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Religion & Spirituality / Theology

Anatomy of the New Testament, 7th edition by Robert A. Spivey, D. Moody Smith and C. Clifton Black (Fortress Press)

A broadly adopted textbook, **Anatomy of the New Testament** weds literary and historical approaches to focus on the New Testament's structure and meaning. This *seventh edition* has been revised throughout to take account of current trends in scholarship and to discuss important interpretative issues, such as the Gospel of Thomas. Each chapter includes two new features:

- Have You Learned It? offering questions for analysis and synthesis.
- What Do They Mean? presenting definitions of key terms to enhance student comprehension and critical thinking.

Authors are Robert A. Spivey, professor emeritus of religion at Florida State University; D. Moody Smith, George Washington Ivey Professor Emeritus of New Testament at Duke Divinity School; and C. Clifton Black, Otto A. Piper Professor of Biblical Theology at Princeton Theological Seminary.

Anatomy of the New Testament, 7th edition is augmented by numerous sidebars to stimulate discussion of matters 'Behind,' 'Within,' and 'Beyond the New Testament.' Other new features and updates include:

- A more readable two-column format.
- Newly designed and updated maps.
- One-hundred new images and illustrations in black and white and in color.
- New charts and diagrams that facilitate deeper learning.
- Thoroughly updated bibliographies.

With over 120 combined years in the classroom, the authors have prepared teacher-friendly ancillaries that include PowerPoint chapter outlines, sample syllabi outlining several approaches to the text, and a chapter by chapter test bank.

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 the book has served as a useful introduction to the New Testament for so many generations of students and their teachers. In its original conception, the book was designed as an introduction to the study of the New Testament, rather than of New Testament criticism, an important distinction. During the book's ensuing years of revision, the authors 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.

The authors believe that the effort to understand the New Testament writings on their own terms is rewarding. Therefore, they continue in **Anatomy of the New Testament**, 7th edition 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, they 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.

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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 the purpose is to serve this intended intelligibility. In this edition, as in its predecessors, the authors do not presuppose of its readers a commitment to Christian faith; they invite all readers of the book, whatever their points of view, to adopt a sympathetic yet critical understanding of these ancient writings, which are foundational for Christianity.

Anatomy of the New Testament 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, they have dealt extensively with representative New Testament texts. From the beginning this characteristic feature has been maintained, and enhanced in the present edition. Working outward from these texts, they display and 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 the title, **Anatomy of the New Testament: A Guide to Its Structure and Meaning**. At those many points where an interpretive consensus does not exist, they acknowledge alternative readings and state the reasons for their own conclusions as clearly as possible. In every case they seek, not to stultify, but to encourage students' independent efforts in their own understanding and interpretation.

The organization of **Anatomy of the New Testament** 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. 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, they authors are asking what was said to the early church through their presentations of Jesus. In studying the other writings, they are asking what is said about the gospel of Jesus through their reflection and discussion of many matters and issues pertaining to the early church.

With each revision, including this edition, **Anatomy of the New Testament**'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

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accessible to students.

*I have had various editions of **Anatomy of the New Testament** at my elbow since 1972. For me, the balance, logic and teaching skills of D. Moody Smith and Robert A. Spivey, along with the physical beauty of the book, made it the best available introduction for more than 40 years. This Seventh Edition is superb. The addition to the team of C. Clifton Black, one of our most imaginative contemporary interpreters, has led three distinguished authors to write a brand new, and even more beautiful book. It will continue to hold its place at my elbow. – Francis J. Moloney, Australian Catholic University*

*Engagingly written, impressively comprehensive, and user-friendly throughout, this newest edition of **Anatomy of the New Testament** is better than ever! In addition to being first-rate New Testament scholars, its distinguished authors both believe and demonstrate that these ancient writings are still worth pondering and caring about. – Victor Paul Furnish, Southern Methodist University*

***Anatomy of the New Testament** by Robert Spivey and D. Moody Smith, now joined by C. Clifton Black, has been a ‘classic’ in the field. The latest update continues the high standards of the volume, presenting an informed and sensitive critical introduction to the New Testament in a clear and accessible fashion, particularly suited for students coming to the text for the first time. Carefully chosen illustrations, thoughtful summaries, and well-designed questions for review make this a very useful teaching tool. – Harold Attridge, Yale University*

Anatomy of the New Testament is systematic, critical, and reliable in its scope and content. Previous editions have 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. Across four decades, the singular focus on the documents of the New Testament itself has met the needs of readers, and it will continue to do so with this updated 7th edition, which should prove only more accessible and more useful. Not all of the changes made to the book are obvious, but they contribute to the high level of acceptability that the book enjoys among students who use it and to readers’ understanding of the New Testament texts.