
<i>TynBul</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WGRW	Writings from the Greco-Roman World
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
ZAC	<i>Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum</i>
ZPE	<i>Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik</i>

Abbreviations of ancient texts follow the lists in *The SBL Handbook of Style*, 2nd ed. (Atlanta: SBL, 2014) and the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 4th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012)

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