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Mindful of the gap that is often present between the academy and the church, T. Michael W. Halcomb offers *Entering the Fray: A Primer on New Testament Issues for the Church and Academy*. The title of the book encapsulates its aim. Where New Testament scholarship may seem far from the lives of those outside, and inside, the church, *Entering the Fray* offers a summary glance at many of the most debated issues within the field. However, Halcomb’s aim is a bit more nuanced. Rather than simply presenting the issues and the scholars most connected with them, Halcomb intends to present the material and its significance for those who call themselves faithful. That is, this book presents the scholarly debates and intends to address the inevitable, So what?

For the uninitiated, New Testament scholarship can indeed seem a quagmire. *Entering the Fray* does not fault the field; rather, the nature of scholarship is to develop a specialized means of investigation and conversation. By default, the field is to a great extent inaccessible to those who have arguably been most influenced by it. Halcomb intends to contribute to the larger, nonscholarly public an introduction to the complexities of New Testament scholarship that conveys enough detail so as to be responsible but not so much so as to be burdensome. That is not to say that Halcomb intends to be simplistic. *Entering the Fray* “was written for those who wish to dive deeper
into the interpretation of, and interpretive issues related to, the New Testament” (257). Halcomb is clear that his work is not intended to be comprehensive. New Testament scholarship is much too broad and deep to be captured in any one volume. Rather, *Entering the Fray* presents a large spectrum of the major issues that have held and continue to hold scholarly attention. The book allows the reader to see how these same issues have influenced and continue to influence theological discussion and interpretation within the church.

*Entering the Fray* is divided into two parts. Part 1 roughly deals with issues pertaining to the New Testament in general and the gospels. Part 2 continues the same format as the first while addressing content related to Acts, Paul’s letters, and Revelation. Throughout, each chapter follows the same format. Three subdivisions are found in each chapter: “Tuning In,” “Taking Note,” and “Taking Action.” Halcomb uses these subdivisions to guide the conversation on each topic. “Tuning In” calls attention to the issue chosen and names some of the problems and questions it raises. “Taking Note” guides the reader through the scholarship on the issue by naming the most prominent researchers on the topic and their contributions to the overall discussion. Helpful side boxes highlight individual scholars and offer brief biographical sketches. The scholarly issue is presented in a manner that follows the chronological contours of each scholar’s entry into the conversation and the main arguments each presents, moving the larger discussion along through time. Each chapter concludes with “Taking Action,” a section dedicated to helping students, laity, and clergy understand an issue’s relevance to the life of faith. This part of each chapter does not provide the author’s concluding interpretation of the issue. Instead, the most salient features of the issue are highlighted to allow for deeper and richer investigation by readers. Each chapter also begins with a Web component developed by Halcomb offering readers further opportunity to enrich their study.

The first chapter in part 1 looks at the New Testament as a whole. In particular, the formation of what we now know as the New Testament is in focus. How did we arrive at this particular grouping of texts? How did they receive scriptural designation? The chapter is a succinct introduction into the process of canonization with regard to the New Testament. Once the texts are established, chapter 2 continues this more general discussion of the New Testament by introducing the means by which scholars investigate texts. Specifically, Halcomb takes a glance at the methodological approaches used by scholars to interpret the New Testament. Here Halcomb’s main point is to show that good biblical interpretation requires integrity. To be sure, biblical scholarship is not immune to interpretive irresponsibility; however, Halcomb emphasizes that scholars use methods to stay as true to the possibilities that each text offers. He then highlights a host of biblical scholars and approaches to the biblical text, using Mark 1:1 as a test case. Chapter 3 presents the debate over the relationship of Paul’s “gospel” and the four
gospels. Halcomb shows, through the scholarship presented, that an underlying metanarrative informs both Paul’s letters and the gospel narratives. This metanarrative is a life pattern one may call cruciformity. In other words, both Paul and the gospel writers were working from a common interest in the life, suffering, and death of Jesus as a pattern for our own lives. This metanarrative helps one understand other important interpretive issues involving Gnosticism, Paul’s role in the development of Christianity, and so on. Chapter 4 turns to the gospels themselves. Here the reader meets the Synoptic Problem, its adherents, detractors, and alternate possibilities. Chapter 5 journeys into the Jesus of history/Christ of faith debate through the conversation regarding the proposed idea of a messianic secret. A dense chapter conveying a century of research on this topic, it is loosely connected with chapter 6, itself a foray into the historical Jesus quest and its many turns and curves.

Part 2 shifts from the gospels to Paul’s letters and other texts. For instance, chapter 7 takes a look at the book of Acts, its relationship to Luke’s Gospel, and the nature in which it may be understood as historically trustworthy. Chapter 8 is similar in this regard by jumping into the debates surrounding the authorship of Paul’s letters. How may Paul’s letters be understood as undisputed or disputed, authored or not by Paul? Chapter 9 offers a glance into the pisteis Christou debate, that is, how this phrase, translated as either “faith in Christ” or “faith of Christ,” should be understood and the ramifications of each choice. Chapter 10 is devoted to scholarship known as the New Perspective on Paul. Halcomb sets the stage with a discussion of Luther and his preoccupation with justification by faith as opposed to works. Alternatives to this view are presented here. Archaeological discovery has had much influence on the New Testament scholarship as well, and an overview of the latest discoveries are found in chapter 11. Chapter 12 concludes the major content portions of the book with a step into Revelation. A brief conclusion, a timeline arranged by birth year of each scholar presented in the text, and notes round out this extensive work.

Halcomb seeks to provide an accessible entry into an extensive, not comprehensive, array of issues debated in the field of New Testament studies. He did so in the hope of bridging the gap between scholarly conversation and church devotion. Halcomb succeeded. The book is understandable, to be sure. More than this, however, the book is inviting, respectful, and open. Finding texts that open up an already-intimidating scholarly world to those with little to no prior knowledge of biblical scholarship, much less any understanding of how that scholarship relates to conceptions of themselves as persons of faith, is difficult. Halcomb’s work is important on that front alone. In addition, Entering the Fray portrays scholarship at its best. Without becoming bogged down in the unnecessarily controversial, Halcomb shows the reader how biblical scholarship is an essential conversation partner with the church.