

# Preface

This book is an abridgment and updating of *Engaging the New Testament: An Interdisciplinary Introduction*, published by Fortress Press in 1995. I have shortened the original text by approximately one-third, largely by reducing many of the analyses of individual writings from detailed accounts to sections entitled “Notes on a Reading of . . .” Otherwise, I have summarized the discussion of some topics and deleted a few sections altogether. But I have also made numerous revisions and introduced a few new topics, such as postcolonial approaches, and have added some features to make the work more student-friendly, such as the sections entitled “Points to Look For in . . .” and summaries following the treatments of each of the Gospels. Also, I have been more systematic in discussing matters of authorship, date, and place of composition.

I am grateful to John Darr of Boston College, along with several other participants in a session of the Society of Biblical Literature at which the original text was the subject of discussion, for suggestions for improvement. I am also indebted to my colleague at Curry College, John Hill, for a painstaking review of the first draft of the abridgment, and to the staff at Fortress Press for their help on this

and earlier projects. And I repeat my thanks to John Darr, along with Ron Farmer of Chapman University, who gave the original text trial runs before its publication.

I have retained the dedication of the earlier version with the sad acknowledgment of the death of William A. Beardslee. Here is my original tribute to those from whom I have learned so much:

Victor Furnish and W. J. A. Power, my professors at Perkins School of Theology at Southern Methodist University, provided much of the inspiration and encouragement that led me to graduate school in the field of biblical studies. Schubert Ogden, also at Perkins, fueled my interest in theology, introduced me to life-changing perspectives, and held before me a model of rigorous thinking. At Vanderbilt University, Walter Harrelson not only gave me invaluable insight into the Jewish Scriptures, but also embodied an ideal of teaching I still strive to emulate. Years later, William Beardslee and John Cobb extended me a gracious welcome into an emerging circle of persons exploring the interaction between biblical studies and

philosophical/theological reflection. To all of these—whom I honor as scholars, teachers, and human beings whose lives are shaped by the biblical vision of peace, justice, community, and love—I express my enduring gratitude.

A final word of heartfelt appreciation goes to my wife, Sammie Maxwell, pastor of Contoocook (New Hampshire) United Methodist Church. Her insight, wisdom, and probing questions are a continued source of nourishment for my own encounter with the biblical text.