



PREFACE

The first edition of *Anatomy of the New Testament* was published in 1969. Forty-four years later its authors are both amazed and gratified that this book has served as a useful introduction to the New Testament for so many generations of students and their teachers. In its original conception *Anatomy* was designed as an introduction to the study of the New Testament, rather than of New Testament criticism. That is an important distinction. During the book's ensuing years of revision, we have tried to keep it free from domination by any single method of study but, instead, to reflect changing currents in New Testament interpretation. Like its predecessors, this seventh edition remains concentrated on the documents of the New Testament itself. Across four decades, that singular focus has met the needs of our readers, whose appreciation of its purpose has heartened and encouraged us through many years.

We believe that the effort to understand the New Testament writings on their own terms is rewarding. Therefore, we continue to affirm the necessity of viewing and seeking to understand those writings as products of an ancient religious community and its leaders. At the same time, we do not assume that the meaning of the New Testament is a repository of ancient lore or artifacts to be “mined out,” centuries later, by historical criticism or newer methods of interpretation. At its best, biblical interpretation is a dialogue or conversation with texts: in this case, texts that are products of an unusual set of events and religious beliefs and claims. The methods and techniques of what has become known as biblical criticism are servants rather than masters in this task.

A twenty-first-century reading of the New Testament is, nevertheless, deeply affected by the historical-critical emphasis on the

importance of hearing the ancient voices in and behind the text, and by modern efforts to do justice to the distinctive theological ideas and ethical interests of the earliest Christians. If readers are engaged by some of those ideas and interests, it should not be surprising. An important characteristic of the New Testament is that it takes such ideas and interests to be universally intelligible, whether or not they are accepted, and a major aspect of our purpose is to serve this intended intelligibility. Moreover, we are grateful that *Anatomy* has been used and found useful, not only by Christians of different church and theological commitments, but also by teachers and students who stand outside the Christian community. In this edition, as in its predecessors, the authors do not presuppose of its readers a commitment to Christian faith; we invite all readers of this book, whatever their points of view, to adopt a sympathetic yet critical understanding of these ancient writings, which are foundational for Christianity.

Anatomy intentionally emphasizes the content and interpretation of the New Testament, on the assumption that readers naturally want to know what the New Testament is about, and to understand the beliefs and purposes that informed the writing of the individual books. To help readers achieve a more than superficial or secondhand understanding, we have dealt extensively with representative New Testament texts. From the beginning this characteristic feature has been maintained in *Anatomy*, and, we hope, enhanced in the present edition. Working outward from these texts, we then have endeavored to display and to illumine the character and movement of the different writings. The result is certainly no comprehensive or uniform coverage of the New Testament, but rather a series of “dissections” or “biopsies” designed to uncover the structure and meaning

of the New Testament books, and of the collection as a whole—thus our title, *Anatomy of the New Testament: A Guide to Its Structure and Meaning*. Naturally, the discussions of New Testament texts in this book represent its authors’ interpretations. Although these often follow main lines, if not a consensus, of modern exegesis, other defensible interpretations are also possible. At those many points where an interpretive consensus does not exist, we have made every effort to acknowledge alternative readings and to state the reasons for our own conclusions as clearly as possible. In every case we seek, not to stultify, but to encourage students’ independent efforts in their own understanding and interpretation.

The older, standard questions of introduction (authorship, date and place of composition, and so forth) have again been considered in summary fashion in the introductory comments at the beginnings of chapters or at other appropriate places. Again, if there is agreement on a problem, we state it. If not, we give our position and reasons for holding it. In any event, such questions are of little concern to readers until they have some knowledge of, and engagement with, the content of the New Testament itself. The sooner they can get to the text, the better. Readers can return to disputed questions as they become aware of the relevance of such issues for the text’s understanding. By then they should be ready to consult more advanced works on the subject.

The views expressed or assumed in this book are well considered and centrist. That is to say, they represent a tradition of scholarship. It is necessary to emphasize this fact, because the media’s treatment of the history and other issues pertaining to the Bible and related literature often gives a misleading impression of what is possible or likely, and does not indicate

adequately whether a consensus of scholarship exists or what that is. All things are possible, but by no means are all things equally likely. Journalists and media commentators are not in a position to make professionally competent judgments about what is a realistic or plausible proposal; often they are at the mercy of scholars, or other authors, who are advancing eccentric, if not outlandish, views. By contrast, *Anatomy* endeavors to hew closely to the main line of contemporary New Testament scholarship.

The organization of *Anatomy* is simple and reflects the shape of the New Testament canon, the church's liturgical usage, and the history of early Christianity. Thus, after an introductory chapter that sets the historical stage, the book falls into two major parts, "The Gospels and Jesus" and "The Apostles and the Early Church." The focus of the entire New Testament message is on Jesus and what God did through him. The perspective throughout is that of the early church or churches, and of Christians who believed in him. This two-part structure does not mean that the Gospels and Jesus represent an earlier period of the New Testament, and the letters and other writings represent a later period. Nor does it mean that the Gospels have to do with Jesus, and the letters and other writings with the early church. The Gospels are products of the early church and reflect its faith and practice over a period of just over a half-century (roughly, A.D. 30 to 100). The development of the church or churches can be studied by analyzing the Gospels. The other New Testament writings, while they speak more or less directly of the activities of Christians in the churches, nevertheless have to do with the gospel about Jesus Christ. Some (such as the genuine Pauline letters) are earlier than the Gospels; a few (like 2 Peter) are almost certainly later. In studying the

Gospels, we shall be asking what was said to the early church through their presentations of Jesus. In studying the other writings, we shall be asking what is said about the gospel of Jesus through their reflection and discussion of many matters and issues pertaining to the early church.

Why have we not organized the book chronologically, beginning with the earliest documents (Paul's letters) before moving to the Gospels and other later writings? Although it is theoretically possible, and defensible, to reverse the order of Parts I and II, *Anatomy's* present arrangement deliberately underscores the fact that Jesus of Nazareth is not only the central figure but also the historical beginning of Christianity and the New Testament. Accordingly, Part I concludes with a treatment of Jesus of Nazareth (Chapter 6). It cannot be assumed that the historical information deduced in this chapter was generally available to early Christians, although some of them doubtless knew about matters that are now hidden from us. Nevertheless, an appreciation of Jesus' mission and message is illuminating and necessary for an understanding of the New Testament. Moreover, a chapter devoted to Jesus is a legitimate concession to the almost universal desire to know what can be known about the central figure of the New Testament, the *sine qua non* of its existence.

Within the framework established by Parts I and II, *Anatomy* continues to adopt a consistent, four-part method for understanding each particular document, which is summarized at the conclusion of each chapter. First, for each New Testament writing that we survey, we restate its *structure*: perhaps the most crucial for understanding. Second, we underscore each book's *major emphases*. Third, where possible (as in the Synoptic Gospels), we note how those

■ themes have received emphasis through the biblical authors' *editing* of discernible traditions or sources. Structure, emphases, and redaction are all literary in nature. Fourth, we summarize what can be discerned of the book's *historical situation*: often the most difficult aspect to determine, yet intimately related to all literary considerations.

With each revision, including this edition, *Anatomy's* authors have gone over the text minutely and made innumerable additions, deletions, and alterations with a view to improving the book, keeping it current, and making it more accessible to the student. Not all of these changes are obvious, but they have contributed to the high level of acceptability that *Anatomy* enjoys among students who use it. In this edition we have also introduced more obvious changes, all of which, we hope, may enhance the reader's understanding of the New Testament texts.

- In the Prologue we describe how our approach is consistent with the nature, purpose, and reading of the New Testament itself. We comment on various modern versions of the New Testament and offer concrete suggestions about how to read it, using *Anatomy* as a guide. In these ways we invite the reader to join with us in the task of interpretation, or exegesis: "drawing out" the meaning of the text.
- Fresh, up-to-date maps of Palestine and the Mediterranean World at the time of the New Testament are presented at the book's beginning and end.
- This edition presents nearly a hundred new images and illustrations, many of which, for the first time in the book's history, are presented in color.
- New charts and diagrams have been inserted to sharpen the reader's appreciation of the structure of various New Testament documents.
- A new, two-column format has been adopted for easier reading.
- Transitional comments or questions now open each chapter, creating greater coherence within the book as a whole.
- We have revisited and revised every chapter, editing the text for clarity. In some cases we have added new material that reflects current trends in contemporary scholarship, including increased attention to such apocryphal writings as the *Gospel of Thomas*.
- Developing an innovation introduced in the book's sixth edition, we have revised and added new sidebar discussions of important interpretive issues raised by the texts for today's readers:
 - ▶ *Behind the New Testament* takes up important topics in historical understanding (e.g., 9.3: "Ancient Homosexual Practice"; 12.6: "House Churches");
 - ▶ *Within the New Testament* correlates issues that are pervasive throughout these early Christian documents (thus, 6.5: "*Abba*"; 8.1: "The Paul of Acts and the Paul of the Letters");
 - ▶ *Beyond the New Testament* explores implications of the text for contemporary concerns (e.g., 11.6: "Should Women Be Ordained as Clergy?"; 13.8: "Where's the Antichrist in Revelation?").
- Provocative questions at the beginning of each section of every chapter have always been a feature of *Anatomy*. In this edition, in several instances, we have

replaced or altered those questions to make them correspond more closely to the text's discussion.

- This seventh edition introduces new features intended to maximize students' analysis and comprehension. Two new sections now conclude each chapter:
 - ▶ *Have you learned it?* Here we offer a series of questions intended to help the reader restate, analyze, and synthesize the material in that chapter.
 - ▶ *What do they mean?* We compile all the key terms highlighted in **bold typeface** in that chapter, whose definitions may be conveniently found in the book's Glossary, which has also been edited, expanded, and simplified.

These aids in study may be used by both students and their instructors in preparing for tests on the material.

- All bibliographies at the end of each chapter, as well as the General

Bibliography at the end of the book, have been updated to include important new scholarly studies up to 2013.

- The General Bibliography opens with a new introduction, "Getting Oriented," which guides the reader in evaluating the quality of biblical scholarship old and new.
- Finally, the authors and publishers of *Anatomy* are building an online website that students and teachers may consult for ancillary information, guides, and other helps in learning and teaching from this textbook. Our intent is that it will be regularly updated with new material. Readers may access this site at www.fortresspress.com/anatomynt.

We hope that all these changes will make this seventh edition of *Anatomy of the New Testament* more accessible and more useful for its intended readers.