

Book Reviews

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The Inspiration and Interpretation of Scripture: What the Early Church Can Teach Us. By Michael Graves. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014. Pp. viii + 201. \$24.

It is not surprising that a book such as this one should come from the hand of Graves, who authored two notable volumes on Jerome that include a new translation of Jerome's *Commentary on Jeremiah* (2012). By contrast this monograph casts a wider net seeking to capture a broader overview of how the early Church Fathers in general understood and interpreted biblical texts as the inspired word of God.

G.'s study begins with the premise that patristic authors accepted the historicity or the literal truth of Scripture, but that this acceptance was far from uncritical, and it was informed by methods of interpretation that were "very much at home within the cultural context of the Greco-Roman world" (9). Building on this premise, G. explores 20 "entailments" or axioms that flow from the patristic approach built into five concise chapters. Indeed, this book's economy in content and organization is one of its strongest characteristics. Each of the five chapters begins with a set of related axioms derived from a reading of the Church Fathers—for example, that Scripture is useful for instruction and has multiple senses, or speaks in riddles and enigmas that are then illuminated by a study of selected passages from the Fathers. Origen, Jerome, and Augustine figure most prominently, but G. presents many other passages from lesser-known patristic authors. He also draws on insights from contemporary non-Christian texts by authors such as Philo, Josephus, and later rabbinic writers, as well as the Qur'an, to demonstrate the dependence of the Fathers on widely accepted principles of literary interpretation.

Of course, any student of the Fathers is well aware that they do not all speak with one voice, especially on the issue of the divine inspiration of biblical texts and even less so on the correct method of interpreting these texts as the inspired word of God. Moreover, much of what the Fathers have written about Scripture would prove foreign to modern readers. G. concedes both of these points, agreeing that there is diversity in the patristic biblical interpretation, and that not all the material gleaned from the Fathers' exegetical writings has equal value for contemporary biblical scholarship. Still, the exercise brings valuable insight for the modern interpreter, in part because some of the issues that bedeviled ancient scholarship remain unresolved. So, for example, the early exegetes were way ahead of modern literary critics of the Bible

in recognizing that Scripture often employs modes of expression that are sometimes puzzling and cannot be clarified by adherence to a simple historical or literal interpretation. As such, interpreters must move beyond the literal sense to “theological interpretation,” admitting that “the message of Scripture is not always equivalent to the intention of its human writer” (135).

However, it is also true to say that patristic exegetes often resorted to interpretive methods that would not win many adherents today. Returning to the example cited above, the early church, when confronted with puzzling modes of expression in biblical texts, saw such “riddles and enigmas” as opportunities to seek “deeper meanings” through allegorical elucidation. While some of the later Fathers did recognize the “marvelous sublimity” of the Bible (79), many failed to fully appreciate the general artistry or specific literary strategies employed by the authors. This approach was not unique to the early church. G. points out that in Greco-Roman literary circles, allegorical interpretations of mythological or legendary compositions were common. Even Homer’s epics were allegorized to uncover deeper, metaphysical connotations.

In conclusion, one could agree with G. that surveying the Fathers’ views of biblical inspiration and the “entailments” thereof highlights the timeless value of a “rich and complex reading of Scripture,” which in turn “underscores the element of subjectivity involved in interpretation” (147). The Fathers’ unique insights and collective wisdom demonstrate that, while every generation of the church reads Scripture as an authoritative revelation from God, such readings are governed by the culture of the day. As a window onto the vibrancy and diversity of biblical interpretation in the early church, this book will benefit the scholar and casual reader alike.

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History, Ideology, and Bible Interpretation in the Dead Sea Scrolls: Collected Studies. By Devorah Dimant. *Forschungen zum Alten Testament 90.* Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014. Pp. xv + 609. \$288.

Dimant has been an important figure in Dead Sea Scrolls studies since the mid-1970s, when she completed her doctoral work at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem with a dissertation on fallen angels in the Scrolls and related literature.

This volume contains 27 articles divided into four different categories: The Qumran Library (nine articles); The History of the Qumran Community (one article); Themes in the Qumran Literature (five articles); and Texts from Qumran (twelve articles). The titles of these categories and of individual articles attest to the breadth of D.’s competencies. Examples of the latter include “The Qumran Manuscripts: Contents and Significance”; “The Vocabulary of the Qumran Sectarian Texts”; “Sectarian and Nonsectarian Texts from Qumran: The Pertinence and Use of a Taxonomy”; “Between Sectarian and Nonsectarian: The Case of the Apocryphon of Joshua”; “Between