This work seeks to present an overview of the formation, reception, and interpretation of Christian Scriptures. It is divided into three parts—“The History of the Texts,” “The Interpretation of the Texts,” and “The Theological Status of the Texts as Scripture”—with each part containing four essays.

Michael F. Bird opens the volume with “Introduction: From Manuscript to MP3.” Commencing with a brief overview of the volumes’ articles, Bird traces the contours of the collection and maps out its intention to stimulate students, teachers, and ministers to think and reflect on questions of the Bible as a whole (7). Following this, Bird provides a reflection of his own experiences of Christian Scripture, specifically addressing the ideas of the phenomena of Scripture, the relationship between ecclesiology and bibliology, the interconnectedness of ecclesiastical tradition, biblical interpretation, and the Holy Spirit, the role of the author and authorial meaning in interpretation, and the use of “infallibility” and “inerrancy” as terms to describe Scripture.

The first essay in the volume is Karen H. Jobes’s “The Septuagint as Scripture in the Early Church.” She begins with a brief discussion of the origins of the “Septuagint” and some of the differences between the Hebrew and Greek versions of the Old Testament. Jobes then discusses the different positions of the “inspiration” of the Greek versions as held by

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Following this, Tomas Bokedal investigates “Scripture in the Second Century.” This is a growing field, with many potentially interesting areas for study. In this short piece Bokedal attempts to address many of them and provides a cursory discussion of the usage, interpretation, text, and canon of Scripture in the second century. With a very wide range of topics (including nomina sacra, manuscript production, liturgical function of the Gospels, New Testament citations in the apostolic fathers, orality versus literacy, etc.) this chapter begins to show the breadth of topics for future inquiry.

Next is an interesting essay by Michael Pahl, titled “Scripture and Tradition,” which seeks to find a middle path between Protestant sola Scriptura and Catholic “Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition.” Tracing the contours of orality and apostolic witness in the early church, Pahl argues that there are substantial similarities between the Protestant and Catholic views, properly defined. Moreover, Pahl contends that both have gone too far in their perspectives and that there is significant space for dialogue for both groups to share a common path of the relative authority and respective roles of Sacred Scripture and church tradition.

The final essay in this section is John C. Poirier’s thought-provoking “Scripture and Canon.” Here Poirier challenges current reasoning about Scripture’s authority based on “inspiration” and suggests that Scripture’s authority is derived from the doctrinal centrality of kerygma. This, Poirier suggests, is closest to the New Testament’s view of Scripture. In support of his argument, Poirier provides an alternate reading of 2 Tim 3:16, 2 Pet 1:20–21, and Eph 2:19–20. Moreover, the role of kerygma and the biblical author’s relationship with Jesus was one of the pivotal reasons for a work’s inclusion in the New Testament.

Part 2, “The Interpretation of the Texts,” opens with Jamie A. Grant’s “Scripture and Biblical Criticism.” This essay outlines the origin and development of literary and historical criticisms in the post-Enlightenment study of the Scriptures and how they have come to us today. Although well-written, there is not too much original contribution here.

Next, Thorsten Moritz’s “Scripture and Theological Exegesis” provides an intriguing look at hermeneutics as method, art, and content. Surveying seven approaches to interpreting
the text (speech-act theory, hermeneutical geography, implied versus empirical, storied hermeneutic, the role of imagination, open versus closed texts, and community and the social brain), Moritz challenges readers to reevaluate their hermeneutical approaches to allow for a more full reading of the text. This chapter would make a good introductory essay to a hermeneutics course.

Following this, Robert Shillaker’s “Scripture and Postmodern Epistemology” outlines the many different contours of postmodern thought. Highlighting the dynamic relationship between modernism and postmodernism, Shillaker argues that postmodern thought is actually the completion and intensification of modernistic methods. Shillaker concludes with a discussion of postmodernism’s view of the author and authorial intent.

Jennifer Bird’s “Scripture and New Interpretive Approaches: Feminist and Postcolonial” concludes section 2. Here Bird provides a short outline of the sociological impetus for the rise in feminist and postcolonial interpretations. These theories are applied rather briefly to the household code in 1 Pet 2:18–3:6.

The final section, “The Theological Status of the Texts as Scripture,” comprises four articles, each providing a perspective on Scripture from a major theological tradition. First is “Catholic Doctrine on Scripture” by Brant Pitre, which draws upon statements from councils, letters, and catechisms of the Catholic Church regarding Scripture. From these documents Pitre articulates the doctrines of inerrancy, inspiration, and interpretation and how their integration informs modern Catholic study of Scripture.

The next theological tradition is Eastern Orthodox, outlined by George Kalantzis. Beginning with an acknowledgement that Eastern Orthodoxy is diverse and not always uniform in its perspectives, Kalantzis defines the Orthodox understanding of theology as the intersection of Scripture and tradition in which both are mutually engaged. The last part of the chapter outlines three different eras of Orthodox interpretation: patristic, traditionalist, and modern.

The penultimate essay advocates a strong evangelical approach to Scripture. In “Still sola Scriptura,” James M. Hamilton Jr. argues for three points: that the sixty-six books of the Protestant canon are recognized as inspired by the books themselves and that only these books are inspired by the Holy Spirit; that the “Bible itself claims to be inspired by the Holy Spirit, flawless, totally true, and completely trustworthy”; and that the key objections to the doctrine of inerrancy are wrong.

The final essay, “The Word as Event,” by David W. Congdon, evaluates Barth’s and Bultmann’s perspective(s) on Scripture. Commencing with an overview of both scholars’
perspective on the nature and interpretation of Scripture, Congdon argues that Barth and Bultmann share substantial common ground in their view of Scripture despite their dissimilarities. Congdon further suggests that the views these scholars were responding against caused their differences to be emphasized rather than their similarities affirmed.

The volume closes with a good subject index, although the work would have benefited from the inclusion of an authors index and an index of scripture cited. After all, the latter is what this work is all about.

Michael Bird claims in the introduction that the purpose of this volume is “to provide a brief introduction to the many complex issues including: (1) the formation of the Christian canon in the context of the ancient church; (2) hermeneutical strategies for interpreting the Christian Scriptures; and (3) the theological status and function of Scripture in various Christian traditions” (1). However, while there are some very good essays directed to those issues, one cannot help but think that essays on any one of these three topics could have sufficiently filled a volume. As a result, the reader is left wanting more. Moreover, though Bird’s introductory essay provides some macrostructure to the work, there is no other essay to provide synthesis or integration of ideas for the reader. Rather, this is left up to the reader, which might have been the intention of the editors, but can potentially leave less experienced readers with questions.

Unlike some other edited volumes, in this volume there is good coherence among the pieces in that no essay seems out of place. This creates a feeling of unity within the work as a whole.

Another positive is that this compilation, particularly part 3, provides a strong ecumenical and ecclesiastical perspective. Containing articles from Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and American evangelical writers, this work successfully shows the diversity of ways Scripture is and has been theologically interpreted. This is a particular strength of the work, as it affords the reader a variety of perspectives by which Scripture is viewed and used.

Overall, this volume would be of benefit to anyone interested in the role and nature of Scripture. Furthermore, it would be a helpful text for a course on Scripture or hermeneutics.