

Michael Graves, *The Inspiration and Interpretation of Scripture. What the Early Church Can Teach Us*. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm B. Eerdmans, 2014), viii + 2-1, \$24, ISBN: 978-0-8028-6963-0.

Anglophone evangelicals have been returning to patristic sources to resource their reflections on the doctrine and interpretation of Scripture for at least a couple of decades. Michael Graves' deeply learned book belongs to that project and is a useful and accessible addition to other introductory volumes that share this agenda. The book explores patristic views about the significance of the inspiration of Scripture announced in 2 Timothy 3:16-17, its entailments for the doctrine of Scripture and its varied consequences for scriptural interpretation. It begins with the usefulness of Scripture as the encompassing emphasis of patristic accounts of its inspiration, and from there covers the illumination of the exegete, the spiritual senses, scriptural prophecy as prediction, the modes of expression employed by the Spirit and how to interpret them, the historical factuality of Scriptural stories, Scripture's coherence and truth, the role of ruled interpretation, and the criterion of interpreting the text in a manner worthy of God.

As this order of topics suggests, Graves' account negotiates the tension this agenda brings between presenting patristic material in a manner that respects ancient sources and presenting it in a way that speaks to present-day evangelical concerns. For example, one key structuring device is the twenty entailments of scriptural inspiration that Graves finds in the Fathers. The way these are phrased sometimes highlights the distinct character of ancient concerns (e.g. number 20 'Scripture's teaching must be worthy of God'). Sometimes, however, that phrasing seems to reflect modern evangelical categories in ways that seem in tension with the Graves' more nuanced exposition of ancient ideas (e.g. no 13 'Events Narrated in the Bible Actually Happened' and number 14 'Scripture Does Not Have Any Errors in Its Facts').

This same problem is evident in the sequence of chapters. To begin with inspiration as usefulness is a helpful contrast to modern evangelical treatments of the notion. It also, however, reflects the prominence of that term as a starting point for thinking about Scripture (and about doctrine) in modern evangelicalism. A little like modern evangelicals, Graves' account is vulnerable to the critique that he tends to abstract patristic understandings about biblical inspiration and interpretation from a wider doctrinal ecology. Similarly, while he attends to the relationship between early Christian approaches to Scripture and early Christianity's Hellenistic context (and to a lesser extent, its Jewish background), much more could be done to place early Christian ideas and approaches in the historical contexts which help to shape them,

and the practical and polemical ends for which those who espoused them articulated views about it. The book depends on, but does not reflect upon, a prior decision about who counts as an early Christian thinker, reflected in the term 'Church Fathers', though Graves is attentive to internal diversity amongst patristic figures. Similarly, evangelical works of *ressourcement* such as this one also need to wrestle also with issues such as the formation of early Christian identity in relation to the formation of Judaism, anti-Jewish Christian polemic and supersessionism, and how these shaped, for example, the interpretation of what Christians called 'the Old Testament'.

Throughout the book, Graves is careful to note divergence between ancient understandings and modern ones, and both areas where modern Christians may learn from ancient authors and issues on which modern Christians would do well to disagree with their forebears. The effect of this commentary is to convey a sense of the historically contextual character of theologies of Scripture and modes of theological interpretation of biblical texts and of the variety of hermeneutical conclusions that early Christian writers drew from scriptural inspiration. As Graves notes in his Conclusion, an appreciation of these things problematizes unqualified appeals to the Fathers on inspiration. The other really interesting aspect of his conclusion is the argument that scriptural authority, because of the inescapably subjective dimensions of theological interpretation and the implausibility of any claim to final interpretive authority, is, in the final analysis, a matter of the authority of God exercised through Scripture to the individual reader. Graves qualifies this point carefully, and the conclusions he draws about individual liberty, diversity and mutual toleration in scriptural interpretation are to a significant extent salutary and deserve careful consideration. Yet his recognition of the importance of community in Christian life and interpretation seems to call for some comment about how it is that individual Christians might settle their interpretive disagreements, however provisionally, so as to be able live and worship together absent such magisterial authority. It is perhaps telling that a book that asks how we may learn from the early church does not find there the resources to address this vexed problem.

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