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BOOK REVIEW

J. Merrick and Stephen M. Garrett, eds. *Five Views on Biblical Inerrancy*. Counterpoints: Bible and Theology. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013. 328 pp. Pbk. ISBN 9780310331360.

This is how Merrick and Garrett provide their rationale for this *Counterpoints* book: “Mindful of the complexity of inerrancy, this book hopes to generate conversation from a variety of diverse quarters on the doctrinal framework that surrounds inerrancy . . . discussions on inerrancy too often produce more heat than light . . . One of the aims of this book is to restore the focus on these doctrinal issues so that debates about inerrancy enrich evangelical theology and faith, facilitating a deeper understanding” (21). To produce more light than heat, they narrow the focus of this book by asking their contributors to address four topics: (1) God and his relationship to his creatures, (2) the doctrine of inspiration, (3) the nature of Scripture, and (4) the nature of truth (22). The editors have also chosen two passages for each of the contributors to discuss: Joshua 6 because of the current archaeological and historiographical evidence that calls into question the details of the text’s account, and the “discrepancy” between Acts 9:7 and 22:9.

This *Counterpoints* book differs from some of the others in the series in that the first three views are “Perspectives on Inerrancy and the Past” whereas the other two are “Perspectives on Renewing and Recasting Inerrancy for Today.” This difference is key because although each contributor presents a slightly different view of this doctrine, its presentation, and its classification within the common places of systematic theology, the contributors are *not* presenting five completely different views. The title is initially misleading in this respect.

R. Albert Mohler Jr., a historical theologian, makes the first

contribution with his chapter entitled “When the Bible Speaks, God Speaks: The Classic Doctrine of Biblical Inerrancy.” Mohler locates himself in this theological tradition, outlines his position in accordance with the Chicago Statement of Biblical Inerrancy (CSBI), supports his position with Scripture, and considers theologians from the past (Mohler’s area of expertise). Mohler gives what is perhaps the most conservative viewpoint represented in the book.

Following Mohler’s presentation the editors swing to the opposite side of the theological spectrum with the contribution of Peter Enns, a biblical scholar, who writes, “Inerrancy, However Defined, Does Not Describe What the Bible Does.” He begins by providing some thoughts on the current evangelical disharmony over inerrancy, suggesting there needs to be dialogue over the CSBI, and explains his view: “Simply put, inerrancy, however defined and nuanced, has great difficulty in addressing adequately and convincingly Scripture as a historical phenomenon” (113). His view presented here concords with what he has said in his previous publications.

The third contribution in this first section of the book comes from Michael F. Bird, another biblical scholar, with a chapter entitled, “Inerrancy Is Not Necessary for Evangelicalism outside the USA.” This contribution may be revealing for those in North America who may not be aware of the perspectives of those outside of the continent. He writes, “I will endeavor to show that while the American inerrancy tradition possessed a certain utility in the ‘Battle for the Bible’ in the twentieth century, it is not and should not be a universally prescriptive article of faith for the global evangelical church” (145).

In the fourth contribution (in the second section of the book, “Perspectives on Renewing and Recasting Inerrancy for Today”) Kevin J. Vanhoozer, as a systematic theologian, discusses Augustinian inerrancy. He covers some of the history of the discussion on inerrancy and explains his vision for inerrancy today. His vision is conservative, albeit different from Mohler’s position. While Mohler would say that believing in inerrancy is essential to being an evangelical, Vanhoozer writes, “To say it is essential is to go too far” (204). Furthermore, he defines inerrancy as

meaning that “the authors speak the truth in all things they affirm (when they make affirmation), and will eventually be seen to have spoken truly (when right readers read rightly)” (207).

The final contribution of this book is by John R. Franke, another systematic theologian, “Recasting Inerrancy: The Bible as Witness to Missional Plurality.” He recasts inerrancy from the opposite end of the theological spectrum than Vanhoozer. Franke writes, “I’ve never thought the term *inerrancy* was a particularly helpful way of articulating the core idea of the authority of Scripture as a witness to the mission of God” (259). His concern is reception, as he clarifies: “For so many people inside and outside of Christian communities, it [the word inerrancy] conjures up artificial notions of precision and exactitude that are decidedly unhelpful in the task of reading and understanding the Bible” (259).

This book has several strengths. First, the editors successfully encapsulate a variety of viewpoints on this doctrine by using some of the foremost scholars on the topic. This should certainly be appreciated, as other books in this genre of books do not always select the best representatives.

Second, the editors wisely attempt to focus the discussion on inerrancy rather than proponents and larger trajectories. As they hint with their reference to light and heat, this discussion could easily have become emotionally charged, with writers not addressing the concerns raised by the others, although this still happens in this book to some extent.

Third, this book provides a good introduction to the doctrine of the authority of Scripture because it encapsulates the history and important related doctrinal formulations. History matters, whether or not it is usually discussed, because it affects the modern-day formulation.

Fourth, each of the contributors has demonstrated strengths. Mohler presents his view clearly, concisely, and covers all of the required texts attentively; he demonstrates a clear understanding of the historical-theological side of this doctrine. Enns presents a consistent viewpoint from his previous publications; he considers these issues carefully, seriously, and thoroughly. Bird’s presentation is valuable for the fact that he is able to bring levity

to a rather serious discussion. His perspective is valuable because North American scholars and theologians need to hear this other perspective lest they become too influenced by the theological milieu in which they find themselves. Vanhoozer provides several important considerations for the doctrine of inerrancy today. Franke provides a balancing perspective to Vanhoozer considering the missional implications of our ideas about inerrancy today. Furthermore, all of these contributors provide interesting and engaging responses to one another.

This book also has several areas for improvement. First, although the editors asked the contributors to focus their articles around the aforementioned points and texts, the editors perhaps should have focused the book even more for the sake of furthering the discussion. For example, if one considers each of the contributors' sections on the second required topic, the doctrine of inerrancy, one will notice a vast difference in their discussion. Unfortunately this seems at times to have led to writers speaking past one another. Perhaps a better approach would have been to list the suggested areas and also suggest what the editors would like the contributors to cover in each section, e.g., their definition of the doctrine, how they would support it, etc.

Second, this book would be better if the contributors submitted rejoinders to their respondents. Although this would probably not change the positions of contributors, their interaction would be helpful for readers to consider. For example, Mohler writes: "The affirmation of biblical inerrancy is necessary for the health of the church and for our obedience to the Scriptures" (58). Yet, Bird responds with: "I think I can sink Mohler's *bibliological battleship* simply by pointing out that his version of inerrancy has not existed for all time and in every place where the evangelical churches have confessed that Jesus is Lord" (67; emphasis mine). Although these two scholars are in similar theological camps, their interpretations of this doctrine are very different; seeing further interaction in rejoinders would be helpful for furthering this discussion. As it stands, many of the articles and responses are highly predictable if one already knows their theological positions.

Third, this book highlights the need for further discussion on theological methodology. This issue is perhaps the core issue that should have been included in the required topics to cover because the theological method used determines the result. That is, if someone knows how any of these contributors generally engages in the task of theology, then one can likely predict what each of these theologians will say *and* how they will say it. Yet, this discussion is missing from major theological traditions.

Furthermore, if this discussion happened in the book (as it did at the ETS Annual meeting in 2013), then perhaps the theologians and biblical scholars could have had more fruitful biblical and theological discussions. As it stands, some biblical scholars will likely look at the exegesis of some of these contributors and wonder why they do not reference modern scholarship more fully on these texts. Theologians might also say something similar because each author could have interacted more with the responses in the relevant theological works.

This book would serve well for an introductory course textbook on the doctrine of Scripture or on theology because it is representative of different theological positions. It could easily be used as a starting point for students to write their own positions on biblical inerrancy and respond to the other contributors—as if their response continued the discussion of the book. Then, the students in the course could write responses to one another and rejoinders so they learn from this theological engagement firsthand.

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