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Course: DI/TH 311 Theology of the New Testament

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ASSIGNMENT: SUMMARY OF THE ARTICLE – UNITY AND /OR/ IN DIVERSITY? – A SURVEY OF RECENT NEW TESTAMENT THEOLOGY BY WENDEL SUN.

INTRODUCTION: unity and /or/ diversity is a theological survey that focuses on NTT. It was carried out by Professor Wendel Sun, the Academic Dean and the Associate Professor of Biblical Theology at a seminary in China. Professor Sun writes this article with the purpose of briefly survey some of the more important contributions to NTT.¹ He makes an interesting theological survey in which unity and diversity become the central focus of the entire work.

1. UNITY AND DIVERSITY IN RECENT NEW TESTAMENT THEOLOGY

The NTT is always in constant development; it grows up every day with a lot of publication of new books, articles, survey, etc. Besides this development, NTT has always been a subject of critics. Thus, Heikki Raisanen defends that some New Testament scholars abandon theological issues, and have their focus on historical research of early Christian thoughts and critical influence of the New Testament in modern society.² Thus, Raisanen adds that the work of the biblical scholars is not theological and narrative, but strictly historical and descriptive.³ Hence, on the same matter, Thomas Hatina defends that “for the NTT to find a wider audience or even to survive, especially in the West, its practitioners must respectfully and intelligently interact both secularism and religious pluralism.”⁴ Thus, both Raisanen and Hatina want to emphasize the primary argument of this article which is the unity and diversity of the NTT in modern time.

2. HOWARD MARSHALL, NEW TESTAMENT THEOLOGY: MANY WITNESS, ONE GOSPEL

In this second point, Sun analyses Marshall’s work on the exposition of the theology of each book of the New Testament. In the work, Marshall wants to show the underlying unity of the NTT and also the diversity of its text. Marshall’s argument is summed up in four primary issues: 1- the place of the New Testament and its canonical context; 2- the place of the NTT in the early Church’s missionary context; 3- the distinctive theology of each New Testament book; and 4- the theological unity of the New Testament as a whole. In summary, Marshall demonstrates the theological unity of the New Testament and he concludes that all the New Testament writers shared a common faith and a common purpose which is centred on the Messiah who has come for the whole world.⁵

¹ Cf. Wendel Sun, Unity and /or/ Diversity? A Survey of Recent New Testament Theology, JAET Vol. 19. N.2 (September 2015). 6.

² Cf. Ibid. 6.

³ Cf. Ibid. 7.

⁴ Ibid. 7.

⁵ Cf. Ibid. 7-8.

3. FRANK THIELMAN, THEOLOGY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT: A CANONICAL AND SYNTHETIC APPROACH

In this new author, Professor Sun explains Thielman's work, whose primary concern is to allow each book of the New Testament to speak by itself. Thielman does not go out of the theological approach which we are dealing with in this survey. As the previous authors, is also concerned about defending the uniqueness of each of the New Testament documents while at the same time demonstrating a fundamental unity across the New Testament canon. His work is divided into three main works: 1- the Gospels and the Acts; 2- the Pauline Letters and the Non-Pauline Letters; and 2- the Revelation of John. In summary, Thielman gives us a general view of the historical and theological issues that emphasizes the theological unity of the entire New Testament.⁶

4. FRANK J. MATERA, NEW TESTAMENT THEOLOGY: EXPLORING DIVERSITY AND UNITY

Matera presents diverse contributions of the various New Testament texts while showing that within this diversity there is a core of theological unity. He starts with diversity and moves toward unity, as the previous author did. Hence, he presents a summarized book with a focus on the context of the previous and current NTT Scholarship. His work is divided into four main points: 1- the Synoptic Tradition; 2- the Pauline Tradition; 3- the Johannine Tradition; and 4- the other voices. In summary, Matera summarizes the theology of each book thematically highlighting the unique emphasis on unity and diversity as well.⁷

5. THOMAS R. SCHREINER, NEW TESTAMENT THEOLOGY: MAGNIFYING GOD IN CHRIST

Schreiner does not follow the pattern of the previous authors. He opts rather, for a thematic approach arguing that this will aim in understanding both the overall unity of the New Testament and the individual contributions of its authors. He defends that the centre of the NTT is the work of God in Christ which is expressed in his redemptive power. In summary, Schreiner also agrees that there are a clear unity and diversity in the NTT.⁸

6. UDO SCHNELLE, THEOLOGY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

Schnelle deals with historical, thematic, and theological concerns in the context of a modified book-by-book analysis. His work is focused on the analysis of the Life of Jesus, and major transitions in the development of the NTT. He focuses on major important themes such as the emergency of Christological concerns, the mission of the Gentiles, the writing of the Gospels, and the rooting of the Gospel in the Mediterranean world. In summary, for Schnelle there is no unity, strictly speaking, however, the diversity is real with some limits.

CONCLUSION: it was an interesting assignment because it allowed me to have a wider understanding of what New Testament Theology is, and how it is done. Having gone through this article, I am surer about the New Testament Theology concepts in the view of many different authors.

⁶ Cf. Ibid. 9-10

⁷ Cf. Ibid. 11.

⁸ Cf. Ibid. 13-14.