

I have recently decided to undertake a brand new venture. Well, more truthfully, I've been persuaded to do it. I have a new editor at Oxford University Press. My old editor and good friend (he lives in Chapel Hill, as it turns out. But when I first met him he lived in Manhattan), Robert Miller, who has edited all of my textbooks and all their revisions, my various readers, and most of my Oxford trade books, has retired after a long and successful career. Taking his place at OUP as editor of both Religion and Philosophy (there are a lot more courses and books in the latter) is Andrew Blitzer. Andy is a young and energetic editor with vision and ideas - and he's on the blog!

Andy from our first meeting urged me to think about a new kind of textbook on the New Testament. A graphic novel kind of textbook. Hmm... OK then. Really?

I knew nothing about graphic novels. When I first saw a section of them at Barnes & Noble I was quite surprised: why does B & N have a section on soft porn???

OK, so I'm old and stupid. But I've gotten accustomed to the form, and Andy has shown me examples of how it's been used in such wide ranging fields as criminology, philosophy (Wittgenstein!!) , and history of religion (a book on Perpetua, e.g.). It's a *great* idea for the New Testament. And a real challenge.

And so this kind of thing - hey, I think I'll write a book! — cannot simply be decided between editor and an author. The author has to write up a prospectus for the editor to examine, usually be reviewed by others, and get approved by the administrative board at the Press. Only then can he offer a contract.

So I had to write a prospectus. It is under evaluation. But Andy has agreed to have me post it here so you can see what I have in mind. This will take three posts. Here's where I describe why such a book is needed and what I have in mind for it. The following posts will show how I imagine structuring the first fascicle of it (explained below).

(To forestall the obvious question, which I'll be dealing with in the later posts: yes, we will be hiring an artist that I will be closely working with. There are professionals who do this kind of book for a living. The book will be in color. We are interviewing and auditioning artists already.)

The New Testament: A Graphic Textbook

Prospectus

Bart D. Ehrman

College and university courses in New Testament continue to be among the most strongly enrolled in Departments of Religious Studies throughout North America. My OUP text, The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings, has been the number one book in the market since its publication twenty-five years ago. It is now in its seventh edition. In terms of sales, the next three leading texts are all geared toward conservative evangelical or fundamentalist Christian colleges. The fifth - that is, the only one of these competing in the same actual market with me - is also mine, A Brief Introduction to the New Testament, published in 2004, and now in the fourth edition. The

fifth edition has been completed and is entering production.

All of these books follow the standard model for textbooks: a number of chapters devoted to discrete themes, written in steady prose, page-after-page, often with side boxes on ancillary and interesting issues, artwork, study questions, key terms, suggestions for further reading, and the like. This kind of book has always worked well in the college/university context and will do so for the foreseeable future. But it is now time for a new model, one that has already been used in other disciplines but not yet in biblical studies, rooted in the reading practices of a different generation of students. The book I am proposing is meant to employ this new model.

The Concept of a Graphic Textbook

Graphic books of all kinds (usually called “novels,” but only as a generic term) have grown increasingly popular and found remarkable success in a number of markets, especially trade. They include works of fiction and non-fiction, the latter involving such disparate fields social sciences, art, English, criminology, history, and philosophy. They are now increasingly used as textbooks, since they can communicate serious content in an attractive and engaging comic-book style.

The graphic book is ideal for today’s college students, who, as a rule, have short attention spans, find complicated argumentation difficult to follow, tend to be visually oriented, and require considerably more entertaining. New models of communication need to take such realities into account.

Graphic books using a comic-book format understandably work especially well with “visual learners”; but they also have been shown to be effective tools for communicating and reinforcing knowledge with students of all kind: a visual format can reinforce and encapsulate knowledge acquired through more traditional means. This itself is not a new insight: just with respect to the New Testament, generations of film goers have acquired their “knowledge” of Jesus not from texts (whether the Gospels or books about them) but from the silver screen. Earlier centuries had their analogous mode of visual teaching and learning tools: paintings, plastic art, stained glass windows, and so on. A graphic textbook, more than any other, exploits the advantages of the visual learning.

This is now becoming more widely recognized. As one educational publisher reports: “Many educators have reported great success when they have integrated graphic novels into their curriculum especially in the areas of English, science, social sciences, and art. Teachers are discovering that graphic novels – just like traditional forms of literature – can be useful tools for helping students critically examine aspects of history, science, literature, and art (http://www.scholastic.com/graphix/Scholastic_BoneDiscussion.pdf).

A graphic textbook on the New Testament thus makes perfect sense. It will work in a traditional classroom and will also be ideally suited for online classes.

The Publication Plan

In addition to semester-long courses on the New Testament, a number of institutions provide either courses on “Jesus and the Gospels” and “the Life and Letters of Paul,” or

cover parts of the New Testament in much broader seeps of history or literature (for example, Western Civilization or Global Literature). My plan is to take advantage of this situation by publishing the book in a series of three fascicles. On one hand, this will get the product out there more quickly to build enthusiasm over time; on the other hand it will allow instructors of more specialized courses, or far broader courses, simply to order the appropriate fascicle.

And so I plan to publish the book in three stages:

- Stage one: The Gospels and Jesus
- Stage two: The Book of Acts and the Letters of Paul
- Stage three: The New Testament.

To clarify: I do not plan to publish the “general epistles and Revelation” (the third part) as a separate fascicle, since there would be very little market for it (unlike the other two). And so the third stage will involve writing that portion of the final product and combining it with the other two as the final product. The buyer could then purchase one or both of the first fascicles, or the final product.

The entire work is projected to be 150 pages, with fascicles of decreasing length in view of their general importance and interest: Gospels and Jesus 60 pages; Acts and Paul 50 pages; General Epistles and Revelation 40 pages.

Basic Orientation:

As with my other textbooks, this one will approach the New Testament from historical and literary perspectives (rather than, say, theological or devotional), emphasizing how each of the New Testament books has its own distinctive meaning and perspective. The textbook will be rooted in serious critical scholarship, but it will wear its scholarship lightly, especially in view of space considerations. Given its format, the book will need to be far more concise and direct than a traditional textbook, hitting only truly key points, striving to emphasize what is both important and interesting.

The rest of this Prospectus will focus on Fascicle One.



[How I Will Write My “Graphic Textbook of the New Testament”](#)
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