

## Unity and Diversity in the NT

- History of the problem
- Elements of unity and diversity
- The basis of unity
- Implications

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## History of the Problem

- Unity of the NT assumed until recently.
  - Often read as book of dogma or system of propositional truth.
  - Recent scholarship has emphasized diversity, sometimes to exclusion of unity.

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## History of the Problem

- James Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the NT*.
  - No single orthodox theology in NT period.
  - NT documents define center (Christ) and circumference of theology.
  - Diversity in their understanding of Christ and in their practices.
  - Jesus of history = exalted Christ of faith.
  - Scholars: “Theologies but no theology.”

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## History of the Problem

- What is at stake in this question?
  - Determines whether our systematic theology can be based on a coherent NT foundation.
  - Does the concept of canon have any meaning?
  - Calls inspiration and authority into question.
  - Calls the analogy of Scripture into question.
  - Raises the issue of whether we can identify anything as orthodoxy or heresy.
  - How can Scripture be our standard?

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## Elements of Unity and Diversity

- What elements of diversity exist?

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## Elements of Unity and Diversity

- What elements of unity exist?

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## The Basis of Unity

- On what basis, if any, can we speak of an NT theology?
  - Concepts: salvation history, covenant, anthropology, justification by faith, kingdom of God, people of God, promise/fulfillment, Christology.
  - Ladd argues that identifying a center of NT theology distorts the fullness of the biblical witness.

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## The Basis of Unity

- Perhaps it's a narrative unity.
  - Matera (427, 479): a master story.
  - Would fit the narrative kerygma of early church (Dodd).
  - Fits a salvation-history approach.
- Can you summarize the metanarrative?

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## The Basis of Unity

- Matera summarizes it in 5 points:
  - Humans were in a predicament from which they could not extricate themselves.
  - God acted in Christ to bring salvation.
  - This salvation called into existence a people, a new sanctified community.
  - This community must live transformed lives and witness to what God has done.
  - They wait for Christ to return and bring God's salvation to completion.

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## The Basis of Unity

- Matera argues for a diverse unity.
  - Diversity because of different starting points.
  - Unity in common experience of salvation and common master story.
  - NT writers reason from solution to problem.
  - Sin is fully revealed only in the light of Christ.
  - We reason in the other direction: leads to possible misunderstandings.
  - Matera may overplay tensions over the Law.

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## Implications

- Implications of the unity-in-diversity?
  - Prooftexting is illegitimate; respect the context.
  - We shouldn't simplistically harmonize and miss the "inspired differences" (G. Wenham).
  - Diversity testifies to authenticity.
  - Christ was too big to fit into a single picture.
  - The gospel can be contextualized.
  - The gospel goes back to Jesus himself.
  - Individual documents can be read in light of the master story.

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## Implications

- Implications of the unity-in-diversity?
  - Church's task: we must make sure people know the master story!
  - Let the NT writers speak in their own voices.
  - Let ourselves be encouraged, challenged, and changed by the story they tell.

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