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Review: The Unity of the Bible: Unfolding God's Plan for Humanity

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this chapter and its call for an intentional integrity in matters of personal lifestyle, family, finances, and sexuality could be the most significant chapter in the book. In chap. 4, "The Minister's Congregation," the reader is asked how he or she will view and treat the members of the congregation. In chap. 5, "The Minister's Colleagues," the reader is asked to make similar decisions about colleagues both inside (church staff members and volunteer leaders) and outside (predecessors and other ministers) the congregation. In chap. 6, "The Minister's Community," the reader is asked to decide how he or she will respond to the community surrounding the church. Attention is called to the fact that an evangelical minister must at times be both prophet and pastor to the community.

The final chapter, "The Minister's Code of Ethics," is the special hope of the authors. They admit that asking ministers to construct a personal or denominational code of ethics might be viewed as superfluous, but they maintain their belief that a written code of ethics will prove beneficial. The chapter serves as a practical guideline for writing such a code.

Ministers and ministerial students should find this book to be tremendously helpful. And if, as the authors assume, ministers do want to be persons of integrity, then they will surely want to avail themselves of the potential here for learning the categories and vocabulary of ethics as they answer these questions.

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The Unity of the Bible: Unfolding God's Plan for Humanity. By Daniel P. Fuller. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992, 508 pp., $24.99.

For over forty years Daniel Fuller, professor of Biblical interpretation at Fuller Seminary, has sought to grasp and teach *the* purpose of God in the world, the salvation-historical unfolding of God's redemptive-kingdom plan from Genesis to Revelation—that is, the unity of the Bible. Christian misunderstanding of God's purpose for the world is not only misunderstanding the books of Scripture as reflecting that purpose but also hampering of lives in and for Jesus Christ. Fuller believes that only through a summarization of Scripture along the "timeline of redemptive history" and not by the "timeless categories of God, humankind, Christ, Church, and last things," as reflected in the Church's systematic approach through the centuries, will help Christians follow the inner logic of Scripture, the *boulē* of God. Fuller's ire against classic theological formulation is clear. Throughout the process of interpreting, analyzing and synthesizing the purpose/goal of God, as given in the "inspired" Scriptures, Fuller finds that God's goal may be summarized in the Biblical terminology "that the earth be filled with the glory of God as the waters cover the sea." He has written this book that this goal would be accomplished.

For a book about *the* redemptive-historical purpose of God, the unity of the Bible, this is a very heterogeneous book. The first section prepares the way through helpful analyses of canon formation and evidence for Scriptural unity, along with eschatological comparisons between Biblical understanding and that of Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam. This is also a book about the nature of faith, true faith, and the necessity of persevering faith in the promises of God in the likeness of Abraham's faith. Fuller also emphasizes the true and *continuous* relation of law and the gospel, in opposition

to most Protestant exegesis of Galatians and Romans. Thus, it is indirectly (but openly) a tract much influenced by Jonathan Edwards as set against John Calvin. But preeminently it is a kind of ethics or dogmatics of redemptive history with most of its argument centered in the original expression of God's redemptive-kingdom purpose in and through history, the revelatory acts of God in history for human redemption, and thereby the filling of the earth with the glory of God. After the opening section, more than three hundred pages analyze the line of God's redemptive-historical purpose in Genesis. While often presented plainly and even homiletically, these sections are rich in content, exhortation and encouragement in the faith. God's purpose in creation, human creation, fall, the continuous tension between the seed of the serpent and that of the woman, the persevering faith of Abraham and the nature and purpose of the Mosaic law receive the greatest emphasis in these sections. Fuller thereby directs attention to the kingdom of God first in the OT and the gospel presentation to the world via Jesus' presentation of the kingdom, then the present manifestation of the kingdom and the way in which this unfolding of God's purpose will lead to the conversion of Israel. This culminates historically in the full, final harvest of the Gentiles in the millennium. Fuller concludes with an important appendix on the nature of the Mosaic law by exegesis of pertinent passages in Galatians and Romans. This is done in continuous debate with Calvin's influential understanding of these passages. Fuller endeavors to overthrow Calvin's setting of law in opposition to gospel by his own emphasis on relation, parallel and continuity. One wonders if debate with Luther would not have been closer to the point.

Affirmations and criticisms of this book might cause overly lengthy lists. Several issues will do. This is a rare example of scholarship made truly presentable at several levels. Many will find Fuller's emphasis on inspiration and inerrancy surprising and even suspicious after Harold Lindsell's allegations of the 1970s. Yet Fuller claims never to have negated inerrancy and to have asserted it in his teaching through the years. His willingness to wrestle with truly difficult issues has no doubt been misinterpreted. Fuller's premillennial, salvation-historical, Biblical-theological presentation of the logic, way, and purpose of God from Genesis 1 to the new heavens and the new earth, and the "why" of each step, is excellent and stimulating. This is theology, then, which is openly critical of all "systems," Calvinist–Arminian, covenant–dispensational, etc., which are said to lose sight of the way and goal of God's actual disclosure in history, preeminently in Jesus Christ. Also, Fuller's presentation of the place of the law in relation to the gospel and salvation by grace through faith is, for the most part, both correct and needful.

Yet numerous problems must be mentioned despite the overall excellence. Fuller has a tendency to stretch points to fit his purpose. Coupled with his great admiration for Edwards is his occasional conclusion that since Edwards says something it is therefore true. Surely Fuller did not mean this, but the logic of presentation often lacks other premises of presentation. Indeed, there were numerous places where his logic was "unique" (an "apples, therefore oranges" kind of logic). Fuller's argument at the early stages is partially hinged to his understanding of the triunity of God and the *imago Dei.* But both are not well handled, and Fuller's copious use of the Trinity for his salvation-historical purpose not only is dependent on "despised" systematic theology ("biblical" theology *cannot* come to this end with *its* questions) and is of the outmoded Augustinian-Hegelian type, which in fact lapses necessarily into either modalism or subordinationism (cf. W. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology* 1.280–327). Others may find his affirmation of redaction criticism or an allusion to Deutero-Isaiah (p. 431) problematic.

A particularly interesting issue in this fine book is Fuller's understanding of salvation and perseverance in God's purpose as reflected throughout Scripture. Fuller eschews all theological labels and their ensuing limitations, yet he is a strong supporter of limited atonement. But Fuller is also to be commended for his antipathy to "eternal security" or "once saved always saved" as is so popularly heard and understood. Rather, he properly emphasizes the perseverance of the saints. The saints prove or make their calling and election sure by their persevering faith. Yet while the elect and only the elect will finally persevere, many will be "regenerated" or "renewed" by the Spirit for a time only to fall away and be condemned. These can have present assurance of salvation (Fuller is concerned to avoid the Roman Catholic view that salvation is known only at the end). But one can so lapse and, without repentance, finally overrun the patience of God. Fuller's view of faith from Hebrews (especially chap. 6) is clear here.

This is an excellent book, an important book, a book effectively exhorting every concerned reader. It has been a rich blessing to me.

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Canon and Theology: Overtures to an Old Testament Theology. By Rolf Rendtorff. Translated and edited by Margaret Kohl. OBT. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993, xii + 235 pp., $16.00 paper.

This volume is a collection of 18 essays presented over the last 15 years; five of these are presented here for the first time in English. It is a European response to changes in the methods of Biblical theology. One of the persistently weak points of the Biblical theology movement was its uncritical acceptance of the liberal hermeneutical presupposition that one came to the Biblical text from a vantage point outside the text. This led to the eventual collapse of the movement but had the positive result of exegetes and theologians giving attention to a holistic reading of the Hebrew text, as is advocated in this volume.

The canonical approach of Rendtorff has a different objective than that of Brevard Childs. Childs approaches the Biblical text as the canon of the Christian Church, which serves as a basis for Christian theology; Rendtorff seeks to interpret the Old Testament in its own canonical framework—that is, "under the presuppositions and conditions of its development up to the close of the canon"—which must be distinguished from the appropriation of that canon by the Christian Church, a society that came into being after the close of this canon (p. 117). Theological interpretation of the Hebrew Bible must be done from the inside, independent of the theological system of the religious tradition to which the interpreter belongs (p. 40). Old Testament theology ought to be done cooperatively between Jewish and Christian scholars, since the theology of the canon both adopt antedates that of rabbinic and Christian interpretation. The authority of the canonical text for each of the two traditions and the validity of interpretive principles used by each of them are separate questions; neither tradition is to be neglected, nor is there any point in discussing hermeneutical principles to relate them to each other (p. 44), but they do have a common theological task.

The first eight essays deal with methodological questions; they not only challenge the supposition that Biblical theology is a Christian enterprise but also show how the enterprise as undertaken by Christians has at times been woefully misguided. The final

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