
Five Views on the New Testament Canon. By Darian R. Lockett, David R. Nienhuis, Jason David Benduhn, Ian Boxall, and George L. Parsenios. Edited by Stanley E. Porter and Benjamin P. Laird. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2022. 287 pp. Paper, \$24.99.

I find these “views” books to be very profitable. Most books of this genre are to be found in the ZONDERVAN Counterpoints series or the InterVarsity Press Spectrum Multiview series. Before the publication of *Five Views on the New Testament Canon*, Kregel Publications only had three other books of this type (on the Synoptic Gospels, Israel and

the church, and the warning passages in Hebrews). This volume is a welcome addition to a growing body of literature on the formation of the NT canon. However, this is not because of anything written by any of the contributors.

Before seeing this book, I had never heard of any of the contributors. The book contains no information about them other than where they teach and where they got their Ph.Ds. Co-editor Stanley Porter—president, dean, professor of New Testament, and Roy A. Hope Chair in Christian Worldview at McMaster Divinity College—is, of course, well known. Co-editor Benjamin Laird is associate professor of Biblical Studies at the John W. Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University. He is the co-author of the recent (and recommended) works *40 Questions About the Apostle Paul* (Kregel Academic, 2023), *Creating the Canon: Composition, Controversy, and the Authority of the New Testament* (IVP Academic, 2023), and *The Pauline Corpus in Early Christianity: Its Formation, Publication, and Circulation* (Hendrickson Academic, 2022).

The format of *Five Views on the New Testament Canon* is a little different from what is usually found in other “views” books. Typical is the presentation of a viewpoint by a contributor followed immediately by responses from the other contributors. In this case, after a detailed introduction by the editors, each contributor addresses historical, theological, and hermeneutical questions related to the NT canon from his own perspective. The five perspectives are: conservative Evangelical (Lockett), progressive Evangelical (Nienhuis), liberal Protestant (Benduhn), Roman Catholic (Boxall), and Orthodox (Parsenios). This first section (pp. 41–187) is then followed by a second section (pp. 189–251) of responses where each contributor responds to the others one at a time. Then follows a hefty conclusion by the editors, a name index, and Scripture and ancient sources indices.

The conservative Evangelical perspective is naturally the one that readers of this journal would align themselves with. Lockett argues for “the early development of the New Testament canon” (p. 55). He makes good points about the development of the NT canon being “a collection of collections” (pp. 52–55), about how “reading Luke and Acts as a single canonical unit obscures the canonical association of Luke with the other Gospels” (p. 66) because “no extant manuscripts appear to place Luke and Acts together as a literary collection” (p. 65),

and about how “the Gospel of John appears to have been read in the early church as part of the fourfold Gospel rather than as part of a set of Johannine writings” (p. 66).

Nienhuis divides the Pauline Epistles into “authentic” and “deutero-Pauline” (p. 78) and believes that “many of the New Testament texts are anonymous” (p. 88). He maintains that his “perspective has far more in common with that of my Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox colleagues than that of my two fellow Protestants” (p. 201).

Benduhn’s view of the canon is grounded in his belief that “the books of the New Testament are understood as humanly composed records of the spiritual experiences and insights of key figures and communities within early Christianity” (p. 112). They are “neither verbally inspired nor equally authoritative in all parts” (p. 113).

Boxall, as expected, argues that “the decisive date in the formation of the New Testament canon is arguably April 8, 1546, when the Fourth Session of the Council of Trent promulgated its ‘Decree Concerning the Canonical Scriptures’” (p. 131).

Parsenios focuses on the practice of the church over time. He argues that “the evolution of the canonical Scripture did not end completely until 1672 CE when the Council of Jerusalem presented the Orthodox Bible, both Old and New Testaments, as it is now construed” (p. 172).

The best things about *Five Views on the New Testament Canon* are not to be found in any of the contributions but in the introduction and conclusion by the editors. I think the book is worth having just to read what Porter and Laird have to say about the NT canon. In their introduction, the editors have a great study of the history of prior discussions of the NT canon and major issues in the canon debate. In their conclusion, they review the common ground of the various contributors as well as the points of contention. This is followed by a very informative study of the primary historical sources for the study of the NT canon: patristic writings, Biblical manuscripts, and canonical lists. The introduction and conclusion by Porter and Laird should be the first thing one consults when undertaking a study of the NT canon.

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