

Preface to Second Edition

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THE FIRST EDITION OF *The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation* appeared in 1986. The manuscript for that edition was completed in 1984. The bibliographies were fairly up-to-date but included only a few items from 1984. The contents of the book are therefore almost fifteen years old. Despite the usefulness of the first edition—it went through 13 printings—it is clearly time for a new edition.

I have not changed the basic philosophy or design of the book. I have simply tried to update and improve it. The updating takes two basic forms. The first is the completely revised bibliographies. Some older items are eliminated, many more recent items are included. I have continued to use only English-language references for the reasons stated in the first edition. The second updating is found in two appendices. One deals with newer methods that have developed over the past fifteen years; it is only a sketch but it shows the general lines of development and its bibliography provides some starting points for reading. The other appendix deals with the question of the Historical Jesus. I explain why I continue to omit this topic from the body of the book, and try to indicate some of the critical questions and sources to consult.

The improvement of the book is found in the line-by-line editing. Every sentence has been assessed for accuracy and clarity. Many passages have been rewritten, some have been omitted, some added. The argument of each chapter remains the same, though I hope it is clearer and more accessible. All of the references have been checked and corrected. I have also added study questions at the end of each chapter to make the book an even better teaching tool.

I could not have completed this arduous work without the help of two associates in particular. Todd Penner is given credit on the title page. His assistance has involved all of the improvements. He has read every word and made suggestions that I followed or rejected. I stand behind every change made, but the credit for many of them goes to Todd. He is even more responsible for the enlarged bibliographies. I am grateful for his talented and cheerful collaboration. My thanks also to David Charnon, who undertook the arduous work of checking all internal references and making corrections when necessary. It was Ann Schechter who first alerted me to the number of these that were in error in the first edition (blessings on readers who actually follow out cross-references!); it was David who carried out the brutal task. I am grateful.

In addition to the thanks expressed in the preface to the first edition, I want to add a heartfelt word of appreciation to the many readers, both teachers and students, who have used this book, especially those who reported to me things that

worked and things that did not. Special thanks as well to Marshall Johnson of Fortress Press, who authorized this new edition; Michael West, who has overseen its production; and K. C. Hanson, who edited it.

Luke Timothy Johnson
Atlanta, Georgia
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Preface to First Edition

I HAVE WRITTEN this book for those who want to understand the origin and shape of the New Testament writings but are unable to find a comprehensive introduction that is neither repellingly technical nor appallingly trivial. I have called it an interpretation rather than an introduction for the simple reason that most volumes going by the name of introduction are either handbooks devoted to the communication of information concerning a narrow range of scholarly issues or popularized versions of conventional scholarly wisdom for college students. In contrast to both, I have tried to provide a genuine interpretation of Christianity's earliest writings. By so doing I draw the reader into the most important critical questions concerning their understanding. In this sense, every interpretation is also an introduction. By no means is every introduction an interpretation.

The organization of this book, its argument, and the choice of topics have all been dictated by the desire to make these writings intelligible and alive for the contemporary reader who wants to meet and understand them more than scholarly discussions of them. I have considered all the critical issues pertinent to the understanding of the writings, but I have gone beyond presenting a consensus of scholarly opinion. The reader will find in these pages a single "reading" of the evidence from beginning to end—my own. My approach to the writings and the critical issues is independent. It is not, I think, idiosyncratic. I have learned more than I can ever credit to my teachers and to the reading of other scholars. But in this book I advance my own understanding of the New Testament in its origin, in each of its parts, and as a collection. Sometimes I agree with the majority of scholars; sometimes I disagree. I have tried to indicate the reasons for both. As in every attempt to deal with the whole of a subject within a reasonable space, much has been eliminated or abbreviated. More advanced readers should recognize in my sometimes elliptical remarks a thoughtful response to critical scholarship.

In order to keep my argument and presentation clean I have not used footnotes, nor do I refer to other scholars by name in the text. The reader will, I hope, forgive the inevitable air of omniscience that results. It seemed better to restrict references to primary sources, above all to the texts of the New Testament itself. Occasionally even these are so numerous as to make the detection of decent prose a problem. At the end of each chapter I have provided an annotated bibliography. Some entries support my presentation, others provide alternative points of view, still others give the reader additional resources for study. With very few exceptions I have included only literature in

English, since the notes are meant to be an aid to the reader rather than a demonstration of learning. Given the rate of translation, not that much of great value is missing. I have also tried to refer to literature that is reasonably available. Translations of primary sources are acknowledged at the head of each bibliographical section.

In everything I write, I discover again and in an ever more humbling degree how much I owe to my teachers. The bibliographical entries do not reveal how much I have taken from Nils Dahl, Wayne Meeks, Abraham Malherbe, as well as Rowan Greer, Brevard Childs, Judah Goldin, Henry Fischel, and Frederick Wisse. For the constant encouragement to stay immersed in the text, my contemporaries William Kurz, Dennis Hamm, Halvor Moxnes, and Jerome Neyrey are owed particular thanks. This book began as lectures at Yale Divinity School. The first stages were worked out together with my good friend and colleague Carl R. Holladay. Our endless debates and our shared passion for the chase mean more to me than I can adequately state. Carl deserves credit for much that might be good in this book. Among my teaching assistants at Yale who went on to become excellent scholars and who offered me much criticism of this point or another are Jouette Bassler, John Fitzgerald, Michael White, David Worley, Tim Polk, Jacqueline Williams, Alan Mitchell, Stan Stowers, Ann McGuire, Tony Lewis, and David Rensberger. Of my students at Yale whose responses to my ideas made a real difference, I must single out Kenneth Frazier, Sam Candler, Mark Burton-Schantz, Jan Fuller, Bill Shepherd, Julie Galambush, and most of all, Nancy Heslin.

My colleagues in the Department of Religious Studies at Indiana University have been outstandingly supportive of this project. To them I owe additional time for writing, as well as support for an Indiana University Summer Faculty Fellowship, which enabled me to complete the first draft of the manuscript. I must thank in particular Sam Preus, David Smith, and Jim Ackerman.

Norman A. Hjelm of Fortress Press was willing to take a chance on supporting this project when it was just a sheaf of lecture outlines. Since then my editor, John A. Holzar, has provided me and the manuscript with unfailingly kind and critical attention. Dr. Barry Blose at Fortress Press gave careful attention to the entire manuscript and greatly improved its prose. My wife, Joy, and my daughter, Tiffany, make all things possible and almost everything a pleasure.

Luke Timothy Johnson
Bloomington, Indiana
June 26, 1985