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Review: The Word Becoming Flesh

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The Word Becoming Flesh: An Introduction to the Origin, Purpose, and Meaning of the Old Testament, by Horace D. Hummel. St. Louis: Concordia, 1979. Pp. 679. \$20.95.

This volume represents a unique contribution to the genre of OT Introduction books. They are usually characterized by an encyclopedic smorgasbord of the modern melange that is so characteristic of the contemporary scholarly diet. As such they are often delightful tools which are rarely of any concrete use to those who don't play the game. On the other hand, there are those works by conservatives which have sought to interact with the former genre by, gently or otherwise, showing the errors of the critical works. The present volume has attempted to introduce a new approach into the field of Introduction.

Hummel has sought to contrast his work with others through the use of the word *Einführung* rather than *Einleitung*. By this he means that "... the former implies something more than mere questing after date, authorship, etc. It indicates some attempt also to convey some of the theological depth and direction of the contents. Thus, it moves perceptibly in the direction of not only exegesis, but also of 'Biblical theology'" (p. 12). It is this feature which has made Hummel's book somewhat unusual in the field.

Hummel has characterized his methodology by reviving the term "isagogics," which historically concerned itself with "questions of date, authorship, occasion, and purpose of writing" (p. 11). This approach has been expanded, however, to include "... the method of a sort of a running commentary of at least the highlights of the book, accenting isagogical matters as we try to state and reject typical critical positions and try to indicate the conservative alternative" (p. 15). This, then, is the heart of his methodology. As such he has combined certain features of the classical OTI genre, Bible survey, and biblical theology. Insofar as he is granted the right to pursue such a merger, his work may be termed a success.

Hummel knows, however, that he is not likely to be allowed this endeavor. He anticipates, for example, that the critics will score him for his "negativism" (p. 15). This is in spite of the fact that, for the most part, he has provided conservative alternatives to destructive critical attacks on Scripture. His attitude throughout the book is comparatively irenic. He appears able to interact on a more scholarly level with less true negativism than those who have reviewed the work.¹ In short, it appears that Hummel is far more aware of the nuances of liberalism than the liberals are aware of the conservative responses to their challenges. Often their responses seem to be little more than *argumentum ad hominem* rather than *ad rem*. At times, Hummel himself

¹See especially the review of Ralph Smith in *SWJT* 23 (1981) 99, who writes, "This book is an example of what a binding credal statement can do to biblical scholarship. This is a warped exposition of this discipline and if such scholarship continues long under the domination of the church's creed, it will become more narrow and harsh." In fact, there is very little evidence of Lutheran credalism anywhere in the book. The issue for Hummel is inerrancy, which is a matter of faith and presuppositionalism, not credalism.

seems to indulge in that when he disparages "fundamental literalism" (p. 280) in its insistence on a literal interpretation of Ezekiel 40-48. Perhaps there is a distinction between "fundamental literalism" and, say, "liberal literalism" that this reviewer has somehow missed.

There is so much in this book that is superb that it is hard to know where to begin. Perhaps the greatest strength of the work is his understanding of the essential unity of the two testaments (see especially pp. 62-63, 347-48). In short, he is not just a man skilled in the discipline of form criticism, text criticism, or historiography; rather, he is these as well as a superb theologian.

His skills as a text critic may be seen in his sound analysis of the Hebrew text which usually is found within each book discussion. His awareness of the discipline of "higher criticism" represents the highest professional standards. For example, his introduction to higher criticism (pp. 19-31) is, in my opinion, the best succinct treatment available. So devastating is his analysis of the weaknesses of higher criticism that one reviewer, rather hysterically, has claimed that "... he has returned to the pre-Gabler days, before 1787, when Biblical theology was captive to Dogmatic theology."² This is neither fair nor accurate. Hummel's guidelines are not drawn by creed or dogmatics. Quite simply, the guidelines for Hummel's work are stated on p. 13: "The Bible is [his emphasis] the Word of God," and "the canonical books are verbally inspired and inerrant."

Another feature of the book which makes it so useful is that Hummel (unlike some theologians) has a realistic perspective on the historiography. This is best reflected in his handling of the book of Judges and the monarchical period. In addition, his discussion on pp. 151-53 concerning the difficulties of exact chronology for the Israelite monarchy provides a marvelous introduction to the problems.

One last subject area of the book that I found enjoyable is the chapter on Wisdom. Once again Hummel demonstrates that the topic is neither irrelevant nor arcane. This is best demonstrated in the following quotation: "The real and ultimate 'uniqueness' of Biblical (and Christian) ethics is not in external behavior patterns ... but in the theological context, motivations, or goals" (p. 397).

In spite of these "bouquets" I must, nonetheless, take issue with one specific and important area. At the heart of his system is the typological hermeneutic. To be sure, his use of typology must not be compared with earlier interpreters, whose efforts at finding the preincarnate Christ are not dissimilar to talmudic methods. Nonetheless, I had the distinct impression that no actual guidelines for the typological approach were ever established. In short, the book represents a personal *tour de force* in applied Christology. The following quotation perhaps best exemplifies that philosophy:

That is to say that Old Testament history really is *our* [his emphasis] history via Christ. It too was accomplished "for us men and for our salvation," and into it

²Ibid. For a more balanced, less pejorative perspective, see the review of Peter Craigie, *JBL* 100 (1981) 106-7, where he raises some legitimate criticisms not mentioned in this review.

too we were baptized. Since Christ is "Israel reduced to one," and since Israel's inner history was all recapitulated and consummated in Him, the 'new Israel,' the Church, expresses its identity and mission in terms of the promise given the old Israel. The difference between the testaments is not ultimately theological at all, but basically only that the first Israel was *both* [his emphasis] "church" and state, while in the age of the antitype or fulfillment the political (and accompanying ceremonial) scaffolding falls away (p. 17).

There is, of course, much with which the dispensationalist (and non-dispensationalist) can agree in that statement. The problem, however, is that he never really establishes the mechanics for knowing precisely when we have a type. He is fully aware of the need for "one literal sense" (p. 458), yet throughout the book expands his interpretations to types that are not said to be types. In the case of Canticles his methodology may be seen in the statement: "Whatever language is used, the *unity* [his emphasis] of the various levels of meaning must be accented. It will not be a matter of a multiple or even a double sense, but of varied aspects of the *unus sensus literalis*" (p. 504). It seems obvious that there is at least opportunity for some continued discussion on this typological approach.

The book is not without spelling errors (pp. 178, 379, but note especially the humorous misspelling on p. 48: "it is worth nothing [*sic*] that von Rad proposed . . ."). I suspect that there is an error on p. 123 where he has outlined 1 Samuel 8–15 as "Samuel and David," which should probably be "Samuel and Saul." On p. 130, "2 Chron 17" should be "2 Chron 7," while "gives" should be "give." On p. 490 there is a split infinitive and on p. 541, "The major exception in many critical eyes are 9:20–10:3 . . ." should read "is 9:20–10:3."

There are certainly other things which might be said about the book, including the author's good sense of humor (pp. 289, 315, 513). There are some excellent indexes which greatly enhance the usability of the volume as well. I feel that this work, especially for pastors, will remain one of the premier introductions to the OT. In one volume, Hummel has combined the best features of survey, history, and theology.

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Aalders, G. Ch. *Genesis*. 2 vols. Pp. 311; 298. \$24.95. Gispén, W. H. *Exodus*. Pp. 335. \$15.95. Noordtzi, A. *Leviticus*. Pp. 280. \$13.95. Noordtzi, A. *Numbers*. Pp. 384. \$16.95. The Bible Student's Commentary. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981–83.

Since the 1930s the commentary set *Korte Verklaring der Heilige Schrift* has been a mainstay for Christian European students of the Word. With the publication of Aalders's commentary on Genesis in 1981, Zondervan has launched an ambitious goal of translating the Dutch commentary into English. The publishers are to be commended warmly for this service. While these various volumes do not stand as the very best commentaries on each book, they do represent a fine level of scholarship and should be found in every serious minister's library.

Most of the series originally was published in the 1930s and 1940s, although there has been some attempt to update them into the 1960s. The series was originally intended for that ubiquitous audience, the lay reader. In that sense it can be read and understood by anyone. Its scholarship, however, is such that it can be read profitably by scholars as well. It is thoroughly conservative, representing the best of continental Reformed scholarship. The translational work is skillfully done, resulting in a readable, lucid style. Its value is enhanced by using the *NIV* as its commentary base. I am happy to recommend it to the readership of this journal.

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Leviticus: An Introduction and Commentary, by R. K. Harrison. The Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries. Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1980. Pp. 252. Cloth \$10.95. Paper \$5.95.

The remark by Qoheleth "the writing of many books is endless" (Qoh 12:12 *NASB*) is, in many ways, truly applicable in our days. Such, however, has not been the case in relation to evangelical scholars and the book of Leviticus. The fact that Leviticus is one of the most difficult books for Christians in our age and culture to understand, appreciate, and apply to the needs of the church makes the previous lack of attention to it all the more lamentable.

The evangelical church now has two fine commentaries upon which to rely for help in understanding this fascinating OT book: Gordon J. Wenham's book in the NICOT series (see the review by D. L. Fowler in *GTJ* 1 [1980] 101–3) and this commentary by R. K. Harrison. Both writers have been careful to treat the text with the integrity and realism that are required in an exegetical/expository commentary.

Harrison's book contains an introduction, a verse by verse commentary, and two appendices—Appendix A is a rendering of Leviticus 13 into semi-technical English and Appendix B is a discussion of sex and its theology. A balance between the detailed exegesis of the book of Leviticus and its application to the church is maintained with admirable success throughout the book. Some of his applications may be questionable, but he does not fall prey to the kind of typological interpretation which overlooks the actual meaning of the text in its historical and cultural context.

The introduction to this commentary is interesting for a number of reasons. Harrison has manifested previously (see his *Introduction to the OT*) that he is particularly adept at handling liberal higher critical theories of the authorship, date, composition, and unity of OT books. This expertise is also apparent here as he attacks such theories with arguments derived from ancient Near Eastern studies. He takes Lev 7:37–38 as a colophon for 1:1–7:36 much in the same manner as he sees the recurrent phrase "these are the generations of" in Gen 1:1–37:2 as marking colophons therein (see pp. 15, 25, 84–88). Thus, he sees the ancient (Mosaic) form of composition reflected in the present text which in turn is taken as an argument against the source critical and tradition critical approaches to the material. This approach to the Genesis