

**Rolf RENDTORFF. *The Canonical Hebrew Bible: A Theology of the Old Testament*. Trans. by David E. Orton. Leiden: Deo Publishing, 2005. 813 pp. \$59.95.**

The publication of David Orton's translation of Rolf Rendtorff's magnum opus was a significant enough event to result in a public discussion of it at the Society of Biblical Literature meeting. Among German OT scholars, Rendtorff, who views his project as a continuation of that of his even more famous mentor Gerhard von Rad, is a singular German voice advocating a form of canonical criticism in reading the Hebrew Bible. As such he is a promoter of some of the insights of Brevard Childs that have become so influential in the English speaking world. Rendtorff goes beyond Childs, while still being indebted to him, in developing a genuinely thorough OT theology. Rendtorff's sizeable tome shows what a canonical approach that takes the historical-critical consensus of a previous generation a step further might look like. He shares with Childs the unenviable (some would say impossible) task of owning and embracing the historical-critical approach and its supposed consensus without giving a really convincing rationale for why the final redaction should be given theological and interpretive primacy.

Rendtorff also has another item on his agenda lacking in Childs. For Rendtorff, whose later career has been intimately involved in inter-Jewish-Christian dialogue, the Hebrew Bible or OT (notice that the complete title in English includes both phrases!) is quite legitimately continued by both Rabbinic Judaism's Mishnah and by the NT of Christians. As such, Rendtorff lacks Childs' confessional approach while advocating a new basis for a postmodern ecumenism.

The volume is divided into three main sections. Rendtorff reads the Hebrew Bible theologically strictly in the Jewish canonical order. Interestingly here, Rendtorff uses the order which "asserted itself" (5) in Judaism since the invention of printing. In other words, Rendtorff uses a relatively contemporary Jewish order rather than a more flexible order in terms of the Latter Prophets and particularly the Writings that is found in the ancient period before the invention of books, much less printed books. This has little effect on the discussion of the Torah and the Prophets. An acknowledgment and discussion of the theological insight to be mined from other more ancient orders would have improved the volume, however, in the discussion of the Writings.

In the first main section Rendtorff leads the reader through the entire Hebrew Bible in its Jewish order. His massive learning, theological insight and subtle attention to intertextual echoing are particularly noteworthy. Because of Rendtorff's methodology and his theological sensitivity, the reader is guided through the OT in the Hebrew order and gains a sense of its underlying continuity without in any way ignoring the diversity of its various parts. While Rendtorff has not focused on the "canonical seams" as much as Sailhamer, he does a commendable job of making intercanonical connections and this must be seen as one of the most useful parts of his work.

The second major section is arranged thematically and, by Rendtorff's own admission, the categories are drawn from theology and not from the Bible. But to Rendtorff's credit, even here, he takes the canonical arrangement seriously and explains the various insights from different sections of the canon in the TaNaK order. Thus, a narrative quality informs and enriches his analysis of selected themes in the OT. His discussion of covenant and election would be a good example of this (432-446). In this section Rendtorff traces selected themes throughout the OT. He argues for the nonarbitrary nature of his selection of themes as arising from the canonical narrative. He thus begins with creation followed by covenant. The last theme, Israel's future, fits the canonical story. The themes are discussed in canonical order of their first mention. Each theme is then traced throughout the Hebrew canon without attempting a systematic doctrinal synthesis. In this way Rendtorff hopes to avoid imposing a foreign system upon the OT. Of course this is a tricky business and ultimately the selection of themes arises not merely from an inductive study of the Hebrew canon but from Rendtorff's sense of the theologically important. The fact that he at least discusses the chosen themes in the order in which they first arise and includes the rest of the canon's treatment of that theme in canonical order is a helpful clue about Rendtorff's idea of how to construct a genuinely biblical theology without the imposition of foreign theological categories onto the biblical material.

In the (much briefer) third section Rendtorff discusses methodological questions his approach raises. Here one reads his final justification of his approach and its implications for Jewish-Christian interfaith dialogue. Speaking schematically his work belongs in the intermediate stage of the rediscovery of biblical theology. He is still wed in significant ways to the quickly vanishing historical-critical consensus of previous generations. Often he feels obligated to tip his hat to that research while arguing for the need to go beyond it. Given his age,

context, and life experience, this is understandable. The fact that he never quite gets beyond it is at times lamentable, but this does not diminish the theological richness of his work. Along with Brueggemann, Goldingay, Fretheim, and Childs, Rendtorff's volume takes its place as a significant contribution to the consideration of OT theology informed by a heightened importance being given to the canonical form and arrangement of the Hebrew Bible.

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