

Introduction

Written some two thousand years ago, the New Testament (NT) remains an exceptional document. For some, it is the most important book ever written; for others it is the basic record of the beginnings of a world religion. For some, it records the words of God; for others it is a historical witness to the Word made flesh. For all of these, the study of the NT is significant. The history of that study is a fascinating story in its own right, but for the serious student of the Bible, knowledge of that history is essential. New wine should not be put in old wineskins, and it is important to know the difference. Old mistakes ought to be avoided; new ventures find their point of departure in the old.

This account of the history of NT research has a history of its own. In response to a request to write such a history—and after months of preparing a prospectus—I signed (in 1984) a contract that promised a book of some 500 pages, to be completed within six years. As work on the project progressed, it became evident that the history could not be covered in a single volume, and as work on the second volume progressed it became apparent that a third volume would be needed. Volume 1, *From Deism to Tübingen*, reviewed research from about 1700 to around 1870. Volume 2 was intended to bring the account up to the period of the Second World War; my original plan had been to end the volume with the chapter on “the Zenith of Enlightenment Criticism.” Lack of space, however, led to the assigning of this chapter to Volume 3. The subtitle of Volume 2, *From Jonathan Edwards to Rudolf Bultmann*, is somewhat misleading. Jonathan Edwards was presented as a precursor of nineteenth-century American research, and the treatment of Bultmann’s work was limited to his history of religion and form-critical scholarship.

The working subtitle for Volume 3, *From Biblical Theology to Pluralism*, came increasingly to appear inadequate: “The New Biblical Theology” was not the first, but the second chapter; an earlier plan to investigate the multitude of new methods that emerged in the last half of the century had to be abandoned because of lack of space and time. Also, the original plan for Volume 3 included more scholars, but again space and time limitations made this impossible. Since no obvious point of termination was apparent, I made an arbitrary decision: the volume would include primarily scholars born before 1930. Although there are exceptions, virtually all of the scholars have retired, and (again with exceptions) their major works were written in the twentieth century. The subtitle, *From*

C. H. Dodd to Hans Dieter Betz, highlights the focus of the volume: the history of twentieth-century NT research in the Enlightenment tradition. Both Dodd and Betz are masters of historical criticism, and both are devotees of classical philosophy and rhetoric. Betz illustrates an important feature of the history rehearsed in this volume: the increasingly international character of NT research.

As in the previous volumes, the material is arranged more or less chronologically. Some of the chapters are ordered topically, but within the individual chapters chronological order is largely followed. As in the earlier volumes, “NT research” includes the whole discipline, from textual criticism to theology. Again attention is focused on the work of individual scholars, but in this volume cooperative research is also reviewed. The title *History of New Testament Research* is an overstatement. This is a history of NT research in *some* places by *some* scholars. Attention is given almost exclusively to research in northern Europe (Germany and Britain) and North America. With the exception of the work of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, feminist NT research has not been reviewed. The abundance of excellent NT research by women belongs mainly to the period beyond the limitations of this book. Scholars have been selected according to their importance for the ongoing history.

As to method, this book reviews and analyzes major works of major scholars. By major works I mean primarily books and collections of articles and essays. This method assumes that knowledge of these primary sources constitutes the essence of NT research: a knowledge that will have continuing value, irrespective of new movements and methods. The attempt has been made to present the works faithfully and sympathetically—a daunting task in view of the fact that many of the scholars are alive and potential readers of the volume. My efforts at evaluation, mainly in short summaries at the end of chapters, attempt to critique the material in terms of its own presuppositions and context and with the assistance, when available, of major secondary sources.

A new feature of this volume is the inclusion of accounts of personal experiences. Although urged by friends and colleagues to include these, I do so with reluctance, wary of the appearance of name dropping or being self-serving. Nevertheless, these experiences constitute oral tradition and have been, like the forms of the gospel tradition, reshaped by the retelling. Any scholar of my generation who has studied in the major university settings and in Europe can recount similar stories.

When English translations are available I have used them, only occasionally checking the original. Unless otherwise noted, the translations from German and French are mine. Quotations from the Bible are usually from the NRSV,

although in contexts in which I am explicating commentaries I have often used the translation of the commentator. I have used “OT” for the Old Testament, since this is the usage of most of the scholars reviewed; this usage is not meant to imply any sort of supersessionism. For my part, I have attempted to use inclusive language, but in reporting the work of others (whose work antedated the identification of the problem) I have followed their usage.

The bibliography, as the title shows, is selective; it does not include all the references found in the notes, but contains only major works of the major scholars. The practice (in vols. 1 and 2) of distinguishing primary from secondary sources has not been followed. Major secondary sources about a scholar are listed alphabetically at the end of the section on that particular scholar. Biographical references for each scholar are found in the first note referring to the scholar’s life and work.

Readers of volumes 1 and 2 may be surprised by the appearance of endnotes (placed at the end of chapters) rather than footnotes. This procedure represents a new program adopted by Fortress Press to make books as readily accessible for electronic publication as in print. For scholars (like myself) who prefer footnotes, a few suggestions may be helpful. There are a large number of notes, for example, almost three hundred in chapter 1. Many of these are mere references, including frequent use of “Ibid.” Readers who wish to follow the main lines of the argument may wish at least initially to ignore the notes. On the other hand, there are some notes of major importance which develop arguments more extensively or present alternative positions in some detail. The concerned reader, when beginning a chapter, may wish first to scan all the notes, marking the longer notes for consideration as the chapter is read.

After almost thirty years of work on this project, I conclude with mixed feelings. I am relieved to be finished, but reluctant to end what has been an exciting adventure. The results in these volumes reflect only a fraction of the research and notes I have collected over the years. I am a slow, ponderous worker, taught to investigate all the sources—a clear impossibility. Others (whose names I could name) would have done this job better, but I am fortunate to have been afforded the opportunity. Though the task has sometimes been arduous, the work has mainly been an enjoyable challenge. I have approached each “new” subject with enthusiasm: I have heard of the scholar and read a bit, but now I have the opportunity to explore in detail, to investigate the primary sources!

Some reviewers have accused me of undue affection for the historical critical method. To that I can merely reply, *mea culpa*. I am well aware, of course, that the use (or abuse) of the critical method has been destructive for

some, resulting in a depreciation of Scripture and loss of faith. For me the opposite have proved true. It has been the historical critical method that has sustained my faith and deepened my devotion to the New Testament, the book I have spent my life attempting to understand and to teach.