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**THE INTERRELATIONSHIP OF THEOLOGY, HISTORY
AND LITERARY ARTISTRY IN ACTS: FROM A CANONICAL
READER'S PERSPECTIVE**

A Thesis

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by

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Broadly, the objective of this dissertation is to contribute to the ongoing studies on the biblical theology of the Acts of the Apostles.

CHAPTER ONE examines the canonical critical approach and its underlying presuppositions. Foundational to the present study is the supposition that the whole Scripture is word of God and thus, the expectation of a theological unity that is centered on “the Son” (John 1:1-4; Heb 1:1-4). It is my thesis that some specifics of that theological and Christological unity can be discerned when Acts is read in the light of the preceding canonical contexts which were ordered by the post-Ireneaus early church as hermeneutical guides for interpreting the NT Scriptures. The canonical contexts that are examined are: (1) the immediately preceding context of the Fourth Gospel [CHAPTERS TWO AND THREE], (2) the four Gospels as a unified whole [CHAPTER 4] and, ultimately, (3) the Old Testament [CHAPTER FOUR]. It is proposed that a canonically informed reading may yield significant insight into the theology that not only is inherent in the history Luke records in Acts about the continuation of “all that Jesus began to do and teach” following his ascension, but also guides the literary choices Luke makes in narrating that history.

The present study proceeds from the rhetorical critical observation that the ascension of Jesus, recorded in the opening discourse of Acts, creates the primary rhetorical ‘problem’ addressed in Acts: how will the mission to establish the kingdom



of God on earth, inaugurated by Jesus as narrated in the Gospels, continue post-ascension?

CHAPTER TWO makes a case from a canonical point of view that, among the four gospels, the rhetorical ‘problem’ posed by the ascension of Jesus in the opening discourse of Acts is most anticipated, most intentionally and comprehensively addressed by Jesus in the second half of the Fourth Gospel. It is proposed and argued in this chapter that Jesus’ teaching in the Fourth Gospel about the post-ascension roles of the Holy Spirit and the apostles best facilitates an introduction to and understanding of the theology intrinsic to the history and narrative art in the opening scenes of Acts.

CHAPTER THREE views the opening discourses of Acts from the perspective of the exegetical insights argued in chapter two. Chapter three assesses whether Jesus’ anticipation of and pre-planned response to the “problem” of the ascension is actualized in the opening scenes of Acts.

CHAPTER FOUR addresses the “problem” created by the ascension in Acts from the broader canonical perspective of the four-fold Gospel testimony about Jesus’ mission. It is argued that Jesus’ mission was defined by Old Testament messianic categories and fulfills the mission of Israel. It is proposed that the reader of Acts, being familiar with the four-fold Gospel, may perceive the striking resemblance of Jesus’ mission, gospel and the concurrent conflict and controversy he provoked manifest in the church’s life and ministry in the narrative of Acts. This chapter argues from a broader canonical approach that the tri-fold Old Testament missional roles of prophet, priest and king, which Jesus fulfills as the Messianic servant in the Gospels is clearly exhibited in Luke’s literary choices and underlying missional theology in Acts. The church’s continuation of Jesus’ tri-fold missional roles in Acts yields a second major plot dynamic that permeates the historical narrative of Acts: persecution. It is argued that these two core elements of theology endemic to the canonical history of God’s people work in literary counterpoint in the history and literary art of Luke in Acts. As the post-ascension manifestation of the



body of Christ on earth, the church continues to live out the tri-fold messianic, missional roles of Jesus in fulfillment of his words: “If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also” (John 15:20). These two contrapuntal themes set forth the core theology that guides Luke’s literary artistic choices and explains the ebb and flow and interconnectedness of the narratives of the continuation of Jesus’ mission by the church in Acts.

Dedicated to my beloved wife, Linda and my four wonderful children, Christin, Heather, Ryan and Rachel

KEY TERMS

Theology

History

Literary

Canonical Approach

Canonical Reader

Reader-response

Presuppositions

Mission

Ascension

Hermeneutical



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yielded a firmer grounding of my understanding and articulation of the canonical critical methodology implied in my theological presuppositions. Consequently, I believe this thesis is a much better work due to his critique and direction.

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“To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen.” Phil 4:20 NIV



LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ABD	<i>The Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> . Edited by D.N. Freedman. 6 vols.
ACNT	Augsburg Commentaries on the New Testament
AUSTR	<i>Australasian Theological Review</i>
<i>BibRes</i>	<i>Biblical Research</i>
<i>BTB</i>	<i>Biblical Theology Bulletin</i>
<i>BETI</i>	<i>Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium</i>
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
<i>HTh</i>	<i>Ho Theolgós</i>
<i>HBT</i>	<i>Horizons in Biblical Theology</i>
<i>Int</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
<i>ITQ</i>	<i>Irish Theological Quarterly</i>
IVP	InterVarsity Press
<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal of Evangelical Theological Society</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JSNT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
<i>JSNTSup</i>	Journal for the Study of the New Testament, Supplement Series
<i>JSS</i>	<i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i>
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
MT	<i>Modern Theology</i>
NIBCNT	New International Biblical Commentary on the New Testament



<i>NIDNTT</i>	<i>New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology.</i> Edited by C. Brown. 4 vols. Grand Rapids, 1975-1985
<i>NLH</i>	<i>New Literary History</i>
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
<i>NovT</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
<i>PTMS</i>	Princeton Theological Monograph Series
<i>PTR</i>	<i>The Princeton Theological Review</i>
<i>SP</i>	<i>Sacra Pagina</i>
<i>SBT</i>	<i>Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology</i>
<i>Semeia</i>	<i>Semeia</i>
<i>SBLDS</i>	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
<i>SBLMS</i>	Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series
<i>SNTSMS</i>	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
<i>SJTh</i>	<i>Southwestern Journal of Theology</i>
<i>StudBib</i>	<i>Studia Biblica et Theologica</i>
<i>Themelios</i>	<i>Themelios</i>
<i>TrinJ</i>	<i>Trinity Journal</i>
<i>TynB</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
<i>TZ</i>	<i>Theologische Zeitschrift</i>
<i>WTJ</i>	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>
<i>WUNT</i>	<i>Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament</i>
<i>WBC</i>	Word Biblical Commentary



CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION: THESIS, PRESUPPOSITIONS AND METHODOLOGY

1.1 Part I: Statement of the Problem and the Thesis

1.1.1 The Background of the Problem

Until the recent generations, too many evangelical Christians were able to keep the questions of inerrancy and hermeneutics separate.¹ The mere affirmation of biblical veracity was often seen as a guarantee for a straightforward interpretation of the text. Inerrancy was a given, isolated enough from exegetical study to stand on its own as a touchstone for truth. That touchstone still stands, but its tendency to be isolated from hermeneutics has been questioned. The issue of inerrancy has become for many “essentially the question of *how* the evangelical is going to *do* theology while holding to Biblical authority.”² To this generation has come the call to rethink hermeneutics.³ Church historian D. Clair Davis states, “Surely the hermeneutical questions are the most pressing of all before the evangelical world. A

¹Harvie M. Conn, “A Historical Prologue: Inerrancy, Hermeneutic, and Westminster,” in *Inerrancy and Hermeneutic*, ed. Harvie M. Conn (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 15-34.

²Robert K. Johnston, *Evangelicals at an Impasse* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1979), 2.

³D. Clair Davis, “Liberalism: The Challenge of Progress,” in *Challenges to Inerrancy: A Theological Response*, ed. Gordon Lewis and Bruce Demarest (Chicago: Moody, 1984), 84-86.



doctrine of inerrancy with no perceptible use, which in practice makes no difference, is hardly worth exerting the energies of the church for.”⁴

A closer link between norm and the interpretation of norm has come as evangelical scholarship has come to the conclusion that it is no longer sufficient to ask simply, 'What does an infallible Bible teach us?' Now the question is, 'How do we decide what an infallible Bible teaches us?' How will we understand the process by which God spoke through Luke in the first century so that we still hear him speak through Luke in the twenty-first? The classical tradition had asked, 'What does *the text* mean?' The new question has become, 'What do we mean by *meaning*?' Thus, the question of authority in hermeneutics becomes also the question of the responsibility of hermeneutics.⁵ Searching the text is said to yield only its *meaning*; the text must also search us as we yield to its *significance*. But how do we cross that line between meaning and significance? Hermeneutics has undergone a shift from a mere search for grammatical and historical rules in understanding the text to the utilization of literary methods to access meaning and significance.⁶

As the literary nature of the Bible has come to the forefront of scholarly attention during the latter decades of the twentieth century, a new approach to the text arose called literary criticism or aesthetic criticism.⁷ Some are claiming that the

⁴Ibid., 88.

⁵Moisés Silva, “Old Princeton, Westminster, and Inerrancy,” in *Inerrancy and Hermeneutic*, ed. Harvie M. Conn (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 74: “For inerrancy to function properly in our use of Scripture, an adequate hermeneutics is a prerequisite. But that is a far cry from suggesting that the doctrine of inerrancy automatically provides us with the correct hermeneutics, except in the rather general sense that it precludes any interpretation that suggests that God lies or errs.”

⁶In the liberal camp, redaction critic Norman Perrin makes this hermeneutical shift in “The Evangelist as Author: Reflections on Method in the Study and Interpretation of the Synoptic Gospels and Acts,” *Bib/Res* 17 (1972): 9: “This means we have to introduce a whole new category into our study . . . the category of general literary criticism. If the evangelists are authors, then they must be studied as other authors are studied.”

⁷Anthony C. Thiselton judges that “the turn towards literary theory in biblical studies constitutes one of the three most significant developments for biblical hermeneutics over the last



literary approach is not just another method alongside of form, redaction or tradition history but rather is a whole new approach, replacing all previous approaches.⁸

Of course, secular literary study is not a monolith. As a result many different schools of literary study have been applied to the Bible including structuralism, rhetorical criticism, deconstructionism, and narrative criticism. But apart from all of the variations in literary approaches, the literary approach in general presents a serious challenge to the evangelical.⁹ On the one hand, the literary approach may be perceived to be potentially quite dangerous to the doctrine of Scripture.¹⁰ On the other hand, there is much in the approach that aids in interpretation.¹¹

A critical danger to the evangelical pre-commitment to scriptural authority arises in the question as to whether literary artifice is compatible with accurate

quarter of a century. It is comparable in importance for biblical interpretation with the impact of post-Gadamerian hermeneutics and the emergence of socio-critical theory and related liberation movements. *New Horizons in Hermeneutics: The Theory and Practice of Transforming Biblical Reading* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 471. Examples of recent works would include: Meir Sternberg, *Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press). Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1981). Leland Ryken, *Words of Delight: A Literary Introduction to the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987). J.P. Fokkelman, *Reading Biblical Narrative: An Introductory Guide* (Leiderdorp, The Netherlands: Deo Publishing, 1999). Edgar V. McKnight and Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, *The New Literary Criticism and the New Testament* (Valley Forge, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1994). Tremper Longman, *Literary Approaches to Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Academie Books, 1987).

⁸A view presented, among others, by D. Robertson, "Literature, the Bible as," in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, supp. vol., ed. Keith Crim (Nashville: Abingdon, 1976), 547-51.

⁹ Since this is the tradition in which I carry on my scholarly efforts, the present thesis attempts to evaluate the canonical/literary approach from this perspective, as a canonical reader,—with particularly reference to reader-response or reception theory.

¹⁰C.F.H. Henry, "Narrative Theology: An Evangelical Appraisal," *TrinJ* NS (1987): 3-19.

¹¹For a convincing argument see Tremper Longman III, *Literary Approaches to Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987).



historical representation.¹² Can a text be artfully constructed and historically reliable at the same time?¹³ The modern literary approaches to the study of the Bible have a decided tendency to deny or severely limit any referential function in literature.¹⁴ This tendency has had some influence in recent studies on Acts.

In his important book *Literary Criticism and the Gospels*, Stephen D. Moore rightly expresses the concern that more traditionalist biblical scholars should not regard the turn to literary theory as merely “light exercise—‘fluff,’ as one colleague puts it.”¹⁵ Tremper Longman, in his introduction to literary criticism notes that, against the atomizing tendencies of the historical-grammatical method, literary approaches tend to emphasize whole texts, and in the case of reader-response theories needed attention is shifted to the role of the reader in the interpretive process.¹⁶

¹²C.F.H. Henry, “Narrative Theology,” 3,8. Henry decries narrative theology’s “flight from history to the perspectival that enjoins no universal truth-claims.” He worries that it “ignores intellectual analysis to maintain an assured connection of confessional premises with objective reality and valid truth.”

¹³V. Philips Long, *The Art Of Biblical History* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 150-1: “Of more pertinence to our present concern with the issue of why scholars disagree over historical questions is the fact that certain of the ‘literary approaches’ tend in *ahistorical*, or even *anti-historical*, directions.”

¹⁴Robert K. Johnston, *Evangelicals at an Impasse: Biblical Authority in Practice* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1979), 548: “. . . the new literary criticism may be described as inherently ahistorical.”

¹⁵Stephen D. Moore, *Literary Criticism and the Gospels: the Theoretical Challenge* (New Haven and London: York University Press, 1989), xviii.

¹⁶Longman, *Literary Approaches*.



1.1.2 The Canonical Reader and Reader-Response Theory

1.1.2.1 Structuralism, Formalism, and New Criticism

Jonathan Culler suggests that a central reason for the rise of interest in readers and reading is to be attributed to the orientation that was engendered by structuralism and semiotics.¹⁷ Structuralism or the New Criticism stressed that the text or work generated meaning in its own right. In structuralism, the reader is conceived as the product of 'codes,' so that critics came to treat a work as an intertextual construct, rooted in various cultural discourses on which it draws for its intelligibility. The outcome is the foregrounding of the reader as central determiner of meaning.¹⁸ Roland Barthes says, "the reader is the space on which all the quotations that make up a writing [cultural codes] are inscribed....A text's unity lies not in its origin [author] but in its destination [reader]."¹⁹ He further suggests that if "the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the author," many have been willing to pay that price.²⁰ With its attention to close reading and its taking seriously the subjective and creative element in interpretation, structuralism and formalism became the precursor to reader response criticism and reception theory, with its recognition of interpretive communities.

This movement away from author-focused theories of meaning to texts as linguistic systems transfers the focus away from the hermeneutical *Sitz im Leben* of

¹⁷Jonathan D. Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism After Structuralism* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1983), 32.

¹⁸Structuralists themselves seldom pursued a focus on the reader but concentrated on the codes and conventions responsible for a work's intelligibility.

¹⁹Roland Barthes and Stephen Heath, eds. *Image, Music, Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 146,148.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 148. Postmodernist, reader-response critic A.K.M. Adam agrees: "Postmodern interpreters may operate freely without fear of ghostly authors looking over their shoulders, coercing them to obey 'original intentions.'" *What Is Postmodern Biblical Criticism?* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1995), 20.



the author and original hearers. It is arguable, then, that for literary theory 'history' tends to become a category that is difficult to fully accommodate. Stanley Porter expresses deep concern in reference to the neglect of history in much of literary approaches:

The historical preoccupations which lie at the heart of Biblical studies appear strange to most secular literary critics, since the one thread that seems to run through secular reader-response criticism is the importance of the contemporary reader in defining and establishing the text and consequently, meaning. The reader grounds interpretation in the present, especially as it is characteristic of an interpretive community. This centre of authority is different from the avowed centre of authority in Biblical studies, however. And the two do not seem readily compatible, or at least compatible in any form which I have found convincing.²¹

An additional concern with formalism, new criticism and structuralism is that hermeneutical tradition is exchanged for that of the semiotic system.²² For these literary theorists a text is often regarded to be 'literary' if it seemed to carry with it layers and levels of meaning that very often transcended the immediate conscious thought of the writer. Meaning in effect is an autonomous system of signs and meanings in their own right, apart from the writer or author who had produced them.²³

²¹Stanley Porter, "Why Hasn't Reader-Response Criticism Caught On In New Testament Studies?" *Journal of Literature & Theology* 4 No. 3 (1990): 284.

²²For an excellent and convincing presentation of the philosophical and logical fallacies underlying postmodernism and reader-response theory see John C. Poirier, "Some Detracting Considerations for Reader-Response Theory," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 65 no 2 (Ap 2000): 250-263.

²³*Ibid.*, 260. Poirier maintains that "the fact that human experience is thoroughly linguistic does not mean that 'brute-factual' reality does not impinge upon it. There is no such thing as a thoroughgoing semiosis. Even the purest semiosis contains an element of mimesis—the ultimate *interpretatum* is still away a brute fact; otherwise, the semiosis could never make sense finally. Fish has shown just how deeply semiotic language is, but he has argued too much. Every semiosis must ultimately yield to an authorial (pre-linguistic) event."



1.1.2.2 Reader-Response and Reception Theory

In the late sixties and early seventies formalism, new criticism and structuralism give way to post-structuralism, reader-response or reception theory and postmodernism. The outcome is a shift to variable context-relative perceptions and constructions of socially-conditioned reading communities, whose expectations and norms were internal to their own social and semiotic conventions. Reader-response or reception theory places emphasis on the active role of the reader rather than on the role of author or text.²⁴ As understood and practiced by its more moderate proponents (i.e., Wolfgang Iser and Hans Robert Jaus), the reader 'completes' the meaning of a text, filling in the 'gaps.'²⁵ An underlying assumption for reader-response theory is that even if one may legitimately speak of an author's intention, it is not fulfilled until a reader appropriates the text. Until the reader actualizes it, the text, as 'sender' of a message has only potential meaning. Until it is interpreted and understood by its reader the text remains an abstraction. The reader's active engagement with the text is seen as a necessary component in any text having genuine meaning.

Reader-oriented literary theory that is influenced by post-modernism thinking declares that meaning arises from an interplay of forces within a text and from the social contexts of the readers and not from the intent of the author. Stanley Fish has become the most well-known, radical (he would argue 'consistent') advocate of the theory. He maintains that there is nothing 'in' the text to interpret, because he believes the only thing that exists is interpretation. He writes: "There is no single way of reading that is correct or natural, only 'ways of reading' that are

²⁴Anthony C. Thiselton notes that "If post-structuralism shifts attention to the reader, this is not to the consciousness of the *individual* reader of formalist theory, but to the *conventions, cultural codes, and historically-conditioned expectations which constitute the reading-community as a socio-cultural phenomenon.*" *New Horizons*, 496.

²⁵Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Read: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974) and *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978, 1980).



extensions of community perspectives...Interpretation is the source of texts, facts, authors, and intention...all...*products* of interpretation.”²⁶

Patrick Grant in his book, *Reading the New Testament*, acknowledges both the positive resources and perils offered by literary approaches.²⁷ He is concerned that socio-literary philosophical theories such as reader-response or reception theory move away from an author-focused theory of meaning and reading resulting in the deflation of any normative meaning of the biblical texts. Thus, the Bible loses its prophetic voice in challenging the worldview and lifestyle of the reader. Ernst Fuchs held that “the texts must translate us before we can translate them” or that “the truth has us ourselves as its object.”²⁸ The biblical writer’s direct confrontation of the Christian community is in stark contrast to reading strategies that stress the self-referring and unstable nature of texts and textual meanings derived from rhetorical interaction between context-relative, socio-narrative communities.²⁹ The danger in the ‘method,’ whether in the self-reflection by the

²⁶Stanley Fish, “Going Down the Anti-Formalist Road” in *Doing What Comes Naturally: Change, Rhetoric, and the Practice of Theory in Literary and Legal Studies* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 29.

²⁷Patrick Grant, *Reading the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989).

²⁸Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Two Horizons: New Testament Hermeneutics and Philosophical Description with Special Reference to Heidegger, Bultmann, Gadamer and Wittgenstein* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 73. Thiselton speaks persuasively of the importance of the transforming quality of the text, so that it is not just what the reader brings to the text, but what the text brings to the reader that is determinative. When a reader is transformed by a text, one will come to the text with changed presuppositions compared to when one first approached it. This is often referred to as the hermeneutical spiral. This is a process of change in understanding in front of the text, between text and reader, rather than a diachronic pre-literary process behind the text. Grant Osborne argues that “the historical-critical method has produced a vacuum in actually understanding Scripture,” for the historical-critical method does not allow the text to speak for itself. It is only interested in how the text came to be in the form it is. It does not give proper emphasis to the meaning of the text as it is. *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1991), 139.

²⁹“A growing number of scholars worldwide are placing culture above Scripture, so that authority resides in culture rather than within the Bible. These scholars do not bring their culture to be critiqued and interpreted by Scripture. They bring Scripture to be critiqued and interpreted by their culture. An international conference on biblical interpretation convened at the Divinity School,



individual or by extension the corporate community, is that it can take the form of “a distorting mirror.”³⁰

1.1.2.3 Canonically Defined Reader-Response and Reception Theory

In reaction, Paul Ricoeur insists that interaction with “the other” is important for the ethical discussion of avoiding “narcissism.”³¹ Distancing itself from naïve overconfidence in human reason, a primary presupposition of biblical hermeneutics accounts for the distorting noetic effects of human sinfulness (Jer 17:9; 1 Cor 4:4-5). Socio-critical theorists like Jürgen Habermas acknowledge the significant part played by ‘interests’ of power, desire, self-affirmation, self-

Vanderbilt University October 21-24, 1993 would be a prime example. An example from the conference was the feminist reading of the Matt 15:21-28 pericope about the Canaanite woman who asks Jesus for healing for her demon-possessed daughter. Jesus did not respond. It was claimed that Christ marginalized the woman while focusing on something else. Christ then says He was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel and thereby shows racism. This is compounded by Christ’s comment: “It is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to their dogs” (v. 26). None of this dialogue is perceived from the standpoint of Christ testing her faith, even though Jesus concluded that she had “great faith” (v. 28). This option is ignored in a quest to picture Christ as irrelevant to female readers, as either a Christ presented in a male-dominated social location or a Christ who was the product of His male-dominated culture.” Norman R. Gulley, “Reader-Response Theories in Postmodern Hermeneutics: A Challenge to Evangelical Theology” in *The Challenge of Postmodernism: An Evangelical Engagement*, ed. David S. Dockery (Wheaton, Ill.: Bridgepoint/Victor, 1995), 222.

Robert M. Fowler summarizes Fish’s response to critics that his position grants too much authority to the reader: “The reader is not ‘too powerful,’ he says, and the critical enterprise is not doomed to subjectivism or solipsism, because the reader and his reading experience are defined and controlled by the critical community of which he is a part. The critical presuppositions employed by the reader to objectify and analyze the text are deprived from the ‘interpretive community’ in which the reading takes place. Readers may control texts, but that does not lead to anarchy, because interpretive communities control readers.”⁹ “Who is ‘the Reader’ in Reader Response Criticism?” *Semeia*, no 31 [1985]: 14.0 I would suggest that this is canonically naïve. Not merely individuals, but every unregenerate community of readers is blinded by ‘the god of this world’ because “the whole world lies in the power of the evil one” (1 John 5:19).

³⁰Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd English ed. (London: Sheed and Ward, 1989), 276.

³¹Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. K. Blamey (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 113-297. Ricoeur is concerned about the strong element of human self-deception and ‘resistance to truth’ on the part of individual consciousness or the ‘heart.’ He holds that this resistance stems from “a primitive and persistent narcissism...a narcissistic humiliation” that involves “suspicion [and] guile” and is trapped within attempts to shelter the self from disclosures that come from beyond the self. *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics*, trans. D. Ihde (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1974), 151-53.



aggrandizement, and forces of oppression.³² In recognition of these distorting forces, a biblically defined reader-response theory espouses a canonically derived and central presupposition of hermeneutics: the essential and necessary role of the Holy Spirit who convicts and convinces readers of individual and corporate sin (John 16:8). The concomitant biblical reader-response is repentance, as the truth of the text addresses the reader's life (cf. James 1:23).³³ Orthodox Christianity and the second century reader believed that the Holy Spirit calls the reader to properly respond to the text and enables conformity to its truth.

After an extended examination in an effort to define the term 'response' in the phrase reader-response theory, Donald G. Marshall concludes: "If we are to take the word seriously, 'response' suggests that something [author-text] lays us under an obligation, makes a claim on us which we must answer, perhaps repeatedly, in an appropriate way, a way whose mirroring or—better—echoing makes what we are responsible to or responsive to resound."³⁴ Without this hearing and yielding to the 'other voice' (author) by a liberating work of the Holy Spirit, the reader is left with a narcissistic, distorted meaning of the text. Norman Holland plainly states that "we use the literary work to symbolize and finally to replicate ourselves."³⁵ Ricoeur cogently argues that a secularly defined reception theory reading of the text can

³²Jürgen Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interest*, 2nd ed. (London: Heinemann, 1978).

³³In the discourse containing Peter's Pentecost speech, the crowd inquires of the author of the speech as to what the proper hearer-response should be if they have accurately understood the author's intended meaning. Peter replies: "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38). Any application of a reader-response theory to the biblical text that is not based upon the presupposition, among others, of the canonical doctrine of the total depravity of man, ends in self-delusion.

³⁴Donald G. Marshall, "Reading as Understanding: Hermeneutics and Reader-Response Criticism" in *Christianity and Literature*, 33 no 1 (Fall 1983), 38.

³⁵Norman Holland, "Transactive Criticism: Re-Creation Through Identity" in *Criticism* 18 (1976): 342.



result in idolatry.³⁶ The orthodox Christian reader holds that the reader can project his or her own interests, desires, and selfhood onto that which the biblical text states and thereby re-create and 'construct' God in our own image through the reading process (Rom 6:6; Eph 4:22; Col 3:9). The Spirit's work is to convict the reader concerning the self-absorbed, self-deceptive readings and resistance to the truth (John 16:7-11). From the perspective of the canonical reader, the task of the inspired text, in conjunction with the activity of the Spirit, is to reconstruct/restore the reader to the image of God as presented in Christ (Rom 8:29; 2 Cor 3:18; Col 3:10; 1 John 3:1-2).

Gadamer recognized the key importance of the fusion of the two horizons of author and the reader for understanding the text. His fusion of the two horizons respects authorial and challenges the subjectivism of secular reader-response theories. As Thiselton rightly says:

The hermeneutical goal is that of a steady progress towards a fusion of horizons. But this is to be achieved in such a way that the particularity of each horizon is fully taken into account and respected. This means *both* respecting the rights of the text *and* allowing it to speak.³⁷

For reader-response theory, understanding is enabled by the life-world that the reader brings with him or her to the text, including the function of language as used in that life-world. Thus, for a non-canonically defined reader-response theory the reader functions as a second author, or as Bernard C. Lategan states it, the reader is "co-responsible for the creation of the text as a meaningful communication."³⁸ It is

³⁶Paul Ricoeur, *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1974).

³⁷Thiselton, *Two Horizons*, 445.

³⁸Bernard C. Lategan, "Reader-Response Theory," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David N. Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 5:627.



not the meaning of the text that is determinative, but the meaning that the reader brings to the text that is decisive.³⁹

In contrast, a canonical reader adopts the worldview of the canon as the hermeneutical starting point.⁴⁰ An objective hermeneutic must pursue a method that is appropriate to the object of its study.⁴¹ A canonically defined reader-response theory begins with a God who is there (the ultimate author—Gen 1:1).⁴² This, then, becomes the central, organizing and unifying principle of the canonical reader's hermeneutic and theology.⁴³ The claim of the canon is that God has uniquely

³⁹“‘Reading’ as a term without semantic opposition seems neutral and innocent; but as a contrastive term to ‘interpretation’ or ‘understanding’ the newer paradigm shifts the focus from epistemological communication and interpretative judgment to semiotic effect, with some considerable loss for biblical scholarship and for the status of the Bible itself.” Thiselton, *New Horizons*, 503.

⁴⁰John Barton notes: “the canonical approach is conceived as a *theological* mode of study. It is an attempt to heal the breach between biblical criticism and theology, and it assumes (at least for the purpose of method) that the interpreter is not a detached, neutral critic free from religious commitment, but a believer, trying to apply the biblical text to the contemporary life of the Church.” *Reading the Old Testament: Method in Biblical Study* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984), 90.

⁴¹“Theological science and natural science are both at work in the same world seeking understanding within the rational connections and regularities of space and time where they pursue their respective inquiries and let their thinking serve the reality into which they seek to inquire. This does not mean that theology can allow its own subject-matter to be determined by the results of scientific work in other fields or that it can extrapolate their particular procedures into its own field of operation, but that it must pursue its own distinctive ends *in a scientifically rigorous way on its own ground and in accordance with the nature of its own proper object*. Yet because it operates in the same world as natural science it cannot pursue its activity in a sealed-off enclave of its own, but it must take up the relevant problems and question posed by the other sciences in clarifying knowledge of its own subject-matter. Hence it can make legitimate use of analogies taken from the other sciences where similar problems arise in order to help it penetrate into the inherent intelligibility of its own object, and under its control bring it to such precise articulation in its understanding that there is no confusion between knowing and what is known, and no unwarranted intrusion of subjective factors into the transcendental content of its knowledge.” Thomas F. Torrance, *Space, Time, and Incarnation* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), viii.

⁴²Francis A. Schaeffer, *The God Who is There* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1998).

⁴³Contra James Barr. Barr suggests, approvingly, that Child's major departure from the earlier failed biblical theology movement was that he proposed a *formal* rather than a *material* ('inspiration') principle, namely, the canon. Barr comments that “by its own nature it [canon as formal



revealed himself through the history of Israel and the person of Jesus.⁴⁴ The God described in the canon has further addressed humans through prophets and finally through his Son (Heb 1:1-2). The final *genre* is not just a compendium of types of literature generated by the human authors, but the unified divine *genre* that they convey—the Word of God. As Calvin states: “Scripture exhibits clear evidence of its

principle] coincides exactly with the boundary of scripture....By taking the canon as principle one was no longer forced to argue that there was an absolute difference in content, in ideas, in thought patterns, between the Bible and the rest of the world....The biblical material was normative, not because it was necessarily different in content, but because the canon separated it off and gave it its distinctive shape.” *Holy Scripture: Canon, Authority, Criticism* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983), 135.

⁴⁴It is clear that the biblical writers thought of the Scriptures as unique when compared to other writings. They spoke of them as “sacred writings” (2 Tim 3:15), “oracles of God” (Rom 3:2; Heb 5:12, ESV) and therefore as “holy Scriptures” (Rom 1:2). Biblical writers never claim to have originated their writings. Rather they speak of seeing in vision (Isa 1:1; Jer 38:21; Amos 1:1; Micah 1:1; Hab 1:1). Nehemiah said to God, “warned them by your Spirit through your prophets” (Neh 9:30; cf. Zech 7:12). David said, “The Spirit of the LORD speaks by me; his word is on my tongue. The God of Israel has spoken; the Rock of Israel has said to me” (2 Sam 23:2-3). Prophets spoke of being filled or moved by the Holy Spirit. Thus Ezekiel exclaimed, “the Spirit entered into me and set me on my feet, and I heard him speaking to me” (Ezek 2:2). He continues, “And the Spirit of the LORD fell upon me, and he said to me, “Say, Thus says the LORD” (Ezek 11:5). In his work of speaking God’s messages, Micah testified, “I am filled with power, with the Spirit of the LORD” (Micah 3:8).

The New Testament gives insight into the function of the Holy Spirit in the writing of the Old Testament. Jesus said that David spoke by the Holy Spirit (Mark 12:36). Paul said in Rome, “the Holy Spirit was right in saying to your fathers” and quotes Isaiah 6:9-10 which speaks of those who listen but never understand for they have closed their eyes (Acts 28:25-27). The Old Testament people of Israel were often that way. They did not perceive that the prophets really had a divine message from God. They only listened to them as human messengers. This is a recurring problem through human history, and is evidenced so remarkably since the Enlightenment in the way people come to Scripture not as a divine message from God but merely as a human message.

Peter said about the ancient prophets: “the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories” (1 Peter 1:11). “For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:21). The origin of Scripture is clearly not human according to its self-testimony, but rather, the Spirit of God. It is appropriate then that biblical writers refer to their writing as written by the Holy Spirit. Thus the author of Hebrews says, “Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says” (Heb 3:7) and “By this the Holy Spirit indicates” (Heb 9:8).

The New Testament writers not only testified that the Holy Spirit spoke through the Old Testament prophets, but that He was the same divine person speaking through their writings. Thus Christ gave “commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen” (Acts 1:2), many of whom became writers of New Testament books. John could speak of being “in the Spirit” (Rev 1:10) when he was given a vision and commissioned to “write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches” (Rev 1:11).



being spoken by God, and, consequently, of its containing his heavenly doctrine.”⁴⁵ Daniel B. Clendenin commends the Reformers because “they came to the text to listen and not to question. Instead of coming to the texts as subjects who lord it over an objective datum they saw themselves as objects and the text as the subject.”⁴⁶

1.1.2.4 The Canonically Defined Interpretive Community

Stanley Porter maintains that “Fish’s concept of ‘interpretive communities’ appears to be one of the strategic concepts which will have to be utilized if reader-response criticism is going to emerge fully in New Testament studies.” As an interpretive community, the Reformers spoke of Scripture as *sola scriptura*, *tota scriptura*, and *prima scriptura*. As *sola scriptura*, Scripture is allowed to interpret Scripture. As *prima scriptura*, Scripture is viewed as the primary source for interpreting God’s word. As *tota scriptura*, all of Scripture can be used in this process. Since God is held to be the author of Scripture (though the inspired human authors are essential co-authors), the Word of God is viewed as transcultural with its social location ultimately grounded in the Trinity, centered upon Christ⁴⁷ and inspired by the person of the Holy Spirit. And only secondarily, yet importantly, is it located within the social location of the human writers who under Spirit inspiration presented God’s life-world in and through Christ (John 1:14,18), and subsequently in the social location of the readers in the original and subsequent generations. This indicates significant warrant for a canonically defined reader-response theory. Scripture has one and the same Holy Spirit author working through all the human authors in different locations in different times so that the divine authorship is in one

⁴⁵John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (London: Clarke, 1962), 1:64.

⁴⁶D.B. Clendenin, “Learning to Listen: Thomas C. Oden on Postcritical Orthodoxy,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 34 (March 1991): 99.

⁴⁷Christ himself interpreted the Hebrew Bible in such a way that his work as Messiah shed light on it (Luke 24:27) and it also shed light on his work as Messiah (Luke 24:45-46).



spiritual location. That one spiritual location has a far more determinative, shaping influence on Scripture than do the various social-cultural contexts in which the story of Scripture and its human authors and readers are located (though important). According to the canon of Scripture, God stands in prophetic critique of human culture (John 3:19; 12:31; 16:8; Jude 15), and calls humanity to the proper reader-response of repentance and faith in Christ. These suppositions have important implications for the cross-cultural relevance of the canon that is beyond the scope of the present work.

Revelation in Scripture is the result of the Holy Spirit inspiring prophets and apostles, guiding in the formation of the canon and giving to the interpreters the guidance in understanding (2 Pet 1:21). David Dockery correctly analyzes that in the post-Enlightenment, postmodern world there needs to be a restoration of the Holy Spirit's function in the interpretation of the Scripture to its proper place.

The idea of illumination as enablement for understanding the text in this manner (see 1 Cor 2:10-16) has at times disappeared from the contemporary discussion. We need to realize that we search not only for the external meaning of the text but for its inner meaning as well. We are suggesting that discovering Scripture's meaning involves not only examining the author's result in the written text, but also the Holy Spirit's work of illuminating the reader's mind to interpret the text. With the enablement of the Spirit, discerning a text's meaning and significance is not only possible but plausible.⁴⁸

Without the successful convicting and illuminating work of the Holy Spirit the reader's inclination is to transform the text rather than to be transformed by the text. Thiselton warns that if textual meaning is the product of readers, then "texts cannot reform these readers 'from outside.'"⁴⁹ Thus, every person in every social location is

⁴⁸David S. Dockery, *Biblical Interpretation: Then and Now, Contemporary Hermeneutics in the Light of the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 158.

⁴⁹Thiselton, *New Horizons*, 549. Thiselton offers five significant reasons why radical reader-response hermeneutics is detrimental. He cautions that "the challenge *to understand* may necessitate *self-reorientation* of an individual or corporate nature. It may not be easy; and the reader,



free to read Scripture from his or her own personal social and cultural perspective. In principle, therefore, there can be as many readings of Scripture as there are readers.

In contrast, a canonical reader comes to Scripture with a worldview that believes in a God who reveals Himself in space and time, where the biblical accounts are not myths but the record of God in His salvific work for humankind. Under such a view of Scripture a canonically defined reader-response theory is possible—a faithful listening to the Word of God in and through Scripture. The reader-response challenge to the hearers/readers in the seven churches in Revelation chapters two and three is: “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” A canonically defined reader-response or reception-theory places the person and work of the Holy Spirit at the center of the interaction of the reader and the text. Mere human socio-linguistic, semiotic competence in reading the canon, devoid of the convicting, illuminating and guiding work of the Spirit leads to idolatry. Fish writes in retrospect about when he used to look for authorial intention: “I did what critics always do. I ‘saw’ what my interpretive principles permitted or directed me to see, and then I turned round and attributed what I had ‘seen’ to the text.”⁵⁰ Ironically, I would agree with Fish, except that he describes the reader unaffected by the work of the Holy Spirit. It is a sufficient truth, but not a necessary one. It frequently leads to an idolatrous ‘reading’ of the author’s intention, but does not necessarily need to be so. Norman Holland approaches reader-response theory from a psychological perspective. He maintains that “every reader” transforms a narrative into a wish-fulfillment fantasy, in effect, about himself

as Bonhoeffer comments on the context of a theology of the cross, may not be able to understand ‘on his or her own terms.’ The key issue, we shall argue in the next chapter, which arises from the work of Stanley Fish is whether a community of readers can be shaped and judged by texts, as it were, ‘from outside,’ or whether they must remain trapped in their own contextual relativism, hearing no prophetic summons from outside and beyond.” *New Horizons*, 503.

⁵⁰Stanley Fish, “Introduction, or How I Stopped Worrying and Learned to Love Interpretation,” in *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), 12.



or herself.⁵¹ He argues that the ego's defenses perform like a doorstep, to keep at bay invitations to interpret the text in disappointing or challenging ways. I would again make the same response I just made in reference to Fish—it is a sufficient explanation, but not a necessary one—for which I shall now make a case.

Thiselton observes that if Paul regards prayers, as human address to God, as Holy Spirit initiated communication through persons to God (Rom 8:15,16), “how much more in the case of address *from* God” should we understand it as initiated and facilitated by the Holy Spirit. He continues: “In a co-operative shared work, the Spirit, the text, and the reader engage in *a transforming process*, which enlarges horizons and creates *new horizons*.”⁵² A primary new horizon for a Spirit regenerated believer is that he or she reads the canon first and foremost as an adopted member (‘sonship’) in fellowship with the Trinity (John 1:12; Rom 8:14; Gal 4:5; 1 John 1:3) and secondarily with the body of Christ, the church ([‘brotherhood,’ ‘body members’] Mark 3:35; Rom 12:4-8; 1 Peter 2:17; 1 Cor 12:12-25; Eph 5:30; 1 John 3:10). These, then, become for the canonical reader the dominant communities that influence ones reading, interpretation, and understanding.

A canonical reader who is ‘crucified with Christ’ (Gal 2:20) experiences a de-centering of the self as well as a radical social transformation that profoundly affects reading of Scripture (Matt 10:32-38; Mark 10:29-30; Luke 12:51-53; 14:26-27). I believe this was the experience of Paul on the road to Damascus (Acts 9). Post-conversion, Paul’s reader-response to the reading of Scripture is radically transformed. Charles Winquist describes this as “a transformation of consciousness...a re-ordering of values and a new perception of meanings.”⁵³ The theology of the cross, central to the New Testament (1 Cor 1:23; 2:2; Gal 6:14),

⁵¹Norman Holland, *Five Readers Reading* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975), 117; especially 113-21.

⁵²Thiselton, *New Horizons*, 619.

⁵³Charles Winquist, *Practical Hermeneutics: A Revised Agenda for the Ministry* (Chico, California: Scholars Press, 1980), 17 and 36.



performs its trans-cultural function, challenging the corporate constructs, expectations, and wish-fulfillments of every community and individual as a scandalous reversal of human expectations and values.

1.1.2.5 The Cross, Reader-Response and Interpretive Community

For a canonical reader, the cross is a trans-contextual liberating critique of all interpretive communities. If there is no 'meta-critique' of sinful human communities and individuals trans-culturally from 'outside,' hermeneutics serves only to sustain the unregenerate corporate and individual self, structures, and values. Interpretation is consequently ethno-centric by nature and endlessly polyvalent. This trans-cultural application of the cross is central to Jesus' appeal that "if *anyone* would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me" and "*whoever* does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple" (Luke 9:23 // Mark 8:34; 14:27). The early church understood Jesus' command to make disciples of all nations (Matt 28:19-20; Acts 1:8) as transcultural as evidenced by the programmatic narrative of Acts which moves from Jerusalem to Rome and to the Jews first and then the Gentiles. Paul broadens the 'meta-critique' of the cross work of Christ to be trans-universal when he says, "and through him to reconcile to himself *all things*, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross" (Col 1:20). All interpretive communities, whether angelic or human, stand under the 'meta-critique' of the cross.⁵⁴

The cross and resurrection give rise to the possibility of an interpretive community where there is true liberation, where grace is available to all, for "there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ (Gal 3:28). One experiences a new identity within a new

⁵⁴Contra Fish and Rorty who insist, almost by definition that a trans-cultural critique cannot exist because all criteria remain relative to what is held to count as criteria within a given social community. But I am arguing that this is self-deception under the blinding power of sin according to the biblically defined doctrine of the sinful human nature (Rom 1:21; 3:23; 5:12; 7:23).



community.⁵⁵ In anticipation of the eschaton, this transformation is an ongoing experience for the regenerated canonical reader as Paul notes in 2 Cor 3:18—“And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed (μεταμορφούμεθα) into the same image (εἰκόνα) from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.” In anticipation of the eschaton, a canonical community should acknowledge that it is still continuing to undergo transformation by the Word of God and the work of the Spirit. It reads, with appropriate humility, in pursuit of an accurate understanding and meaning of the text that will match with the reality when it no longer sees in a mirror dimly, but then face to face (1 Cor 13:12). The following section will unpack in further detail the presuppositions under which I, as a ‘real reader’ within the canonical community, interpret Scripture. It is my attempt to discern and clarify the presuppositions the ‘implied reader’ of the canon would embrace. Robert Fowler defines the ‘implied reader’ as “the reader the text invites us to be....the reader we must be willing to become in order to experience the narrative in the fullest measure.”⁵⁶

⁵⁵ See Gert J. Steyn, “Driven By Conviction and Attitude! Ethics in the Acts of the Apostles” in *Identity, Ethics, and Ethos in the New Testament* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2006), 135-63.

⁵⁶Fowler, “Who is ‘the Reader’ in Reader Response Criticism?,” 10, 12. As I have previously argued, whether that invitation is accepted and actualized so that there is a ‘merging’ of the ‘implied reader’ with the ‘real reader’ is dependent upon the successful work of the Holy Spirit. Fowler continues: “Granted the usefulness of Chatman’s terminology, he glosses over one problem spot that requires attention: the nature of the implied reader (and *mutatis mutandis* the implied author). He places both of these entities within the box labeled ‘narrative text,’ claiming them to be ‘immanent’ to the text. A clean break is therefore made between the reader in the text and the reader outside of the text, a division that is problematic, to say the least. In fact, one of the recurring debates among reader-oriented critics concerns the relationship between the text and the reader. Stated in its most extreme form, the question here is: *does the text control the reader or does the reader control the text?*” Ibid., 13. Fish’s response is that the text cannot really control reading in any objective sense, because the text is invented in the process of being read. The text and all its features are only defined and therefore brought into existence by the reader’s interpretive strategies. It is the reader who objectifies the text and its characteristics in the first place, and thus controls it. Again, I have argued that this would be true, absent the work of the Holy Spirit, who acts to liberate the reader from self-interested lording over the text.



1.1.3 Statement of the Problem and the Resultant Thesis

For those biblical interpreters who take their cue from trends in secular literary criticism that are essentially ahistorical in orientation, historical questions can easily be seen as uninteresting and even unwelcome interruptions to the enjoyment and meaning of a good story such as the book of Acts presents.⁵⁷ A number of evangelical scholars have expressed significant concern about literary and narrative approaches. Tremper Longman points to a number of dissertations on the book of Acts written from a literary perspective that examine the structure of Acts and conclude that it is highly structured, but that it “does not convey true historical information.”⁵⁸ V. Philips Long notes that with the rise of studies on biblical narrative “the *nature* and *extent* of the historian’s contribution” has become greatly debated.⁵⁹ That debate is particularly focused on whether “*narrative form* as such is an aspect of reality itself or is a product solely of the historian’s imagination.”⁶⁰ Carl Henry observes that there has been extensive debate “underway in some evangelical circles over whether narrative hermeneutics should be welcomed as an ally that is

⁵⁷“Narrative hermeneutics embraces uncertainty over historicity. The primary interest of Christian interpretation need not be and is not historiography. But a narrative-dramatic approach involving kerygmatic creativity is so open to realistic theological fiction that it readily obscures historical fact and clouds the foundations of a stable faith. The Christian Gospel is inseparably dependent upon God’s self-revelation and soteric sacrifice within the historical space-time continuum, and it is incumbent on those who claim that narrative story and history are not incompatible to clarify which historical specifics are nonnegotiable.” C.H.F. Henry, “Narrative Theology: An Evangelical Appraisal,” *Trinity Journal* 8, no. 1 (1987): 13.

⁵⁸Tremper Longman III, “Storytellers and Poets in the Bible: Can Literary Artifice Be True?” in *Inerrancy and Hermeneutic* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 145. The dissertations are as follows: Susan M. Praeder, “The Narrative Voyage: An Analysis and Interpretation of Acts 27-28” (Ph.D. diss., Graduate Theological Union, 1980); Charles B. Puskas, Jr., “The Conclusion of Luke-Acts 28:16-31” (Ph.D. diss., St. Louis University, 1980); William R. Long, “The Trial of Paul in the Book of Acts: Historical, Literary, and Theological Considerations” (Ph.D. diss., Brown University, 1982); Edwin S. Nelson, “Paul’s First Missionary Journey as Paradigm: Literary-Critical Assessment of Acts 13-14” (Ph.D. diss., Brown University, 1982).

⁵⁹V. Philips Long, *The Art Of Biblical History*, 69.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*



essentially orthodox.”⁶¹ Scot McKnight expresses his concern that “until more careful analyses of reference and historical intention are completed, literary criticism will remain a ‘trend’ and will not become ‘standard method’ for generations to come.”⁶² But that a historical truth claim is being made by Luke in Acts – from a canonical reader’s perspective - is unmistakable, e.g., the Prologue.⁶³ One may choose to deny the truth-value of Luke’s account, but one is simply not free to read Luke as if no historical truth claim has been made.⁶⁴

This leads directly to my thesis: *From a canonical reader’s perspective, a literary analysis of the historical book of Acts is not a priori incompatible with a high view of the historicity of the text, even one which affirms the inerrancy and infallibility of Scripture in the area of history.* Literary artistry and reliable historiography should not be set in opposition.⁶⁵ It is my contention that the biblical narrator, Luke, is not only concerned to tell us facts but also to guide our perspective and responses to those events through literary artifice.⁶⁶ Michael J. Toolan observes, “Narrators

⁶¹C.H.F. Henry, “Narrative Theology,” 7.

⁶²Scot McKnight, “Literary Criticism of the Synoptic Gospels,” *TrinJ* NS (1987): 57-68.

⁶³Terrance Callan, “The Preface of Luke-Acts and Historiography,” *New Testament Studies* 31 (1985), 580: “The stated purpose of Luke-Acts seems to mark it as a history . . . written to provide a true account of something.” Ben Witherington III concludes, after a lengthy discussion of background and text matters: “Luke’s reference to a careful investigation of ‘everything’ from the beginning, coupled with his reliance on the sacred tradition passed down to those who were both eyewitness and minister of the word, amounts to his profession to being a serious religious historian.” *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 51. Darrell L. Bock concludes, “Luke is a credible historian.” *Acts* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 6. Cf. F.F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 34.

⁶⁴Colin Hemer, *The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1989). I. Howard Marshall, *Luke*, 13-76; *idem*, *I Believe in the Historical Jesus* (London, 1977).

⁶⁵D. Carr, “Narrative and the Real World: An Argument for Continuity,” *HTh* 25 (1986), 118: “. . . narrative is not merely a possibly successful way of describing events; its structure inheres in the events themselves.”

⁶⁶Longman, *Literary Approaches*, 58: “The question of historical truth boils down to the question of who ultimately is guiding us in our interpretation of these events. If we look ultimately to



assert their authority to tell, to take up the role of knower or entertainer... in relation to the addressees' adopted role of learner or consumer. To narrate is to make a bid for a kind of power."⁶⁷

The Scriptures cannot be reduced to one function, whether aesthetic, historical or theological.⁶⁸ Each literary genre of Scripture has its own literary strategy in expressing historical and theological reality. The book of Acts is theologically directed, literarily shaped and historically reliable.⁶⁹ F.F. Bruce argues that by the exacting standards of some who wrote about the requirements of good historiography in the Greco-Roman world, Luke's work measures up quite well.⁷⁰ I. Howard Marshall concurs, stating that Luke

is a theologian in his own right and must be treated as such. For the moment enough has been said to show that a blanket condemnation of Luke as a historian of the early church is uncalled for. We do not wish to make exaggerated claims for his reliability, nor to suggest that his views of the historian's task were identical with those of the modern historian. But it is unfair to suggest that he is a thoroughly tendentious and unreliable writer, freely rewriting the history of the early church in the interests of his own theology.⁷¹

human authors, then literary art may be deceptive. If we look to God, then we cannot have deception."

⁶⁷Michael J. Toolan, *Narrative: A Critical Linguistic Introduction* (London and New York: Routledge, 1988), 3.

⁶⁸T. Long, *The Art of Biblical History*, 57: "Above all, false dichotomies such as 'the Bible is theology not history' or 'the Bible is literature not history' must be avoided. The Bible evinces an interest in all three."

⁶⁹For an understanding of history adopted in the present work see Bruce Marshall, "Meaning and Truth in Narrative Interpretation: A Reply to George Schner," *Modern Theology* 8 (1992).

⁷⁰F.F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles: The Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans), 29-31.

⁷¹I. Howard Marshall examines and evaluates three issues that are raised in reference to history in Luke-Acts. The first issue is whether Luke's narratives reflect accuracy in relation to "the background, which he describes." He notes that W.M. Ramsay, "who began his research with the assumption that Acts was a tendentious production dating from the middle of the second century,



Comparing Luke's writing with the practices of ancient historians and their views about the historian's task, Hemer observes "the existence of a distinctive and rigorous theory of historiography."⁷² I will argue that Luke intends not only to inform historically, but also is concerned to guide our perspective and responses to events through the use of various literary devices.⁷³ As author/narrator of Acts, he controls the way we view the events he writes by selectivity, artful structuring and crafted emphasis.⁷⁴ But these literary choices in historiography are theologically directed.⁷⁵ The biblical storyteller as well as the biblical poet attributes the great events that happen in Israel or in the Church to God. The author's intention is to interpret that history in the light of the reality of God and His interaction with the world.

convinced him that Luke was a first century historian with an accurate knowledge of Asia Minor and the Aegean area." He concludes that E. Haenchen's and H. Conzelmann's challenges to this conclusion are insufficient. Marshall himself concludes that "compared with other ancient historians Luke acquits himself very creditably. In matters of detail his historical stature is high." The second issue pertains to whether the speeches in Acts are historically 'tainted' by Luke to reflect his own theology, rather than that of the original speaker. Marshall's conclusion is that "Luke incorporated speeches not primarily to express his own theological viewpoint but rather because preaching was an integral part of the activity of the early church, as he saw it....In short, it is one-sided to look at the speeches in Acts merely as evidence for Luke's theology, they have a claim to be based on the practice of the early church." A third area Marshall examines is that of "Luke's general picture of the early church"—that "his history is selective and consequently open to misapprehension." His response is recorded above.

⁷²C. Hemer, *The Book of Acts*, 100, in conclusion in his chapter on ancient historiography.

⁷³Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 12: "By literary analysis I mean the manifold varieties of minutely discriminating attention to the artful use of language, to the shifting play of ideas, conventions, tone, sound, imagery, syntax, narrative view point, compositional units, and much else . . ."

⁷⁴T. Longman, *Literary Approaches*, 57: "The point is that we do not have so-called objective, neutral, or unshaped reporting of events. (As many have pointed out, there is no such thing as a brute fact; an uninterpreted historical report is inconceivable.) Genesis is clearly not attempting to report events dispassionately. Rather it contains proclamation, which shapes the history to differing degrees. The biblical narrators are concerned not only to tell us facts but also to guide our perspective and responses to those events."

⁷⁵Moisés Silva, *Has the Church Misread the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 18: "Every *description* of data necessarily involves a measure of interpretation, that is, a theoretical framework that makes the description meaningful."



While acknowledging what Vanhoozer calls the dark side to aesthetic hermeneutics that makes the author and history irrelevant for interpretive purpose, or turns them into mere inventions of the text, I agree with him that there is much to be appreciated in the literary approach when he states:

In directing our attention to formal features of the text, the aesthetic approach helps us better to grasp the structure and patterns in literary works. And as many of the “literary” studies of the Bible attest, such a reading does dig up new treasures.⁷⁶

It is my intention to examine in Acts 1:1-2:4 how the theological, historiographic and aesthetic aspects of Luke’s writing function cooperatively to communicate the intention of the author. I will attempt to show how Luke’s theological perspective of the events determined his selectivity of possible events to include in his narrative, and in turn influenced the compositional, stylistic decisions. I believe that – from a canonical reader’s perspective - divine revelation should be located in both historical events and the interpretative word, and that the false assumption by some interpreters of Acts that literature and history constitute mutually exclusive categories is a distinctly modern one to be rejected. I agree with Robert Alter when he speaks of “a complete interfusion of literary art with theological, moral, or historiographical vision, the fullest perception of the latter dependent on the fullest grasp of the former.”⁷⁷ I shall attempt to demonstrate in my examination of Acts 1:1-2:4 that “an increased appreciation of the literary mechanisms of a text—*how* a story is told—often becomes the avenue of greater insight into the theological and historical significance of the text—*what* the story

⁷⁶Kevin J. Vanhoozer, “A Lamp in the Labyrinth: The Hermeneutics of ‘Aesthetic’ Theology,” *TrinJ NS* (1987), 25-56.

⁷⁷*Art of Biblical Narrative*, 19; cf. 179.



means.”⁷⁸ In order to access Luke’s theology in Acts I will pay attention to two primary matters. First, noting the important advances made by narrative critics, I will pay close attention to the rhetorical strategies and literary conventions Luke employs.⁷⁹ Secondly, as an effort toward a biblical theology of the opening discourses of Acts, I will keep in mind the historical impulses that contribute to Luke’s second volume—in particular, biblical history.⁸⁰ It is the thesis of this work that keeping both aspects in view simultaneously may lead to an increased understanding of the theology conveyed by Luke to his intended audience.

1.2 Part II: Epistemological Presuppositions and Methodology

1.2.1 Preliminary Hermeneutical Matters

1.2.1.1 On Reading the Bible for Theology

A canonical reader reads the Bible as literature with the aim of an ever-increasing discernment of the divine intention.⁸¹ Texts are ideological insofar as they reflect certain attitudes, values, and assumptions (understanding ideology as a

⁷⁸V. Philips Long, *The Reign and Rejection of King Saul: A Case for Literary and Theological Coherence*, SBLDS 118 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 14.

⁷⁹Mikeal C. Parsons, *Acts* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 19.

⁸⁰Kevin J. Vanhoozer, “Exegesis and Hermeneutics,” in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 59: “The discipline of biblical theology thus involves not only linguistic and historical but also *literary* competence....If the literary form of the Bible is essential to its theological and historical content, then biblical theology ignores the diverse literary genres of the Bible at its peril.”

⁸¹It is important to approach Scripture with hermeneutical humility, acknowledging the ‘hermeneutical spiral’ as Bernard Lategan aptly states: “The ongoing cyclic process of pre-understanding—challenge—rejection or acceptance—adjustment—new self-understanding—new pre-understanding is what is understood as the ‘hermeneutical circle.’ However, the image of a circle is misleading. We never return to the point where we started...We therefore prefer to use the term ‘hermeneutical spiral’ rather than ‘hermeneutical circle.’” *Focusing On the Message: New Testament Hermeneutics, Exegesis and Methods*, ed. Andrie du Toit (Pretoria: Protea Book House, 2009), 81. Cf. Grant Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2006).



synonym for ‘worldview’). The Bible is ideological literature insofar as it seeks, through its rhetoric, to shape readers’ minds and hearts in order to bring their attitude into alignment with its own.⁸² According to Sternberg, the worldview of the Bible is unique: “If the Bible is ideologically singular—and I believe so—then its singularity lies in the worldview projected, together with the rhetoric devised to bring it home.” I seek to discover and to submit to the worldview written into the fabric of the narrative discourse in Acts—to grasp its theological ideology, conveyed by its primary author and the primary protagonist of the Bible story.

In order to accomplish this I will attempt to pay close attention to the Bible’s literary conventions. But to focus on a text’s formal literary features runs the risk of missing the main point. C.S. Lewis emphasizes this when he states: “Those who talk of reading the Bible ‘as literature’ sometimes mean, I think, reading it without attending to the main thing it is about; like reading Burke with no interest in politics, or reading the Aeneid with no interest in Rome.”⁸³ My main goal in this study is to discern, understand and submit to the theology (ideology) conveyed through the literature penned by Luke in Acts – and to do so from a canonical reader’s perspective.

1.2.1.2 Epistemological Presuppositions and Hermeneutical Humility

One aspect of the Bible’s worldview is that God and humans are distinct with regard to knowledge. God created humans with a finite capacity to know Him truly, and that finite capacity does not guarantee infallible interpretation of the inspired text. I believe in ‘hermeneutical realism’—that exhaustive knowledge of God

⁸²“We are to fit our own life into its world, feel ourselves to be elements in its structure of universal history.” Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1953), 15. Cf. Sternberg, *Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 482.

⁸³C.S. Lewis, *Reflection on the Psalms* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1958), 2-3.



is beyond our grasp.⁸⁴ But our limitations do not prevent us from knowing truly many things about God on the basis of God's self-communication in Scripture and general revelation.⁸⁵ I wish to avoid the trap of the sterile dichotomy of either absolute, exhaustive knowledge (hermeneutical dogmatism) or absolute skepticism (hermeneutical atheism). While I believe in the possibility of "right" interpretations, I acknowledge the rightful place of criticism, realizing that no one perspective or set of descriptive categories can capture the complexity of theological interpretation and meaning other than with relative adequacy.⁸⁶ *Sola Scriptura* should be a reminder that textual meaning is independent of our interpretive schemes and therefore, that our interpretations remain secondary commentaries that never acquire the status of the text itself.

Story is a vital mode of communication in Scripture.⁸⁷ Narrative discourse cannot be distilled into a few theological propositions that exhaustively, completely capture the entirety of meaning *and* effect a story intends to communicate.⁸⁸ But this

⁸⁴Sternberg argues that this cognitive antithesis is built into the very structure of biblical narrative and so shapes the experience of reading. Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1985) 37ff.

⁸⁵"Hermeneutically sophisticated biblical theologians will happily concede the exhaustive knowledge of the meaning of a text is impossible, but they will nevertheless insist that true knowledge of the meaning of a text is not impossible." D.A. Carson, "Current Issues in Biblical Theology" in the *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 5 (1995), 34.

⁸⁶Longman expresses this well: "Such a loss of faith is unnecessary if we realize that our interpretations of any text, and biblical literature in particular are partial, hypothetical, probable, and contextualized. Said positively, our interpretations may never be dogmatic, because the texts are rich in meaning, the mind of God (the final author) is ultimately unfathomable, and, recognizing that interpretation necessarily includes application, the situations that readers confront are various." *Literary Approaches*, 64.

⁸⁷See Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth: A Guide to Understanding the Bible*. 2nd Ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 265 pp.

⁸⁸"Goldingay points out that the translation of the biblical material into a system (or new structure) has leaned towards the unequivocal, replacing stories with concepts and categories and eclipsing the mysterious and the equivocal. This is unfortunate, for narrative's ability to embrace complexity, ambiguity and mystery is an expedient skill, given the nature of the Christian faith which,



should not lead one to hermeneutical paralysis. We have an obligation as canonical readers of the Word of God to hear and understand to the best of our abilities what the author is communicating. In the following chapters I make no claim to a 'totalizing' interpretation that asserts to be both exhaustive and comprehensive.⁸⁹

T.F. Torrance rightly anchors the proper humility a Christian should have, epistemologically and hermeneutically in the biblical doctrine of justification.

"The fact that, through the free grace of God, Jesus Christ is made our Righteousness means that we have no righteousness of our own. To be put freely in the right with God means that we and all our vaunted right are utterly called in question before God. Epistemologically, this means that to be put in the truth with God reveals that in ourselves we are in the wrong. Or, as Paul bluntly expressed it, "Let God be true and every man a liar." No one may boast of his own orthodoxy any more than he may boast of his own righteousness. Justification thus turns out to be the strongest statement of the objectivity of faith and knowledge. That is to say, the very beliefs which we profess and formulate as obediently and carefully as we can in fidelity to God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ are themselves called into question by that revelation, for they have their truth not in themselves but in him to whom they refer, and are therefore constantly to be revised in the light of the Truth that Jesus Christ is in himself in God."⁹⁰

1.2.1.3 The Goal of Interpretation: Repentance and Transformation

Meir Sternberg begins his work, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative* by pondering the 'bottom line' question concerning the goal of narrative communication,

as the apostle Paul says, obliges us to 'see in a mirror, dimly,' and to 'know only in part' (1 Cor 14:12)." Karl Möller, "The Nature and Genre of Biblical Theology," in *Out of Egypt: Biblical Theology and Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Craig Bartholomew, Mary Healy, Karl Möller, and Robin Parry (Grand Rapids: Zondervan), 58.

⁸⁹"The success of any interpretation depends on its explanatory power, on its ability to make more complex, coherent, and natural sense of textual data than other interpretations do." Robert H. Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 4.

⁹⁰T.F. Torrance, *Reality*, 18. The second to the last line would more reflect my thinking if it read, "whom they refer, and therefore *should always be open* to be revised."



with all its rhetoric and poetics. Why does narrative discourse exist? What is its goal?

What goals does the biblical narrator set himself? What is it that he wants to communicate in this or that story, cycle, book? What kind of text is the Bible, and what role does it perform in context?" These are all variations on a fundamental question that students of the Bible would do well to pose loudly and sharply: the question of the narrative as functional structure, a means to a communicative end, a transaction between the narrator and the audience on whom he wishes to produce a certain effect by way of certain strategies. Like all social discourse, biblical narrative is oriented to an addressee and regulated by a purpose or set of purposes involving the addressee. Hence our primary business as reader is to make purposive sense of it, so as to explain the *what's* and the *how's* in terms of the *why's* of communication.⁹¹

The goal or drive to faithfully interpret the Word of God as a canonical reader is not merely to understand meaning, but to embody it, to allow it to transform a person into the image of the Son (Rom 8:29).⁹²

Jesus Christ is the preeminent interpreter of God's self-communication, the unique and definitive embodiment of God's self-communicative act or "Word." The church, as Christ's body, is a secondary and derivative embodiment. The Word seeks, by the Spirit, to be taken to heart, to be embodied in the life of the people of God. Scripture's warnings call for attention, its commands call for obedience, its promises call for faith. *The vocation of the biblical interpreter is not simply to point to a biblical meaning, but to embody it—to walk the way the Word goes.*⁹³

For me, the motivation for faithful interpretation and analysis of the discourses of Acts is discipleship—to be a living commentary of the text, to make me 'wise for

⁹¹Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987).

⁹²This is the third aspect of linguistic acts that J.L. Austin identifies. He labels it the 'perlocutionary' act: what we bring about by saying something (e.g., persuading, surprising). The first two are: (1) the locutionary act: uttering word (e.g., say the words "good morning"); (2) the illocutionary act: what we do in saying something (e.g., greeting, promising, commanding, etc). J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 2d ed. (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1975).

⁹³*Ibid.*, 440.



salvation,' and to be 'trained in righteousness' (2 Tim 3:15f). "The reader is challenged to enter the world of the text by becoming a disciple, a hearer of the word, a follower of Jesus."⁹⁴ In short, the ideal reader of Scripture must be a disciple.⁹⁵ "As Scripture...Luke and Acts have implied readers who are [actually or potentially] Christian."⁹⁶ Thus, it is not merely a matter of understanding, but 'being'—that which Paul desired for the Colossian Christians when he penned the words: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly" (Col 3:16). If, as Catherine Belsey maintains, it is "the role of ideology *to construct people as subjects*,"⁹⁷ then one may say that one purpose of *biblical* narrative is to constitute people as covenantal *subjects* under the Kingdom of God. If the Bible represents the *divine* ideology, and if one believes its description of the chief character of the storyline from Genesis to Revelation as a loving, righteous and just God, then that ideology need not be

⁹⁴Sandra M. Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture* (San Francisco: Harper, 1991), 168. "Scripture is canonical precisely because believers recognize its power to convey *God's* intended meaning and transforming grace to all its faithful readers. If the meaning of Scripture is divinely intended and mediated by the inspired text itself, then it is the task of every faithful interpreter to see after it. The act of reinterpreting Scripture as the vehicle of God's truth and grace, however provisional and seemingly tentative, is the courageous act of finding God's intended meaning for a community who in faith seek after a more mature life with Christ in the realm of his Spirit." R.W. Wall, "Canonical Context and Canonical Conversations," in *Between Two Horizons: Spanning New Testament Studies and Systematic Theology*, ed. Joel B. Green and Max Turner (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 169.

⁹⁵With regard to the Bible, the implication is that "a reader unable or unwilling to postulate the articles of faith will forfeit competence as a hopeless counterreader...Either we reconstruct the whole as best we can in the light of the writer's presumed intention...or we fashion—in effect reinvent—everything as we please....Even to judge against the text's grain, you must first judge with it: receptivity before resistance, competent reading before liberated counterreading, poetics before politics." 469, 473. Meir Sternberg, "Biblical Poetics and Sexual Politics: From Reading to Counterreading," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 111 (1992): 463-88.

⁹⁶William S. Kurz, "Luke and Acts As Canonical," *Reading Luke-Acts: Dynamics of Biblical Narrative* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox, 1993), 105.

⁹⁷Catherine Belsey, *Critical Practice* (London and New York: Routledge, 1980), 58.



considered oppressive and unethical, as the postmodernist might claim.⁹⁸ To such a God one may humbly and gladly submit.

1.2.2 Foundational Presuppositions and the Methodological Correlates

1.2.2.1 Biblical-Theological Presuppositions

The title of this study proposes an exploration of the interrelationship between the triad of theology, history and literary artistry in Acts from the perspective of a canonical reader.⁹⁹ As with any interpreter, my fundamental presuppositions will certainly influence my analysis of all three categories. Therefore, I think it best to state my pre-commitments from the start. The following pages outline my presuppositions, which are the watershed beliefs that permeate my work. Paul Ricoeur states at the conclusion of his book on hermeneutical reflection: “The illusion is not in looking for a point of departure, but in looking for it without

⁹⁸An example of this postmodern conclusion is Erich Auerbach. According to him the Bible’s claim to truth is “tyrannical”: “The world of the Scripture stories is not satisfied with claiming to be a historically true reality—it insists that it is the only real world, and is destined for autocracy... The Scripture stories... seek to subject us.” Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1953), 14-15. Ironically, Auerbach is correct in saying that they “seek to subject us,” but is one hundred eighty degrees mistaken that it is tyrannical, leading to oppression. Jesus’ commission to the apostle is to *testify* of him, to present “*witness*.” *Testimony* or *witness* is open to believe or disbelieve, uncoerced. The Bible’s witness to the saving acts of God is salvific in nature, and the perlocutionary act of the metanarrative (the gospel story) is to *persuade* the reader that the biblical ideology or worldview is one that brings the ultimate of freedom: “Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:32); “So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed” (John 8:36). It appears to me that those of Auerbach’s opinion ‘disbelieve in order to resist’ (John 3:19). I believe in order to obey. He will serve his god(s) (Luke 16:9,13), and I will serve my God. I willingly become a servant of Christ. Time will tell which faith commitment will yield liberty and which will bring tyranny (Deut 30:15-20; Ps 1).

⁹⁹Albert C. Outler notes that “Canon-criticism is, of course, no panacea for any of these tendencies [the fragmentation and fragment atomization of Wesley’s holistic vision a fourfold criterion for doctrine] nor a sufficient substitute in itself for any of the existing biblical and historical disciplines. But it might help turn our inquiries in new directions, with a fresh set of queries and nuances that could affect both the substance and spirit of the ‘introductions’ and ‘surveys’ that upcoming generations could use for orientation.”⁹ “The ‘Logic’ of Canon-making and the Tasks of Canon-criticism,” in *Texts and Testaments: Critical Essays on the Bible and Early Church Fathers*, ed. W. Eugene March [San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 1980].0



presuppositions. There is no philosophy without presuppositions.”¹⁰⁰ I would argue that it is equally true that there is no production or interpretation of history or theology or art without presuppositions or perspective.¹⁰¹ Ricoeur describes the epistemological, hermeneutical circle as follows: “You must understand in order to believe, but you must believe in order to understand.”¹⁰² I agree with his recognition that criticism has an important function in understanding, but that the initial movement must be one of faith.¹⁰³ Acknowledging this reality, I will proceed to clarify the primary axioms or faith commitments underlying the present work, which will, in turn, have significant bearing upon the methodology employed and the resultant interpretation.¹⁰⁴ Against the postmodern myth that all of life is simply interpretation, it is asserted that interpretations have implication both in life and in

¹⁰⁰Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, trans. Emerson Buchanan (Boston: Beacon, 1967), 348.

¹⁰¹“The point is that we do not have so-called objective, neutral, or unshaped reporting of events. (As many have pointed out, there is no such thing as a brute fact: an uninterpreted historical report is inconceivable.)...The biblical narrators are concerned not only to tell us facts but also to guide our perspective and responses to those events.” Tremper Longman III, *Literary Approaches to Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Academie Books, 1987), 57.

¹⁰²Paul Ricoeur, *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1990), 298.

¹⁰³Ultimate beliefs “are by their nature unprovable and irrefutable, because they have to be assumed in any attempt at proof or disproof and because they involve a relation of thought to being which cannot be put into logical or demonstrable form. Far from being irrational or non-rational, however, ultimate beliefs express the responsible commitment of the mind to reality in which it falls under the power of its intelligible nature and through which it gains the normative insights which prompt and guide our inquiries. As such, ultimate beliefs enable us to interpret our experiences and weigh the evidences of our observations and direct the reasoning operations of our inquiries to their true ends. These ultimate beliefs constitute the basic framework on which we rely in all rational and scientific activity.” T.F. Torrance, *Reality and Evangelical Theology* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1982). I understand ‘faith’ according to Reformed epistemology, as a gift of God.

¹⁰⁴Given the blinding effects of sin, both Luther and Calvin believed that the things of God could be understood only by those illumined by the Spirit of God, that is, by those who have the right presuppositions, brought about by the work of the Spirit. “It is true that for many people much remains abstruse; but this is not due to the obscurity of Scripture, but to the blindness or indolence of those who will not take the trouble to look at the very clearest truth.” Luther, “On the Bondage of the Will,” 111.



the critical enterprise of dealing with text. Hermeneutical convictions behind interpretive strategies do matter.

1.2.2.2 The Macro-Genre¹⁰⁵ of the Bible and the Divine Authorship of Scripture

For those Christians who would take their cue from the Bible's own self-understanding, the Bible is not simply a religious book or even *the* religious book of a given community, but, rather, *the* religious book that is above all others and quite distinct from all others—its very words being “God-breathed” (2Tim 3:16).¹⁰⁶

There is a sense in which “the Bible by its very nature as divine revelation transcends all actual genres, since divine revelation could not be generic in a logical sense of the word.”¹⁰⁷ What other book could be described as “God breathed” if approached from a canonical reader's perspective? Is there a generic category inclusive of other writings within which the Bible is one member among others?¹⁰⁸ I believe the Bible is unique in that it is the Word of God,¹⁰⁹ and that God

¹⁰⁵This term is borrowed from V. Philips Long, *The Art of Biblical History* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan), 29. He uses this term ‘loosely’ to refer to the essential character of the Bible as a whole.

¹⁰⁶*Ibid.*, 28.

¹⁰⁷E.D. Hirsch further observes: “Anything that is unique cannot, with respect to those aspects which are unique, be a type.” *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1967), 64.

¹⁰⁸“The simplest definition of *genre* in literature is ‘a group of texts that bear one or more traits in common with each other.’” Tremper Longman, *Literary Approaches to Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 76. This is not to deny that its subparts share generic traits with other literature, so that one, through common grace works with literary conventions to access the author's intent and perspective.

¹⁰⁹Tremper Longman believes that this basic presupposition is the direct, underlying foundation to the historicity of Scripture: “The question of historical truth boils down to the question of who ultimately is guiding us in our interpretation of these events. If we look ultimately to human authors, then literary art may be deceptive. If we look to God, then we cannot have deception.” *Literary Approaches*, 58.



is the chief author of the Bible in its totality.¹¹⁰ Because Scripture is revelation from God it is received as wholly an authoritative and trustworthy guide to faith and practice (1Tim 3:16; Heb 1:1-2). While it is acknowledged that each book of the Bible has a human author or authors, the primary author of the canonical collection of documents is God.¹¹¹ The Scripture itself argues that a proper fear of God, of the *author*, is the beginning of true literary knowledge, (Ps 111:10; Pr 1:7; 9:10; 15:33; Eccl 12:13)—that one might not merely know things about the text, but that he or she may know the one of whom the text is about, i.e., both the author and central protagonist of the narrative.

Postmodernist thought denies the role of the author in interpreting a narrative. Seán Burke accurately comments that “the great crises of postmodernism are the crises of authorship.”¹¹² Deconstruction is Nietzsche’s announcement of the “the death of God”¹¹³ (author of Scripture) put into hermeneutics. Without the

¹¹⁰It is not the intention of this work to argue the warrant for the acceptance of divine inspiration of Scripture (however exactly one understands this claim) and the logical correlates, nor the extent of the canon. The issue of warrant is deftly explored by Alvin Plantinga in “Two (or More) Kinds of Scripture Scholarship” in *Behind the Text: History and Biblical Interpretation*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003). The Belgic confession offers warrant for such belief: “And we believe without a doubt all things contained in them [following the Protestant list of books]—not so much because the church receives them and approves them as such, but above all because the Holy Spirit testifies in our hearts that they are from God, and also because they prove themselves to be from God.” See also D.A. Carson and J.D. Woodbridge, eds., *Scripture and Truth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983); *idem*, *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon*; also, G. Fackre, “Evangelical Hermeneutics: Commonality and Diversity,” *Interpretation* 43 (1989), 117-29.

¹¹¹A firm insistence on the divine authorship of Scripture does not entail the rejection of human authorship of the various books of the Old and New Testaments. Just as I reject the various Christological heresies that hope to elevate the divinity of Jesus Christ by denying his real humanity, so also I refuse to abandon the human element in the authorship of Scripture. The authors were real figures, addressing real situations, and receiving revelation from God for their times; I reject any docetizing view of Scripture.

¹¹²Seán Burke, *The Death and Return of the Author: Criticism and Subjectivity in Barthes, Foucault and Derrida* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press, 1992), xxxix.

¹¹³Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 183. “The so-called ‘death of God’ theologians of the 1960’s viewed the demise of God as the passing away of an idol, the deconstruction of a philosophical construct—the supreme being of classical theism. In announcing the two deaths—of God, of the author—deconstruction also declares



author, biblical authority is undone. Without affirmation of the author, one falls prey to what Kevin VanHoozer describes as ‘interpretive idolatry,’ under which a reader treats “the text as a mirror onto which they project their own devices and desires” and thus “fail to distinguish author from reader.”¹¹⁴ He identifies this as the cardinal sin of postmodern hermeneutics. For example, Nietzsche affirmed the freeplay of the world “without truth, without origin, offered to an active interpretation.”¹¹⁵ Under the postmodern worldview the nihilistic denial of meaning, authority and truth must not only be accepted, but also affirmed. The affirmation of the death of the author frees one to explore his or her own creativity as a reader.¹¹⁶ I reject the postmodern hermeneutical temptation ‘to be like God’—to determine my own meaning, or else to know nothing at all, definitively. If in the end, non-exhaustive, yet true meaning cannot be read from a text—that the author has communicated nothing concrete, determinate or specific, then it may legitimately be questioned as to why the postmodernists bother to write? Without the inherent authority of the author and text, a postmodern reader drifts into the marsh of hermeneutical anarchy, analogous to the Israelites in the time of the Judges when there was no king and “everyone did as he saw fit” (Judg 21:25). Countering this view, Longman states: “The view that the author is the locus of the meaning of a text provides theoretical stability to

the death of meaning (viz., determinate textual sense) and interpretation (viz., correct understanding). The death of God also marks the birth of the reader and of what Plantinga calls ‘creative anti-realism’: the celebration of humanity’s power to structure and differentiate the world. The ‘death of God put into writing’ gives rise to a state of permanent interpretive jubilee; once one acknowledges the artificial nature of the world and of interpretation one is free to read endlessly. The new morality of literary knowledge, insofar as it concerns the refusal of understanding, has one overriding maxim: ‘You shall not believe in absolutes.’”

¹¹⁴Ibid., 32.

¹¹⁵Jacques Derrida, “Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences,” in Richard Macksey and Dugene Donato, ed., *The Language of Criticism and the Sciences of Man* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1970), 247-65.

¹¹⁶“From this perspective, the death of the author is the Magna Carta of creative interpretation. Dostoyevsky’s adage on the death of God is easily adapted to the current situation in literary theory: ‘If there is no Author, everything is permitted.’” VanHoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 89.



interpretation.¹¹⁷ Our interpretation is correct insofar as it conforms to the meaning intended by the author.”¹¹⁸ If there is no author speaking there is no determined meaning.¹¹⁹ I merely hear the echo of my own voice. As Ricoeur emphasizes, adequate use of suspicion and self-criticism on the part of a canonical reader is essential if one is not to worship idols, by projecting ones own wishes and images onto revelation.¹²⁰ The difficulty that arises from the work of Stanley Fish and company is whether a community of readers can be shaped and judged by texts, as it were, ‘from the outside’ (author), or whether they must remain trapped in their own

¹¹⁷“The individual writings, to be sure, may gain full relevance and meaning only in the context of the complete canon. But authorial intention nonetheless remains fundamentally important for the constituent parts as well as for the whole.” Carl F.H. Henry, “Canonical Theology: An Evangelical Appraisal,” *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 8 (Aut 1990): 84.

¹¹⁸Tremper Longman, *Literary Approaches*, 65.

¹¹⁹Jared M. Compton correctly stresses the importance of ascertaining the human author’s intention as essential in discovering the meaning in a text when he states that “most admit that completely severing the intentions of Scripture’s authors introduces the potentiality of massive amounts of subjectivity, effectively undermining the grammatical-historical approach. In other words, not only is the human author necessary to underwrite Scripture’s perspicuity, but also he is similarly necessary to validate our interpretations. How can the interpreter identify, for instance, verbal definitions if not by an appeal to a semantic domain available to the text’s human author? Moreover, what else may prevent arbitrary (not to mention anachronistic) readings if not the human author and his context?”⁹“Shared Intentions? Reflections on Inspiration and Interpretation in Light of Scripture’s Dual Authorship,” *Themelios*, 33.3 [2008]: 81.0 Douglas Moo further clarifies that “appeal is made not to a meaning of the divine author that somehow is deliberately concealed from the human author in the process of inspiration—a ‘sensus occultus’—but to the meaning of the text itself that takes on deeper significance as God’s plan unfolds—a ‘sensus praegnans.’ To be sure, God knows, as He inspires the human authors to write, what the ultimate meaning of their words will be; but it is not as if he has deliberately created a double entendre or hidden a meaning in the words that can only be uncovered through a special revelation. The “added meaning” that the text takes on is the product of the ultimate canonical shape—though, to be sure, often clearly perceived only on a revelatory basis.”⁹“The Problem of Sensus Plenior,” in *Hermeneutics, Authority and Canon*, ed. D.A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986], 188.) While interpretation depends on the existence of overlap between the divine and human authors, its stability does not demand complete overlap.

¹²⁰Ricoeur expresses his central thesis when he writes: “Hermeneutics seems to me to be animated by this double motivation: willingness to suspect, willingness to listen; vow of rigor, vow of obedience. In our time we have not finished doing away with *idols* and we have barely begun to listen to *symbols*.” Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretations* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1970), 27. Freud’s account of the capacity of the self to deceive itself is akin to theological assertions about the deceitfulness of the human heart (Jer 17:9; Hos 10:2).



contextual relativism, hearing no prophetic summons from outside and beyond. It is proposed that the canonical reader is hearing the prophetic voice of God, the ultimate author of the canon (Heb 1:1) and is being challenged to repent and obey.¹²¹

1.2.2.3 The Unity of Scripture: A Biblical-Theological Correlate of Divine Authorship

A logical correlate of the presupposition of the divine authorship is that Scripture exhibits an overarching unity, emanating from a unified, single coherent mind—the mind of God. It follows that a biblical-theological and literary method must treat the whole Biblical text as a unified, coherent corpus, rather than a compendium of assorted ancient writings. The present work, as an effort in biblical theology and literary analysis, views the Scripture not so much as a library of disparate books, but as a book with a variety of subdivisions and genres, with a central plot line: the story of the gospel—the redemptive work of God through Christ.

Furthermore, I will argue that reading the text in the light of key, thematically related portions of the whole canon aids the interpreter in grasping the divine author's meaning. While not neglecting the history recorded in Luke's first volume, the present study acknowledges the church's shaping of the New Testament canon in separating the first volume of Luke from his second work by inserting the Gospel of John between the two.¹²² I will attempt to demonstrate the

¹²¹I shall discuss the place of the 'reader' in interpretation in a later section of the present work.

¹²²Albert C. Outler observes that "canon-criticism raises such prior questions (for example) as why the Gospels are styled as 'according to' whomever (*kata*) instead of 'by' (*dia*)? What does this imply as to the early Christian understanding of the genre and function of 'the gospel'? Or again, why does 'The Gospel According to Matthew' stand at the head of *all* the listings of 'the holy quarterion' (as Eusebius calls it)?...Again, it turns to the prior question: what was the 'logic' in the canon-makers' minds in their placement of Mark directly after Matthew (with some interesting exceptions)...A rather different aspect of the 'logic' of canon-making appears in the otherwise inexplicable sundering of Acts away from Luke's *proton logon* (Acts 1:1) by the addition of a *fourth* gospel—from a later date and with a different perspective....'The Acts of the Apostles,' once



historical, theological unity of the opening chapters of Acts with the immediate, preceding canonical context of the Gospel of John—in particular, the second half of the Gospel of John – from the perspective of a canonical reader. The opening and closing statements in Greg Goswell’s recent article addressing the order of books in the canon is worth quoting in full in this regard:

Readerly habit views enjambment as a clue that significant relations are to be discerned between a particular book and its neighbors in the library of canonical books. The reader presumes that material that is juxtaposed is related in some way in meaning, and this habit of readers forms the basis of the following analysis. The assumption is that a book is more closely related to books next to it or nearby, and less closely related to books placed far from it.¹²³

In almost every case, the positioning of a biblical book relative to other books in the canonical collection, whether in terms of the grouping in which it is placed, or the book(s) that follow or precede it, has hermeneutical significance for the reader who seeks meaning in the text. Consciously or unconsciously the reader’s evaluation of a book is affected by the company it keeps, hence the importance of a deliberate examination of this aspect of the para-text of Scripture.¹²⁴

Goswell argues that it has “hermeneutical significance” that a believer reading systematically through the New Testament in its present canonical order will begin their reading of Acts, having just finished the reading of the Fourth Gospel. There is a clear theological/historical continuity between John’s Gospel and the opening discourses of Acts, especially in the area of pneumatology. **The Church Fathers may have been providentially guided in the final ordering of the Gospels by the Fourth Gospel’s particular emphasis and development of pneumatology, which is especially theologically informative and preparatory for the**

separated from its *proton logon*, seems to have found its place with the ‘catholic epistles’ in some of the proto-canonical lists. But its ‘logical’ function as a bridge between ‘the stories’ of Jesus and the Pauline interpretations of that story gradually prevailed and became stabilized.” (“The ‘Logic’ of Canon-making,” 266-67.)

¹²³Greg Goswell, “The Order of the Books of the New Testament,” JETS 53/2 (June 2010): 225.

¹²⁴Ibid., 241.



pneumatology of Acts. This is no small matter as Luke Timothy Johnson writes, “Acts can appropriately be called the ‘Book of the Holy Spirit.’”¹²⁵ F.F. Bruce concurs saying, “Luke makes it plain that it is by the power of the same Spirit that all the apostolic acts which he goes on to narrate were performed, so much so that some have suggested, as a theologically more appropriate title for his second volume, *The Acts of the Holy Spirit*.”¹²⁶ I will attend to this particular issue in chapter two.

In addition, from the perspective of a canonical reader, the acceptance of the divine authorship of Scripture and its correlate, the unity of Scripture, gives warrant for an attempt to explore and demonstrate continuity between the history of Jesus recorded in the Gospel of John and the historical narrative in the book of Acts. Commenting on the task of canon-criticism Albert C. Outler states: “But it is rather less our business—in canon-criticism, at least—to pass judgment on the canon-makers’ judgments and rather more to understand their ‘logic’ and the functions of the process. In any case, it is required of us that we try to see the whole Canon in its functional terms and its units in those same terms. And this would make for new perspectives (and, one might hope, new interest!) in NT ‘introductions’ and early church history ‘surveys.’”¹²⁷ The following chapters attempt to show that the theology revealed in the latter half of the Fourth Gospel is artfully incorporated in Luke’s historiography in the opening sections of Acts. Hermeneutically exploring the two works in juxtaposition may bear fruit in understanding Lukan theological history.¹²⁸

¹²⁵Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1991), 17.

¹²⁶F.F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 31.

¹²⁷Outler, “The ‘Logic’ of Canon-making,” 269.

¹²⁸Ben Witherington, ed. *History, Literature, and Society in the Book of Acts* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 346.



At issue is whether working with two different human authors of Scripture may or may not yield evidence that demonstrates unity within diversity; whether it may yield evidence of a superintending divine author over the diverse human authors. It may be one thing to attempt to demonstrate Luke's consistency or inconsistency with himself between his Gospel and Acts (the parameters within which many works comment), but it is another thing to attempt to show the cohesion and coherence¹²⁹ of the divine author with himself between two different human authors.¹³⁰ If this may be accomplished, it would seem to provide one layer of

¹²⁹A.B. du Toit defines cohesion as referring "to the lexico-grammatically well-bonded unity of the surface text, whereas coherence is used for its underlying semantic bonding." ("New Testament Exegesis in Theory and Practice," 134.) I assume that du Toit would agree with me that these qualities not only apply to individual works of Scripture, but also to the whole canon as a single authored work, although I could not find a definitive statement of his in that respect.

¹³⁰This seems to me to be a watershed issue for the field of 'biblical theology.' Scott J. Hafemann in the book he edited, *Central Themes in Biblical Theology: Mapping Unity In Diversity*, comments about the authors whose writings were chosen to be included in the book: "We chose people we believed shared our commitment to 'whole-Bible biblical theology,' a term we coined for the sort of biblical theology that tries not only to examine the theology of biblical books, which we also applaud. Rather, we wanted to bring together people who saw the need to trace themes and overarching structural ideas through the whole Bible." (Grand Rapids: Baker Book, 2007), 15. If the grounding principle of this type of biblical theology is the presupposition that the Bible is a unified work because it is the Word of God, who is a unified and coherent being, then unity in diversity must be demonstrable. On a small scale this describes the attempt of the present monograph. To use the worn out analogy, there seems to be a chicken and egg dilemma. The painful risk to be taken is to be open to criticism as to whether ones presuppositions have skewed ones results from observation and analysis. But on the other hand, a shift in paradigms in science as well as in theology may open understanding and knowledge to the inquirer heretofore unavailable, offering a better, more comprehensive, compelling theory. Ian G. Barbour in his work titled, *Myths, Models, and Paradigms: A Comparative Study in Science and Religion* quotes Thomas Kuhn: "Though each may hope to convert the other to his way of seeing his science and its problems, neither may hope to prove his case. The competition between paradigms is not the sort of battle that can be resolved by proofs...Before they can hope to communicate fully, one group or the other must experience the conversion that we have been calling a paradigm shift. Just because it is a transition between incommensurables, the transition between competing paradigms cannot be made a step at a time, forced by logic and neutral experience like a gestalt switch it must occur all at once or not at all." Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1962), 10. Barbour later says, "One cannot prove one's most fundamental beliefs, but one can try to show how they function in the interpretation of experience" (124). And I would add in the last phrase: "try to show how they function in the interpretation of Scripture." I am fairly certain Barbour would agree with that extension of application. I trust that it is obvious that the presupposition of divine authorship is a crux matter in this monograph. The adequacy of any interpretation offered based upon this presupposition must be judged "by applying the same criteria that science uses to appraise



evidence of a divine, single mind authorship of Scripture – based on a canonical reading. In this regard, John Barton concludes his study on the canon in early Christianity with the observation that there are important resemblances between the early Church, the Second Temple and the early rabbinic Judaism in how they read Scripture in the ancient world. He argues that they not only were concerned to interpret the sacred books as internally consistent, but also as consistent with each other—which is a concern of present day canonical criticism.¹³¹

1.2.2.4 Scripture Interprets Scripture

1.2.2.4.1 Literal Sense and Canon

Logically following from the belief in the unity of Scripture is the hermeneutical principle that *Scripture* interprets Scripture. In others words, the *canon* is the ultimate arbiter of meaning for any and all texts of Scripture.¹³² Brevard

theories—correspondence, comprehensiveness, coherence, and compellingness.” Kevin J. VanHoozer, *Is There a Meaning In This Text* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 334.

¹³¹John Barton, *Holy Writings, Sacred Text: The Canon in Early Christianity* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 161. In a section later in the chapter I shall embrace canonical criticism as understood and practiced by scholars such as Eugene Lemcio and Robert Wall, rather than Brevard Childs and James Sanders.

¹³²In the present study, “canon” is defined as a norm or standard of faith. Canon is held to be a historical-theological concept that views the process of divine revelation as complete (Heb 1:1; John 1:14; Col 1:19). Christ alone and His appointed witnesses constitute the canon. Thus, the term comes to refer to a closed collection of documents that witness to Christ, regarded as Holy Scripture. Herman Ridderbos notes that priority must be given to the action of Christ and not to the decision of the church: “...the canon in its redemptive historical sense is not the product of the church; rather the church itself is the product of the canon.” (*The Authority of the New Testament Scriptures*, trans. by H. De Jongste [Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Pub. Co., 1963], 27). That Christ himself as witnessed to by the apostles forms the ground of the canon is an *a priori* that must be received by faith. There is no claim here to ecclesiastical infallibility in the strict sense, yet there is great assurance to be drawn from the widespread judgment of the early Christians that this group of writings comprises the authoritative teachings of the apostles. Oscar Cullmann speaks of the “astonishing historical and theological assurance with which the Church proceeded when it settled on the fourfold canon.” (“The Plurality of the Gospels as a Theological Problem in Antiquity,” *The Early Church: Studies in Early Christian History and Theology*, ed. A.J.B. Higgins [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1956], 52. Translated from the original German article in *TZ* I [1945]: 23-42.)



Childs argues that historical criticism's inability to read the Bible as Scripture is derived from a faulty view of the literal sense: "For the Reformers, the literal sense was a *literary* sense; but for critical scholars it became 'literalistic.'"¹³³ Taking the Bible literally for Childs means reading it in the context of the Christian canon.¹³⁴ He argues that the literal sense of the Bible is a function neither of its historical nor of its storied context, but rather of its *canonical* context.¹³⁵ Hans Frei adeptly argues that

As witness to Christ, the canon is defined as "the church's Rule of Faith." It is the collection of writings in which the church acknowledges hearing the voice of God. The present work understands the canon to be that collection of works "God breathed" and through which the Spirit of Christ rules to constitute, instruct, correct and train the people of God in righteousness in covenant relationship with God. The canon is a received authority by the church to mediate God's covenant grace and to rule or delineate the theological boundaries of the one holy catholic and apostolic church. Thus, the terms the church employs to describe Scripture's authority (divine inspiration, revelatory word, apostolic witness, Christological confession, etc.) are primarily to be understood in functional and formative rather than epistemic and dogmatic terms. In this regard, see the study by William J. Abraham, *Canon and Criterion in Christian Theology: From the Fathers to Feminism* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998). "As early as the 2d century, Christians could speak of the Bible as 'canonical' as well as divinely 'inspired.' Only later did Athanasius (ca. 350 C.E.) identify *ta biblia* ('the books' of scripture) with the noun *kanon* (a list of normative books)." (*The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 862.) Eugene Ulrich prefers the definition of canon as "a closed list of books that have been considered, debated, sifted, and accepted," and so concludes that "talk of an open canon is confusing and counterproductive." ("The Notion and Definition of Canon," in Lee Martin McDonald and James A. Sanders, eds., *The Canon Debate* [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002], 34). See also the helpful by Lee Martin McDonald's discussion of canon in chapter four, "The Notion and Use of Canon" where he defines the terms 'Scripture' and 'Canon' and sketches briefly the history of the development of the concept canon in the the early church, in *The Biblical Canon: Its Origin, Transmission, and Authority* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2007), 38-69.

¹³³Brevard Childs, "The *Sensus Literalis* of Scripture: An Ancient and Modern Problem," in H. Donner et al., ed., *Beiträge zur alttestamentlichen Theologie* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1977), 80-93.

¹³⁴Cf. Bernard Ramm, who contends that the systematic reading of Scripture "is in its final intention," that is the *canon*. *Protestant Biblical Interpretation: A Textbook of Hermeneutics*. 3d ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), 175.

¹³⁵ After review the history of the development of the New Testament canon David G. Dunbar draws the following conclusion: "It is appropriate then to speak of the canon as having achieved its present form throughout most of the church during the fifth century. The consensus, to be sure, was not perfect. The native (as distinct from the Greek-speaking) Syrian church recognizes only the more limited canon of the Peshitta to the present day. The Ethiopian church, on the other hand, acknowledges the canonical books of the larger Christian church plus eight additional works dealing primarily with church order. Yet is is fair to say that wherever Christians in particular localities have been concerned to know the extent of the New Testament and have searched for this knowledge in a spirit of open communication with the larger church, unanimity of opinion has



the meaning and truth of the Gospels are eclipsed whenever one seeks to interpret them in terms of an independent description of their subject matter.¹³⁶ “I am persuaded that...theological reading is the reading of the *text*, and not the reading of a source, which is how historians read it.”¹³⁷ I would contend that this is what occurs when interpreters such as Robert Funk, a follower of Bultmann and founder and chair of The Jesus Seminar, read the Gospel as not a story about Jesus, but a story about something else: existential possibilities, social liberation, the rights of women, etc. Bruce Marshall maintains that this occurs in Gnosticism and demythologizing alike when biblical narratives are interpreted “without ascribing primacy or centrality to those narratives in deciding about truth.”¹³⁸ He makes the connection between literal meaning and Christology explicit: “If the moderns made a mistake in biblical interpretation with regard to the narratives, it was ultimately because they made a Christological mistake: they failed to see the narratively identified Jesus as epistemologically primary and in that sense as logically basic to and decisive for all our talk about God and ourselves.”¹³⁹ Frei adds: “It was largely by reason of this centrality of the story of Jesus that the Christian interpretative tradition in the West

generally been the result. So it is significant that the reopening of the questions of canon by the leaders of the Protestant Reformation led to a narrowing of the Old Testament canon over against Roman Catholic usage by effected no similar change in the extent of the New Testament canon.” (David G. Dunbar, “The Biblical Canon,” in *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon* ed. D.A Carson and John D. Woodbridge [Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995], 317-18.)

¹³⁶Hans Frei, “The ‘Literal Reading’ of Biblical Narrative in the Christian Tradition: Does It Stretch or Will It Break?” in Frank McConnell, ed. *The Bible and the Narrative Tradition* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1986), 36-77.

¹³⁷Frei’s conclusion is clear: “It cannot be said often and emphatically enough that liberals and fundamentalists are siblings under the skin in identifying or rather confusing ascriptive as well as descriptive literalism about Jesus at the level of understanding the text, with ascriptive and descriptive literalism as the level of knowing historical reality.” (*Types of Christian Theology* [New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1992], 84.)

¹³⁸Bruce Marshall, “Meaning and Truth in Narrative Interpretation: A Reply to George Schner,” *Modern Theology* 8 (1992): 176.

¹³⁹*Ibid.*, 178-79.



gradually assigned clear primacy to the literal sense in the reading of Scripture.”¹⁴⁰ Instead of interpreting the text with our categories and conceptual schemes, Frei proposes that we let the text itself interpret everything else, including its readers. To interpret the Bible literally means letting the biblical text “swallow up the world” rather than the world the text.¹⁴¹ The literal sense is textually determined. The “control” for interpretation is not only the immediate work of the human author in its historical, cultural and theological context which is limited to the accumulated theological revelation at the time of the writer (*Sitz im Leben*),¹⁴² but also includes the larger encompassing text of the final form of the canon (*Sitz im Kanon*).¹⁴³ The literal sense not only is constricted by the interpreter’s common sense and critical attention

¹⁴⁰Op. Cit., 39.

¹⁴¹Frei, following George Lindbeck, terms this “intratextuality,” and he opposes it to “extratextuality.” See Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*.

¹⁴²John Piper makes this point poignantly: “The point is this: Hearing the Word of God in the oral or written proclamation of the Scriptures is absolutely dependent on hearing the Scriptures in an understandable language. Hearing the Word of God is thus dependent on a faithful translation of the Greek and Hebrew. But translation is only possible and successful when the specific meanings of the ancient documents are understood. Most of those meanings can be determined only by an analysis of the grammatical and historical context that displays the author’s intention. Therefore, it is wrong to say that theology and devotion do not depend on the recovery of the historically-verified intention of the Biblical writer/redactor. There would be no intelligible or faithful canon at all if thousands of scholars and translators had not labored in this grammatical and historical effort. And there is no reason to think that their work is finished, because the ongoing task of theological exegesis is simply an extension of the task of translation.” (“The Authority and Meaning of the Christian Canon,” 96.)

¹⁴³Brevard Childs, in his *Biblical Theology in Crisis* (1970) suggested that exegesis should not stop with relating a pericope to its original historical context but should explore the dialectic between individual text and full canonical context. He worked on parts of the Old Testament seen by others as intrusions into the text, such as Psalm superscriptions and asked how these ‘late’ additions functioned, and what they could tell readers about the ways in which the earliest communities unified their diverse authoritative traditions. “Psalm and Midrashic Exegesis,” *Journal of Semitic Studies* 16 (1971): 137-50.

A clear example would be the 2 Sam 7 passage where God promises Solomon that he is going to build a house for Solomon (7:11,12, 27). The human author would certainly have an understanding of meaning determined by his *sitz im leben*, but the divine author that inspired the text certainly had in mind the fuller meaning that would not violate the human author’s understanding of his own writing, but would encompass and supersede it in the greater context of the canon (John 2:20; 1 Cor 3:16).



to the words of the text and their multiplex grammatical relations and by its rhetorical role within a particular composition, but also by the composition's role within the wider biblical canon. This vital literary or canonical-critical aspect of meaning presumes that there is one voice and one mind inspiring all Scripture (2 Tim 3:16).¹⁴⁴ The individual writings gain full relevance and meaning only in the context of the complete canon, but authorial intention nonetheless remains fundamentally important for the constituent parts as well as for the whole.¹⁴⁵ All the true and necessary implications of an author's intentions do not have to be a part of his consciousness in order to be a part of his meaning. This helps to account for the fact that according to 1 Pet 1:10-12 the prophets were not fully aware of all that they

¹⁴⁴While acknowledging that ultimately God is the author of Scripture, I reject any implication that this divine authorship lessens the importance of finding the writer/redactor's intention and the importance of defining the meaning of a text as the intention of its human author. It contradicts the historical particularity of divine revelation. This cuts squarely across canon critic G. Sheppard's position: "Biblical theology in the context of the canon does not depend first upon...an attempt by 'historical-grammatical' means to recover a writer's 'intention' in all of its full historically conditioned particularity." ("Canon Criticism," 12).

¹⁴⁵I define 'authorial intention' as an objective, structural speech-act that creates a text as public discourse. Meir Sternberg has labeled this the "embodied" or "objectified intention" which is something we have access to historically. *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Pr., 1985), 8-9. It is fixed by the linguistic conventions of that time and community, and can be recovered by literary and historical research with some reasonable degree of probability. See further the philosophical work of Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Pr., 1995), and Ben Olleberger's discussion of it in "Pursuing the Truth of Scripture," in Alan G. Padgett and Patrick R. Keifert, eds., *But is it all True? The Bible and the Question of Truth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 44-65.

No biblical author is likely to have sat down to write with the intent or awareness that he or she was contributing to what would later be a final, comprehensive canon. But in the church's receiving a composite canon and reading it as a unity it already is going beyond anything that could have been in the mind and intention of any individual author or redactor. Thus, the canonical sense must be taken into account. If what the Gospels proclaim about Jesus is true, then the entire history and testimony of Israel in the OT needs to be re-interpreted. But this is exactly what the apostles do, following the practice of their Lord (e.g., Luke 4:16-22). They were practicing canonical hermeneutics—expounding a "spiritual" or fuller sense of the Scriptures that went beyond the plain, historical, or literal sense, discovered through historical and linguistic research. The identification of the God of Israel with the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ lies at the heart of the claim that Jesus is the Messiah of Israel. For Jesus to interpret the OT in this manner and for the community of believers to read and understand the Gospels in this way goes beyond the original intention of the inspired author/editor of the OT. But the conventional, or literal sense of Scripture must remain the basis and guide for any further, spiritual or canonical sense.



were implying when they wrote of “the sufferings of Christ and his subsequent glories.”¹⁴⁶

This model of the literal meaning can be supported because it accounts for test cases in which the biblical writers interpreted the Bible. The divine and human authors shared the textually expressed meanings. How many additional unstated submeanings the human author consciously knew is unnecessary to determine. At the same time God, since He is omniscient, intended all the submeanings necessary to this expressed type of meaning. The interpreter may not know or recognize all these submeanings until the divinely intended reference appears in history. But such recognition of submeanings is not a “consequent” sense. Nor are they “separate” in the sense of *unrelated*. They are separate only in the sense of being *unstated*. Nor are they “different” in the sense of being *conflicting*. They are different only in the sense of being *unexpressed*....Marshall exhibits the same

¹⁴⁶For a full treatment of the relation between meaning and implications see E.D. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), 24-67; especially 61-67.

G.K. Beale gives a helpful analogy: “The notion of ‘extended meaning’ is instructive for understanding and analyzing the New Testament’s use of the Old....Old Testament authors appear to have only dimly, implicitly or partly comprehended the things of which they were speaking. We may say that authorial intentions of Old Testament writers were not as comprehensive as the simultaneous divine intentions, which become progressively unpacked as the history of revelation progresses until they reach climax in Christ. The Old Testament writers prophesied events to occur not only distant in time from them but in another world, a new world, which Jesus inaugurated. These writers are comparable in a sense to people in a spaceship above the earth. They can see only the earth and its different shading, representing clouds, seas and landmasses. When, however, they see magnified pictures of the earth from satellite cameras, they are able to make out mountains, rivers, forests, cities, buildings, houses and people. Both the distant and close-up views are ‘literal.’ The close-up picture reveals details that someone with a distant view could never have guessed were there. The close-up even ‘looks’ like a different reality from the distant. Nevertheless, both are ‘literal’ depictions of what is actually there. Similarly, the literal picture of Old Testament prophecy is magnified by the lens of New Testament progressive revelation, which enlarges the details of fulfillment in the beginning new world that will be completed at Christ’s last advent.” (*The Temple and the Church’s Mission* [Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004], 379).

C.J.H. Wright makes the point in telling fashion by means of another analogy emphasizing the eschatological perspective of progressive revelation provided by the genre of the final form of the canon (the Word of God) and its hermeneutical bearing on any one sub-genre of Scripture: “Imagine in the last century a father promises his young son a horse of his own when he comes of age! In the meantime cars are invented. On his twenty-first birthday, his father therefore gives him a car instead. The promise is fulfilled, because the substantive meaning of the promise was a personally owned means of transport. It would be pointless to say that it would only be fulfilled if the son gets a horse as well, or later. That would be to take the original promise as a mere prediction which will have ‘failed’ unless it is literally honored.” (*Knowing Jesus Through the Old Testament: Rediscovering the Roots of Our Faith* [London: Marshall Pickering, 1992], 5).



concept. He imagines the Apostle John responding. “I hadn’t consciously thought of the story like that, but now that you suggest it to me, I would agree that you could also understand it in that way.”¹⁴⁷

1.2.2.4.2 Testimony or Witness as Epistemologically Basic

Closely related to this issue is the topic of *eyewitness* and *testimony*. The Bible is the corporate testimony of the Jewish and Christian communities to God’s self-revelation in history and in Jesus Christ. Taken as a whole and as a divine communicative act, the Bible is God’s self-attesting Word to humanity. The subject matter of the Bible is not discovered by treating the Bible only as evidence for reconstruction of the history found *behind* the text, but by treating it as divine testimony that gives the true perspective (defining true and truth as denoting ‘that which accords with reality’) and significance of the history it records. I, then, maintain that the main source of literary knowledge of Scripture is *testimony* of the text. Only by reading the Bible as divine testimony will one gain not merely knowledge about the text, but knowledge of what the text is about: the gospel of Jesus Christ—God’s reconciliation with humanity and, as Paul says, “all things on earth and in heaven” through Jesus Christ (Col 1:19).

The topic of testimony and witness is raised at the outset in Acts and is of seminal importance for reading and interpreting Acts.

1:8 καὶ ἔσεσθέ μου μάρτυρες

1:21f δεῖ οὖν τῶν συνελθόντων ἡμῖν ἀνδρῶν ἐν παντὶ χρόνῳ ᾧ εἰσῆλθεν καὶ ἐξῆλθεν ἐφ’ ἡμᾶς ὁ κύριος Ἰησοῦς, 22 ἀρξάμενος ἀπὸ τοῦ βαπτίσματος Ἰωάννου ἕως τῆς ἡμέρας ἧς ἀνελήμφθη ἀφ’ ἡμῶν, μάρτυρα τῆς ἀναστάσεως αὐτοῦ σὺν ἡμῖν γενέσθαι ἓνα τούτων.

The philosopher C.A. Coady has recently argued that testimony is an important source of knowledge, as are memory and perception.¹⁴⁸ To restrict belief to that

¹⁴⁷Elliott E. Johnson, “Dual Authorship and the Single Intended Meaning of Scripture” in Roy B. Zuck, ed., *Rightly Divided: Readings in Biblical Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1996), 175-176.



which we see for ourselves would eliminate most of what we know: “It is testimony and learning from others that makes possible intellectual achievement and culture; testimony is the very foundation of civilization.”¹⁴⁹ Eyewitness testimony is a properly basic form of knowledge.¹⁵⁰ The Gospels and Acts are historically reliable records of the eyewitness testimony that the Church recognizes in a properly basic way through the Holy Spirit. In this light, the historical critic’s attempt at reconstruction of the text appears conspicuously thin. To attempt to get behind the eyewitness testimony of the Apostles is not to gain literary knowledge of Scripture, but to lose it. For the knowledge we gain from their eyewitness testimony is not inferential but properly basic.¹⁵¹ In the case of the Gospels and Acts, the texts are the only access we have to the events in question. “The attempt to get behind these testimonies does not enable us to say more but to say less than they do.”¹⁵² Testimony, then, is the linchpin that connects what the biblical authors are doing (testifying) and what the text is about (Old and New Testaments--from Latin

¹⁴⁸C.A. Coady, *Testimony: A Philosophical Study* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992).

¹⁴⁹Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function* (New York: and Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1993), 77. See also Paul Ricoeur, “The Hermeneutics of Testimony,” in *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Lewis S. Mudge (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 123.

¹⁵⁰See Kevin J. VanHoozer, “The Hermeneutics of I-Witness Testimony: John 21:20-24 and the ‘Death of the Author,’” in A. Graeme Auld, ed., *Understanding Poets and Prophets* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 366-78.

¹⁵¹For Nineham and other biblical critics, however, the only eyewitness testimony that is wholly reliable is one’s own. Coady perceptively observes that the tendency to privilege perception over testimony is really “a hankering after a primacy for my perception.” Coady, *Testimony*, 148. This is precisely what interpreters who create rather than attempt to discover textual meaning do; they prefer their own observations to the testimony of authors.

¹⁵²Francis Fiorenza, *Foundational Theology: Jesus and the Church* (New York: Crossroad, 1986), 41. Coady speaks of the futility of attempting to get ‘behind’ testimony: “Hence, I suspect that the problem of justifying testimony, conceived in anything like Hume’s reductive terms, is a pseudo-problem and that the evidence of testimony constitutes a fundamental category of evidence which is not reducible to, or wholly justifiable in term of, such other basic categories as observation or deductive inference. This opinion I have not proved but if my argument so far is correct then there is no sense to the idea of justifying testimony by the path of individual observation, at least where this involves anything like a search for Humean correlations.” *Testimony*, 96.



testamentum, 'a will' [from *testari* 'testify']).¹⁵³ Testimony or witness is at the heart of the intention of the divine and human author(s) of Scripture.

1.2.2.4.3 Point of View and Interpretation

How do we know what aspect of the divine intention a narrative discourse is testifying about? I would suggest that it is primarily through the literary convention of an author's 'point of view,'¹⁵⁴ how the author 'displays the world as' (fill in the blank). According to Mary Louise Pratt, the author of a literary work is not merely mimicking but making a real illocutionary act:¹⁵⁵ not the act of asserting but rather the act of *displaying* a state of affairs. Pratt's point is that the author is "verbally *displaying* a state of affairs, inviting his addressee(s) to join him in contemplating it, evaluating it, and responding to it."¹⁵⁶ In the narrative act the author projects a world towards the reader as an illocutionary act. Consequently, the methodology of reading and understanding story is significantly distinguished from reading propositional, logical communication, such as presented in Paul's letters. Narrative and literary critics like Leland Ryken suggest that a story's illocutionary act is primarily communicated via *plot*. There are a number of other complimentary literary

¹⁵³Trust rather than postmodern suspicion is more fruitful when it comes to interpreting testimony. Our interpretive faculties are designed to produce belief in the words of witnesses in the absence of compelling reasons to the contrary.

¹⁵⁴"The terms 'point of view' is used rather broadly in literary criticism to designate the position or perspective from which a story is told." Adele Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* (Sheffield: The Almond Press, 1983), 46.

¹⁵⁵Speech act theory (Austin and Searle) proposes three aspects of action in speech communication: (1) locution—action has structure, it has verbal, propositional content, it is the *form* and means of the communication; (2) illocution—speech has *energy*, it involves action; and (3) perlocution—speech is teleologic or has final purpose, it brings about certain results, speech effects readers.

¹⁵⁶Mary Louise Pratt, *Toward a Speech Act Theory of Literary Discourse* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1977), 136.



conventions that are at play in conveying the story that I will utilize in analyzing the narrative discourses in Acts from a canonical reader's perspective.

Susan Snaider Lanser says that in addition to displaying a world, authors of narrative take up a *stance* toward it.¹⁵⁷ Lanser says that by the 'narrative act' the *perspective* is established by the author by means of which the world of the text is presented to the reader.¹⁵⁸ The author's voice and vision is communicated indirectly by the 'point of view'—by his or her display of the world.¹⁵⁹ In choosing to communicate in one genre rather than another, authors choose to establish a stance toward their displayed worlds, and thus to communicate an ideology, a 'worldview.' Meir Sternberg agrees saying: "The Bible teaches more than one general lesson about narration. Far from a technical choice, point of view has emerged as an ideological crux and force, nonetheless artful for being thus engaged."¹⁶⁰ Lanser is particularly interested in the ideological function of point of view—in particular how values and evaluations are communicated. In the narrative discourse the narrator is not only 'displaying' a world, but making an 'evaluative' act—commending, condemning, snubbing, mocking, questioning, satirizing, warning, etc. Lanser contends that the purpose of literary acts is not primarily to communicate information

¹⁵⁷Susan Snaider Lanser, *The Narrative Act: Point of View in Prose Fiction* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1981), 7-8.

¹⁵⁸Cf. M.H. Abrams, "Point of View," in *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 142-45. The aspect of point of view means that storytelling is also testifying. See also the classic work by Wayne Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1974).

¹⁵⁹It must be acknowledged that the real author's views may not coincide with those of the implied author. Nevertheless, the real author does communicate with readers, thanks to the textually mediated voice of the implied author. In other words, the real author may pen a fiction depicting a worldview he or she may not personally ascribe to, for some larger purpose that must be discerned from a larger context, but this does not inhibit the reader from perceiving and understanding the worldview encapsulated in the immediate narrative.

¹⁶⁰Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 129. Teaching primarily through OT biblical examples, his three chapters, "Ideology of Narration and Narration of Ideology," "Viewpoints and Interpretations," and "The Play of Perspectives" are very helpful guides concerning the central importance of 'point of view' and its application to interpretation.



about the story's immediate context, but rather to provide 'cultural communication,' i.e., information and knowledge vital to understanding the human condition and to knowing how to contribute to its flourishing or its decaying. Lanser's summary, drawing from speech act theory, is worth noting: "Much like the biblical parable, the novel's basic illocutionary activity is ideological instruction; its basic plea: hear my word, believe and: to guide future generations. The present discussion of 'point of view' bears greatly on the methodology employed to read the narratives of Acts. If what is witnessed to by the Apostles and the New Testament writers who communicate via narrative is encapsulated in the 'point of view' of the narrative discourses, then we must become close readers of the narrative, looking to discern the author's 'perspective' or 'intention.'¹⁶¹

E.D. Hirsch states that "languages are human institutions and thus are intentionalistic through and through."¹⁶² I concur that the author's intended meaning

¹⁶¹This entails a 'both/and' intention of human and divine authorship, but not in an absolute coextensive relationship. Darrell Bock puts it this way: "Progressive hermeneutics argues for stability of meaning while also honoring the dimensions that dual authorship brings to the gradual unfolding of promise. The literary-theological argument is that God reveals the outworking of His promise gradually as Scripture unfolds its meaning and introduces new promises and connections." He says later: "Often promises by their nature show their outworking by how God responds and directs as time passes. Intention becomes revealed through subsequent action and disclosure." ("Hermeneutics of Progressive Dispensationalism," in *Three Central Issues in Contemporary Dispensationalism: A Comparison of Traditional and Progressive Views*, ed. Herbert W. Bateman [Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1999], 94-95). Moo concludes similarly, noting that in this approach "appeal is made not to a meaning of the divine author that somehow is deliberately concealed from the human author in the process of inspiration—a 'sensus occultus'—but to the meaning of the text itself that takes on deeper significance as God's plan unfolds—a 'sensus praegnans.' To be sure, God knows, as He inspires the human authors to write, what the ultimate meaning of their words will be; but it is not as if he has deliberately created a double entendre or hidden a meaning in the words that can only be uncovered through a special revelation. The 'added meaning' that the text takes on is the product of the ultimate canonical shape—though, to be sure, often clearly perceived only on a revelatory basis." ("The Problem of Sensus Plenior," in *Hermeneutics, Authority and Canon*, ed. D.A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986], 206). The divine intention does not contravene the intention of the human author but rather supervenes on it (e.g., *the canon* does not change or contradict the meaning of Isaiah 53, but supervenes on it and specifies its referent). The canon, as in cellular biology, is a higher order phenomenon that displays new properties and requires new categories (e.g., divine intention) adequately to describe it.

¹⁶²John R. Searle, "Structure and Intention in Language: A Reply to Knapp and Michaels," *New Literary History* 25 (1994): 680.



should remain the regulative principle for interpretation, despite challenges that have been mounted against it.¹⁶³ But I agree with VanHoozer's clarification of the concept of 'authorial intention' by defining it in terms of 'communicative agency.'¹⁶⁴ He does this in order to escape the postmodern deconstructive undoing of the subject and the concomitant death of the author. I believe the intention of the author is infused and embodied in the text in his or her 'point of view'; so consequently, one must go to the text in order to determine what an author has done in 'tending' to his or her words in communicating his or her ideology or 'point of view.'

Because authors are literary strategists, aesthetic agents who control word choices, rhetorical strategies and a host of literary conventions in order to engage and guide the reader, the reader must learn to be a 'close reader,' attending to things that the author was attending to in communicating. It is through these various textual strategies that an author reveals the subject matter and mode of the author's 'intention' or 'point of view' to the reader. Leland Ryken¹⁶⁵ has written extensively on reading and understanding biblical narrative and points out the literary conventions that the reader should be attending to when reading narrative.¹⁶⁶ As I read and interpret the literary conventions employed by Luke in

¹⁶³See W.K. Wimsatt, Jr., and Monroe C. Beardsley, *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1954). "The design or intention of the author is neither available nor desirable as a standard for judging the success of a work of literary art." Roland Barthes made a similar dismissal of authorial intention in "The Death of the Author," *Image-Music-Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), 142-154.

¹⁶⁴VanHoozer, *Is There A Meaning*, 230, 232: "...the author is the one whose action determines the meaning of the text—its subject matter, its literary form, and its communicative energy....My point is simply that authors are communicative agents who mean things by participating publicly in rule-governed behavior....The author, lost as Cartesian thinking subject, thus returns a communicative agent—one who means, one who puts a language system and literary form to work in a particular way for a particular purpose."

¹⁶⁵Professor of English at Wheaton College, Wheaton, IL.

¹⁶⁶His major works in this regard are: Leland Ryken, *Words of Life: A Literary Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1987); *Words of Delight: A Literary Introduction to the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1987); *How to Read the Bible as*



Acts from a canonical reader's perspective, I will attempt to pay attention to both poetics¹⁶⁷ (the study of the various forms of text acts) and rhetoric (the study of the functions of text acts).

1.2.3 Canonical Criticism¹⁶⁸ and the Hermeneutical Implications For the Present Study¹⁶⁹

1.2.3.1 Introduction

The development of canonical criticism over the past thirty years represents the next logical step in the move from source and form criticism to redaction criticism. The canon critic recognizes the profound but previously underrecognized fact that the history of the text did not end with the work of the redactor. Rather, that history continued as the text was canonized and interpreted by the early

Literature (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985); *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998); *The Word of God in English: Criteria for Excellence in Bible Translation* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2002); *A Complete Literary Guide to the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993); *Window to the World: Literature in Christian Perspective* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2000).

¹⁶⁷“Poetics, the science of literature, is not an interpretive effort—it does not aim to elicit meaning from a text. Rather it aims to find the building blocks of literature and the rules by which they are assembled. In order to explain poetics as a discipline, a linguistic model is frequently offered: poetics is to literature as linguistics is to language. That is, poetics describes the basic components of literature and the rules governing their use. Poetics strives to write a grammar, as it were, of literature.... In simpler words, poetics makes us aware of how texts achieve their meaning.” Berlin, *Poetics*, 15, 17.

¹⁶⁸The phrase was coined by James Sanders of Claremont Graduate School in 1972 in *Torah and Canon*, in which he raised the question of why the Torah ends with Deuteronomy rather than Joshua (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972). Cf. *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch* ed. T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 629; *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol. 1 ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 862.

¹⁶⁹The following section prepares the important presuppositional and hermeneutical ground-work for the exploration in the following chapters of the historical, theological, and consequent canonical/literary connections between the Fourth Gospel and Acts and those between the four Gospels and Acts. Thus, it works toward providing the background and foundation for the methodology for my thesis. It is acknowledged that the focus of the present work does not allow for an exhaustive examination of the full spectrum of issues related to the canon and canonical criticism.



Church, and it continues to this day in the communities that value and use the text.¹⁷⁰

The post-critical program of canonical criticism emphasizes the hermeneutical importance of the selection and collection of the individual literary compositions of the New Testament in understanding the New Testament itself.¹⁷¹ Canonical criticism argues that the New Testament documents will not be fully understood apart from their canonical context.¹⁷² Harry Gamble notes that historical criticism has traditionally neglected the canon as “irrelevant for the interpretation of individual documents.”¹⁷³ It led to an ever-increasing atomization of the biblical text.

¹⁷⁰David E. Smith, *The Canonical Function of Acts* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 2002), 35f.

¹⁷¹The best popular introductions to the ‘canonical’ dimension of New Testament interpretation are H.Y. Gamble, *The New Testament Canon: Its Making and Meaning* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985) and L.M. McDonald, *The Formation of the Christian Biblical Canon* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1988). A more technical discussion from a historical perspective is B.M. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988). Perhaps the most influential has been H. von Campenhausen, *The Formation of the Christian Bible* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972). Also see C.S.C. Williams, “The History of the Text and Canon of the New Testament,” in *Cambridge History of the Bible*, ed. G.W.H. Lampe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969). For the theological and hermeneutical importance of the New Testament’s final ‘canonical shape’ see B.S. Childs, *The New Testament as Canon: An Introduction* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985); and for the theological and hermeneutical importance of the process of canonization see J.A. Sanders, *Canon and Community* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985); *idem*, *Sacred Story to Sacred Text* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987).

¹⁷²For example, Sanders, in his work on the canonical-critical method, proposes a system of interpretation that he identifies as “canonical hermeneutics.” He proposes this after he describes the process of canonization. He attempts to identify and apply principles of interpretation that are directly based upon his understanding of the development of the canon, especially the observation that within the canon itself traditions are “adapted, represented, and resignified.” Sanders, *Canon and Community*, 47. Building on the work of Sanders and Childs are scholars like Outler, Levering, Brenneman, Wall, and Lemcio. See Albert C. Outler, “The ‘Logic’ of Canon-Making and the Tasks of Canon-criticism,” *Texts and Testaments: Critical Essays on the Bible and Early Church Fathers*, ed. W.E. March (San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 1980) 263-76; Miriam Levering, “Introduction: Rethinking Scripture,” *Rethinking Scripture: Essays from a Comparative Perspective*, ed. M. Levering (Albany: SUNY Press, 1989); From a conservative point of view see R.W. Wall and E.E. Lemcio, *The New Testament as Canon: A Reader in Canonical Criticism* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992).

¹⁷³*The New Testament Canon: Its Making and Meaning* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985),



In reaction there has been a growing interest in recent years in the importance of the canon for biblical exegesis and the articulation of a biblical theology for the church.¹⁷⁴ Broadly described, 'canonical critics' would be identified as paying attention to the present form of the canon in determining the meaning of a text for the believing community. To a lesser or greater degree, depending upon a particular canonical critic, the history of the text prior to its recognition in final canonical form is not the major issue.¹⁷⁵ Thus, the stages in the process are not important, but rather, it is the final product that has authority for the Church. There has been no consensus among its practitioners as to the exact ways in which canonical criticism should function.

1.2.3.2 The Canonical Criticism of James Sanders

James Sanders and Brevard S. Childs¹⁷⁶ have been widely recognized as being at the forefront of canon criticism, though their approaches differ in

¹⁷⁴Historical criticism is driven "by the necessary requirement to uncover the novel, the different, the complex. That is, historical criticism is *obliged* by its own character to make sure no plain sense consensus, binding Old and New Testament witnesses, emerges, because to do so would be to admit that the plain sense had a certain priority..." Christopher R. Seitz, "Sexuality and Scripture's Plain Sense," in *Word Without End* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 322. Brueggemann and his co-authors, in an introduction to the Old Testament, express their intention to go beyond historical criticism in order to interpret the Old Testament theologically, while building on its results and remaining engaged in its perspective; Bruce C. Birch, Walter Brueggemann, Terence E. Fretheim and David L. Petersen, *A Theological Introduction to the Old Testament* (Nashville: Abington Press, 2005), 20-21.

¹⁷⁵There has been no consensus among its practitioners as to the exact ways in which canonical criticism should function. On the one hand, Brevard Childs would tend to say that it is the final form that has authority for the Church and that whatever the earlier forms may have been is of relatively little importance for contemporary believers. ("The Canonical Shape of the Prophetic Literature," *Int* 32 [1978]: 53-55). On the other hand, Sanders believes that an understanding of the process whereby the final canonical form was reached is critical to our understanding of the meaning of that form for us (James Sanders, *Torah and Canon* [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972], xx *et passim*).

¹⁷⁶James Sanders, *Torah and Canon* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972) and *Canon and Community: A Guide to Canonical Criticism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984) *idem.*, *From Sacred Story to Sacred Text* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987); Brevard S. Childs, *The New Testament as Canon: An Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Valley Forge, Pa. Trinity Press International, 1994).



significant ways.¹⁷⁷ Though he does not state it so bluntly, Sanders concludes that the net effect of two hundred years of higher critical work on the Bible was to render its theology null and void.¹⁷⁸ He then proceeds to describe a way of dealing with the biblical text that he thinks preserves the Bible as a theologically valid document. He labels this approach ‘canonical criticism.’

The impetus for Sanders’ new direction was his puzzlement as to why the Torah ended with Deuteronomy rather than Joshua. Moving beyond redaction criticism, which task is to investigate the editorial processes leading up to the final form of the text, Sanders sought to understand the effect of redaction on the final form of the text and its consequent theological implications. He was bewildered that the ancient pattern of the promise of God to the fathers and its climactic fulfillment in the conquest of Canon was not reflected in the Torah’s ending with the narrative of Deuteronomy. The authoritative version ends with Israel encamped in enemy territory and leaderless. His conclusion was that the Torah’s omission of Joshua in its final, canonical shape in effect reinterpreted Israel’s story. Working from and pushing beyond a redaction critical conclusion that the final editing of the Torah was accomplished by priestly editors in sixth-century Babylon, Sanders made the canonical critical observation that the Torah appeared to shift the focus from the land to the law. He concluded that the final shape of the Torah resignified the tradition embedded within it most likely because the exiles in Babylon had lost the land and by ending with Deuteronomy the final form elevated the law as something it could never lose. Building on tradition history, comparative Midrash and redaction

¹⁷⁷For an interchange between Childs and Sanders see *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 2 (1980), 113-211.

¹⁷⁸Sanders concludes that the historical-critical methods “locked the Bible into the past...to protest that it did not intend to do so is of little value. It has happened, and it has been largely responsible for the gulf that now obtains between the pulpit and pew, between the critically trained pastor and the lay parish. For some the Bible has become a sort of archaeological tell which only experts can dig.” J. Sanders, *Canon and Community*, 4-6. See also James D. Smart *The Strange Silence of the Bible in the Church: A Study in Hermeneutics* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970).



criticism, Sanders argued for canonical criticism as a critical pursuit, the goal of which was to explore the hermeneutics of those who shaped older traditions into what became the authoritative version.

Sanders' focus is upon the *process* of canonization, not on the final form and fixed canonical context of the documents. His concern is for the hermeneutical dynamics by which authoritative traditions were not only stabilized but were repeatedly revised and adapted in order to make them freshly relevant to the ever-changing circumstance of the religious community. What is important to Sanders is the identification of the underlying hermeneutic discerned within and behind the canon and its subsequent usefulness as paradigms for further appropriation for future generations of believers.

1.2.3.3 The Canonical Approach of Brevard Childs

Brevard Childs dislikes the term "canonical criticism," worrying that it will be misunderstood as just another technique which takes its place alongside source, form, and redaction criticism.¹⁷⁹ He prefers the ascription "canonical approach."¹⁸⁰ His view is that the canonical approach is "a stance from which the Bible is to be

¹⁷⁹Rolf Rendtorff is right to observe that Childs has brought few followers into his fold. See *Canon and Theology: Overtures to an Old Testament Theology*, translated and edited by Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 47-51.

¹⁸⁰Response to Childs' method have varied greatly. H. Cazelles labeled it an "anthological style," praising it as profound and successful, contrasting it to the fragmenting approach of historical criticism. "The Canonical Approach to Torah and the Prophets," *JSOT* 16 (1980): 28. James Barr satirically responded: "It is like the Book of Kings: for failure to remove the high places, read now failure to read in canonical context. Only very occasionally does one discern an element of cautious hesitation in this monolithic principle (e.g., p. 476). If only Childs had recognized the value of the word *sometimes!*...He leaves it in no doubt that the canon is a good thing. The expression 'the curse of the canon' is not a part of his vocabulary. The book is an utterance of entire approval of the idea of canon: everything about canons, canonicity, and canonical form is good. No one in the history of theology or of biblical interpretation has accorded so much centrality to the canon." (J. Barr, "Childs' *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*," *JSOT* 16 [1980]: 13.)



read as sacred Scripture.”¹⁸¹ Childs uses the term ‘canon’ as “that process of religious interpretation by which a historical faith community left its mark on the literary texts which did not continue to evolve and which became the normative interpretation of those events to which it bore witness.”¹⁸² He tends to downplay the process by which the text supposedly evolved and to emphasize the final product. In this respect I agree with Childs as opposed to Sanders, for whom it is not the final form of the text but the process by which the community arrived at that form that is canonically significant. Sanders argues for a fluid text rather than for a decisive final text that the early Christian community accredited (Childs). He uses the analogy of inflected languages to describe the canon as paradigmatic, by which the believing community can ‘conjugate’ the traditions of a fixed set of traditions reflected in the canon to be adaptable to new contexts by successive communities of believers.

Canonical criticism might be seen in metaphor as the beadle (*bedelos*) who now carries the critically studied Bible in procession back to the church lectern from the scholar's study. And canonical criticism may permit the believing communities to see themselves more clearly as heirs of a very long line of shapers and reshapers of tradition and instruct the faithful as to how they may faithfully perceive the Bible even yet as adaptable for life.¹⁸³

Contra Sanders, Childs argues that theological interpretation of the Bible ought to proceed on the assumption of the “final (canonical) form” of a document and with persistent attention to its “full canonical context,” i.e., the way that text is related to all other texts in the canon. He then makes the *literary* context of the

¹⁸¹Brevard Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 82.

¹⁸²Brevard Childs, *Interpretation* 38 (1984): 68.

¹⁸³Sanders, *Canon* 20.



canon the foundation and standard of interpretation, rather than the original historical context of the canonical documents.¹⁸⁴ Here is where I sharply disagree with Childs.

Childs essentially removes theology from its historical context.¹⁸⁵ For example, for Childs Deuteronomy is not a revelation of God to Moses in the desert of Moab, but rather it is a product of a believing community's reflection upon the issues of law and grace many hundreds of years later. Childs distances himself from the goals of any of the historical-critical methods:

Because the shapers of the material usually hid their identity, ascribing it no theological value, I do not feel that the main focus of critical research should lie in pursuing the redactors' motivations and biases. Rather, the emphasis should fall on the effect which the layering of the tradition has had on the reworded text because of its objective status.¹⁸⁶

I would argue that the historical cannot be separated from the literary aspect,¹⁸⁷ and thus, also the theological (my thesis)—that we know God both because of his acts in history and because he caused an interpretation of those actions to be written down

¹⁸⁴Childs sketches his position in his *Biblical Theology in Crisis* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1970) and develops it more fully in his *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979). A series of critical appraisals, together with responses by Childs, may be found in *JSOT* 16 (1980) and in *HBT* 2 (1980).

¹⁸⁵In response to his critics Childs says that it is possible that some texts of the Bible may have been included without any hermeneutical reflection, having no meaning or making no sense. He responds: "In its final form the literature evoked its own dynamic which was only indirectly related to the history of its composition." B.S. Childs, "Response to Reviewers of *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*," *JSOT* 16 (1980): 5. John Barton expressed great concern about this type of canon criticism and thought that a more radical literary approach like structuralism would be needed to recover authorial intention or historical meaning, which was being abandoned by canon critics. J. Barton, *Reading the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984), 179.

¹⁸⁶Childs, "Response," 54.

¹⁸⁷Francis Watson rightly warns against the 'eclipse of history' in the work of some post-liberal and/or narrative theologians. *Text and Truth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 33-63. Cf. J.G. McConville, "Biblical Theology: Canon and Plain Sense," *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology*, 19.2 (Autumn 2001): 134-157.



that is both faithful and authoritative.¹⁸⁸ Childs' hermeneutical triad is canonical, literary, theological; not historical, literary, theological. While welcoming the re-emphasis upon the overall literary context, I reject the separation of fact and meaning, literary context from historical context—typical of canonical critics.¹⁸⁹ The Reformers taught that there are two parameters for determining the meaning of any biblical text: the grammatical and literary on the one hand, and the historical on the other.¹⁹⁰ For Childs, the canon represents a judgment by the community of faith on the basis of an historical process that issued in a normative corpus of writings. For him the community really constitutes an authority just as ultimate, and even more so, than the canon.¹⁹¹ I would argue that an ecclesiastically commended authoritative text is hardly the same as an authoritative divinely inspired text.¹⁹² Bruce Metzger is

¹⁸⁸Interestingly and ironically, the commitment to historical validation is shared both by fundamentalists or evangelicals and higher critics. Childs unambiguously repudiates propositional revelation, that is, divine disclosure of a fixed deposit of objective truths or doctrines. Childs states that "the heart of my canonical proposal has been missed when this conservative theory seeks to ground biblical truth on objective propositions apart from the reception by a community of Christian faith and practice." (*The New Testament as Canon: An Introduction* [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985], 544.)

¹⁸⁹For two perceptive responses to Sanders and Childs from a conservative point of view see Dale A. Brueggemann, "Brevard Childs' Canon Criticism: An Example of Post-Critical Naiveté," *JETS* 32/3 (September 1989): 311-326; John N. Oswalt, "Canonical Criticism: A Review From a Conservative Viewpoint," *JETS* 30/3 (September 1987): 317-325.

¹⁹⁰Cf. A.B. Mickelsen, *Interpreting the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963), 38-40.

¹⁹¹"If ultimate authority for canonization rested with the Church, its interpretive legitimation for that canonization should have the same authority as the canonical product: the canon. To put it another way, if the early Church's interpretation was of only relative value, their canonical decisions could have only relative value—and the present Church might well move the canonical process along to another stage." D.A. Brueggemann, "Brevard Childs' Canon Criticism," 315.

¹⁹²"Childs has absolutized canonical shape, process and context rather than inspiration. Through a text-immanent canonical process, traditions assume the 'trans-historical identity of normative Scripture' in the paradoxical tension of canonical context. The special prerogatives as "Scripture" are not conferred by inspiration apart from a canonical context; rather, 'inspiration is a way of claiming a special prerogative for this one context.' So the canon becomes more a heuristic model for opening up truth than an actual vehicle of truth. The Bible is no longer the Word of God and does not contain the words of God. Rather, it speaks with the authority of God when



correct when he states: “[Neither] individuals nor councils created the canon; instead they came to recognize and acknowledge the self-authenticating quality of these writings, which imposed themselves as canonical upon the church.”¹⁹³ This is an extension of John 10:14, 26—Jesus’ sheep hear his voice.

1.2.3.4 Canon and Authority

1.2.3.4.1 Childs and Sanders on Canon and Authority

If, as Sanders and Childs propose, the meaning of a text resides in divine authority experienced dynamically in the life of the believing community and not in an objective inscripturated divine revelation given to the community of faith,¹⁹⁴ then it begs questions. Were the Christians wrong in applying the ancient prophetic promises to Jesus of Nazareth? If the community and the canon reciprocally gave each other life and meaning, on what basis could one distinguish transcendent authority from subjective experience? For example, in rejecting Jesus the Jews appealed to their revered tradition to reject his messianic claims. How would one

we read it as if it were the Word of God.” (Ibid., 326. Quoting B.S. Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970], 104).

¹⁹³Bruce M. Metzger, *The New Testament, Its Background, Growth and Content*, 3d rev. and enl. ed., (Nashville: Abingdon, 2003), 318.

¹⁹⁴Childs expressly repudiates propositional revelation, that is, divine disclosure of a fixed deposit of objective truths or doctrines. “The heart of my canonical proposal has been missed,” he writes, “when this conservative theory seeks to ground biblical truth on objective propositions apart from the reception by a community of Christian faith and practice.” *The New Testament as Canon*, 544. If, as Scripture attests, God reveals himself intelligibly and verbally, then it is credible that the writers of Scripture give us a God-breathed textual content that tells the truth about God and his purposes and actions. Behind the redemptive acts implicit in canonical interpretation stands the rational disclosure and communication of God who authoritatively inscripturates his revealed truths and goals. The inherited Reformed view of divine inspiration and authority holds that among the canonically-attested acts of God is the divine inspiration of prophetic-apostolic proclamation. What lends credence to the comprehensive authority and reliability of the scriptural history and teaching is textual inspiration. When the production of the canon is inked essentially not to inspired prophets and apostles, but is connected instead to fallible supplementers, editors, redactors and interpreters, divine inspiration becomes so insubstantial as to be powerless. The reformers insisted that Scripture is self-authenticating; it does not stand indissolubly dependent upon the primitive church. The canon witnesses, in the apostle Paul’s words, that Scripture functions profitably for the church’s thought and conduct because it is antecedently ‘God-breathed’ (2 Tim 3:16).



adjudicate the authority claims of each community? Would not the dynamic experiential 'acceptance' of their tradition as other Jews interpreted—or reinterpreted—yield an equally valid creative meaning and revelatory truth? The postmodern pluralist would answer yes. Working from Childs' premises the canonical text gains its sense not through an interpretation of original events in relation to which the text first arose, but through its meaning for the Christian community. One could ask, 'Why did the Christian community arise in the first place if not in response to the objective fact of the resurrection of Christ?' Elmer B. Smick rightly concludes that for Childs "the final (canonical) form of the text has relativized past historical events."¹⁹⁵

Though Sanders and Childs understand the canon in divergent perspectives they both view it in the end as being a human accomplishment.¹⁹⁶ Calvin attacked vehemently "the pernicious error...that Scripture is of importance only in so far as conceded to it by the suffrage of the Church; as if the eternal inviolable truth of God could depend on the will of men."¹⁹⁷ In contrast to their

¹⁹⁵"Old Testament Theology: The Historico-Genetic Method," *JETS* 26 (1983): 145-155. When Barr probes Childs' reason for overthrowing the historical-critical approach Childs responds: accept it by faith. "In my judgment, the acceptance of the canon as normative does not function initially as a derivative of reasoned argument. The canon is the deposit of the religious community's sacred tradition which one receives as a member of that body. The acknowledgment of a normative rule functions confessionally as a testimony to one's beliefs. Earlier attempts to ascribe to the Hebrew canon special qualities of excellence, as if it had the best text, or reflected a superior form of literature, or possessed a unique claim to historicity, seem to have been misplaced. Does this mean that the relation to the canon is irrational and beyond the scope of all reasoned argument? Certainly not. The issue at stake is the classic theological problem of the proper relation of faith to reason. The testimony of faith and not reason establishes the canon. Yet there is an internal logic of faith within the framework of confession." Childs, "Response," 56. But I would argue that faith must have a proper object, or it is only delusion.

¹⁹⁶"This is the key issue. If authority is in the process and the process is human, then the methodology of the process has the same authority as its product. If the canon that resulted from hermeneutical moves in the early Church has authority, then the hermeneutical moves have authority." (D.A. Brueggemann, "Brevard Childs' Canon Criticism," 321).

¹⁹⁷*Institutes of the Christian Religion*, tr. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966), Vol. I.7.1 as quoted in John Piper, "The Authority and Meaning of the Christian Canon: A Response to Gerald Sheppard on Canon Criticism," *JETS* 19/2 (1976): 89.



understanding and presuppositions, I would argue that the principle of canonicity is not the approval of a post-apostolic church, but apostolicity—the connection of the writing to the apostles or their close associates.¹⁹⁸ If textual normativity is the achievement of a final canonizing community, then the meaning of the biblical text is dissolved into what the early church decided, and the decisive role of the prophets and apostles is effaced (Eph 2:20). The apostles were the divinely authorized interpreters of the crucified and risen Christ's ministry and mission (Matt 19:28; Luke 22:27-30; John 14:25f; Rev 21:14). The fact that Jesus promised that the Spirit of Truth would assist their memories regarding his deeds and words during his earthly ministry implies that he addressed contemporaries who would build on direct experience in their exposition of his life and message. Paul claims to be a belated witness to the resurrected Jesus (Acts 9:4; 22:7,14; 26:14; 1 Cor 9:1). In this light it

¹⁹⁸“The primary criterion by which the ancient church established its canon of authoritative Scriptures was clearly a modified form of apostolicity, but the task of determining what was apostolic was not easy since even the heretical Christians claimed to have an apostolic heritage. Eventually the view that carried the day was that the apostolic deposit—genuine witness to and from Jesus Christ (the church's true *canon*)—was transmitted faithfully from the apostles to the church through its succession of.” (L.M. McDonald, *The Formation of the Christian Biblical Canon* [Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1988], 424.)

The difficulty with this view that apostolic commendation is the criterion of canonicity lies not merely in unpersuasive critical theories that a fourth-century church council sanctioned the New Testament as a specific collection of writings; or that theological diversity in the early Christian writings obscured their normativity until heresy necessitated a literary tradition to distinguish orthodoxy from heresy; or some other speculative variation on the critical theme that the canon is but a human achievement. The early church kept the principle of apostolic authority alive, and shared the conviction that normative Christian literature is not indefinitely open-ended (*cf.* Luke 1:1-4). But it remains the case that the apostles conveyed no direct revelation of the express limits of the canon, and that the local churches did not universally share a complete collection of inspired writings. The Apostolic Fathers quote the apostles authoritatively on par with the OT. They also indicate that the apostles are authoritative even if no longer living on earth. The earliest fathers appeal to 'living memory' of apostolic teaching and later fathers to what 'is written.' I think the inescapable implication is that apostolic teaching is authoritative even before a complete canon is accessible. With Irenaeus, who claimed contact with the apostolic generation through Polycarp and scarcely escapes inclusion with the Apostolic Fathers, a definitive literature is stipulated—four Gospels (no more, no less) and well-defined additional writings including Paul's letters (see the tables in the chapter addendum). Nowhere do the church fathers give any indication that they are acting creatively to constitute the canon. The Muratorian canon (about A.D. 200) seems simply to acknowledge the books that the churches used and considered integral to the Christian heritage.



appears a distinctive apostolic authority inheres in the New Testament.¹⁹⁹ This authority is grounded in the risen Christ and mediated through the Spirit who superintended the apostles' oral and written proclamation.²⁰⁰ Just as the apostles were themselves earlier bound to the Spirit-given prophetic Word, the early church was responsible to the apostolic message. In one sense the canon did come 'through the church' but it did not come 'from the church.' The relationship between the written text and the primitive Christian community did not constitute the canon's authority but rather reflected that authority. Though not in a perfectly straight historical line, nor in perfect unanimity,²⁰¹ the church came to recognize the divine inspiration of certain writings, but it did not confer or directly share in that inspiration. The reality of variations in lists in the development toward a final canon reflects the normal historical process of recognizing the divinely inspired documents given to the church, not to the deficiency of the work of the Spirit to inspire and to guide the church into truth (John 16:13).²⁰²

Childs concedes an "almost total lack of information regarding the history of canonization."²⁰³ He adds that the complex process of canonical development largely eludes critical reconstruction because one "cannot decipher all the layers of

¹⁹⁹If writing was believed to have been produced by an apostle, it was eventually accepted as sacred Scripture and included in the New Testament canon. Eusebius' argument against the apostolic authorship of the pseudepigraphal literature reflects the universally acknowledged authority of apostolic writings and the rejection of writings believed to have not come from an apostle.

²⁰⁰There is a major difference between believing in the canonical process (Sanders and Childs) and believing in the One who inspired the original documents and providentially gave an authoritative canon to his church.

²⁰¹See the charts mapping the early history of the canon in the chapter addendum.

²⁰²The canon does not treat scriptural components as if they acquire finality and authority only if and when they are included in the canon, or as if their authority is in any way, even in part, suspended upon a creative contribution or reconstruction by the community of faith. The divine authority of apostolic letters was not contingent upon their inclusion in the canon, although it attests to their authority.

²⁰³*Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*, 60.



tradition and redaction.”²⁰⁴ Historical criticism predicated on diverse assumptions has reached conflicting conclusions about canonical sources, revisionary additions and dating of various strands of the canon. Canon-criticism, of the type that continues to cling to historical-critical presuppositions²⁰⁵ and which elevates the textual authority of post-apostolic editors above that of the apostles, must deal with the fact that while the canon puts forth the names of the apostles Peter, John, Paul and other evangelists, the supposed canonical editors are nameless phantoms reminiscent of P, D, and Q.²⁰⁶

1.2.3.4.2 Lee Martin McDonald and Canon

In his work titled *The Biblical Canon*, McDonald structures several of his chapters around Sundberg’s observation that there were three stages in the history of the NT canon:²⁰⁷ “(1) the rise of the NT writings to the status of Scripture; (2) the conscious groupings of such literature into closed collections (e.g., the four Gospels and the Epistles of Paul); and (3) the formation of a closed list of authoritative

²⁰⁴Ibid., L.M. McDonald concurs in the conclusion to his lengthy work on the canon: “historical circumstances that led to the canonization of the New Testament literature are not completely clear today, since no surviving literature identifies the canonical process.” *The Biblical Canon: Its Origin, Transmission, and Authority* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Pub., 2007), 421.

²⁰⁵Childs appears to be schizophrenic in his view of historical-critical methods—one moment showing respect, but the next denying their benefits.

²⁰⁶Later in the present work I engage James Dunn on this very foundational issue in reference to Acts. He believes later editors produced writings attributed to Luke in Acts. This underlies the importance of the elaboration of my presuppositions and thinking in reference to the issues of canon at the outset.

²⁰⁷Lee Martin McDonald holds that the word *canon* “primarily refers to a fixed standard or collection of Scriptures that defines the faith and identity of a particular religious community.” *The Biblical Canon: Its Origin, Transmission, and Authority* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 2007), 44.



literature.”²⁰⁸ The present work will argue that in stage 2 identified by Sundberg, the early church’s decisions concerning the ordering of the four Gospels, with the majority of early groupings juxtaposing John’s Gospel with Acts, may have been guided by theological insight and therefore indicated hermeneutical guidance to the canonical reader.²⁰⁹ Exegesis will be offered in the following chapters from the second half of the Fourth Gospel and from the opening discourses of Acts as evidence for the theological fruitfulness of such an hypothesis.

McDonald suggests that the earliest ‘*regula*’ (canon) for the Christian community was Jesus himself.²¹⁰ It is Jesus who reignites the prophetic voice in Israel, which some Jews believed had ceased in Israel (Heb 1:2). OT prophets had expected the age of the Spirit and prophet to be manifested at the end of the age (Mal 4:5-6; cf. Joel 2:28-29; Ezek 36:27; 37:14). The apostle John’s statement that “the word became flesh” (John 1:14) and his record of Jesus’ own words declaring that he spoke his Father’s words (John 8:28; 12:49) indicate that the early church believed that the fulfillment of the expectation of Israel was inaugurated in Jesus and then continued in the church’s witness to the risen Lord (Acts 1:8).

The ascension of Jesus presents an historical/rhetorical problem for the continuation of the prophetic ministry he inaugurates. It is suggested in the present work that among the four Gospels, the solution to this apparent dilemma is most anticipated and addressed by Jesus in the latter half of the Gospel of John and actuated in the opening events recorded by Luke in Acts. I will propose that the authority of the joint prophetic witness of the Apostles and the Holy Spirit is established by Jesus in John’s Gospel (John 16:7, 13; 14:13; 17:18; 20:21;

²⁰⁸Ibid., 244; citing Sundberg, “Making of the New Testament Canon,” in *The Interpreter’s One-Volume Commentary on the Bible*. ed. Charles M. Lyman (New York: Abingdon, 1971), 1216-24.

²⁰⁹See the addendum to the present chapter to view the variety of early church groupings of NT writings.

²¹⁰*The Biblical Canon*, 44.



15:26,27) and effectuated in Acts (Acts 1:12-26; 2:1-4; 5:32). The NT canon is rooted first in Jesus and then the authorized witnesses he established.²¹¹

1.2.3.4.3 Canon and the Presupposition of Divine Providence

The presupposition of special divine providence best explains the compilation and preservation of the canon.²¹² The same Spirit of God that inspired the Word of God is the same Spirit of Truth (John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13; 1 John 4:6) that supervised the preservation and collection of the New Testament documents through which Christians through the ages have come to hear the authoritative voice of the Spirit of God.

In response to Jesus' missionary mandate, the apostles were ever on the move planting new churches in various countries and regions. Sometimes they pastored these house churches, sometimes they handed them over to others and some churches arose through the missionary outreach of converts. Without the modern means of communication and travel, it is not surprising that the apostolic writings would have limited circulation. Considering these factors, whatever treasured autographs or copies certain geographical sectors of the church might have had would certainly have resulted in somewhat differing 'lists,' and that for some time uncertainty might preside over the composition of a growing canon. The serial reception of these documents by local churches, to which many of the letters were addressed, and their subsequent distribution and dispersion to more distant churches, seems a more natural explanation of why no indication exists of formal finalization of the canon as one might expect in the case of a single climactic event.

²¹¹The presence of charismatic preachers called prophets in the early church (e.g., 1 Cor 12:28; Eph 2:20; 4:11) is evidence of the widespread belief that the presence of the Spirit and the age of fulfillment had begun in the event of Jesus.

²¹²For Gerald Sheppard the canonical context is a "theological *a priori*...What holds the Scripture together in its dialectical tension...is the affirmation of the believing community for the normative status of a given tradition shaped and contained in a set of books." ("Canon Criticism: The Proposal of Brevard Childs and an Assessment for Evangelical Hermeneutics," in *Studia Biblica et Theologica* 4/2 [1974]: 9, 7.)



The importance of the apostolic eyewitness account of the words and works of Jesus was established quite soon after the death of Jesus (1 Cor 15:3-8; Acts 1:21-22) and after the death of the apostles. It was taken up into the church's witness both for the church itself (1 Clem. 42.1; 2 Pet 3:2) and for polemical argument against heresy (Justin, 1 Apol. 42.4; 50.12; Irenaeus, *Haer.* 3.1-3; Tertullian, *Praescr.* 6). In the examples from Irenaeus and Tertullian the guarantee of accuracy of the church's canon of faith was secured by apostolic succession wherein the truthfulness of their understanding of the gospel was passed on through the church's bishops from the apostles. The apostolicity principle best explains why the canon in its historical development has a history of fuzziness around the edges—that the early generations wrestled to discern the voice of the Spirit as to which document's authority were consistent with and ultimately rooted in the chief canon (Jesus) and those witnesses directly authorized and appointed by Jesus.

1.2.3.4.4 The Usefulness of the Canonical Approach Based Upon Supernaturalistic Presuppositions

Despite the critical shortcomings exhibited by many of its post-critical practitioners as regards the *locus* of authority, the focus on how a document functions as canon in the believing community is a welcome insight. Canonical criticism commendably challenges the tyranny over biblical studies that historical criticism imposes through unwarranted assumptions.²¹³ It refocuses scholarly interest on a normative canonical text as being the authoritative content and context

²¹³John Van Seters' recent monograph is one particularly strong example of the voice of late modernity crying in the wilderness of postmodernity. Anyone who believes there is a theological force at work in the Bible or a canonical intentionality, or the Holy Spirit, is immediately written off as "confessional." But that critic fails to see that his complete confidence in the historical-critical method—a method that shuts out any theological force from working in an avowedly theological book—is equally "confessional." *The Edited Bible: The Curious History of the "Editor" in Biblical Criticism* (Warsaw, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2006).



for Christian theology.²¹⁴ If God is held to be the divine author of all Scripture, then it is the canon as a whole that becomes the communicative act that ultimately needs to be described.²¹⁵

Kevin VanHoozer suggests that the Acts 8 narrative of Philip's encounter with the Ethiopian presents a hermeneutical paradigm for the early church's canonical approach to the reading of Scripture that "**represents a special kind of external aid, namely, the strategy of reading the Scriptures in their broader apostolic and canonical context.**"²¹⁶ He further proposes that Philip serves as a "stand-in" for the New Testament authors' approach to understanding the interrelationship of the documents of the canon—a "*canonical consciousness.*"²¹⁷ Philip's interpreting Isaiah 53 in the light of the person and work of Jesus Christ is viewed as a "proto-canonical practice."²¹⁸ Philip's practice places Jesus at the center of the 'hermeneutical spiral,' portraying Jesus as the one around whom the whole drama of Scripture revolves and that such canonical practice lies at the heart

²¹⁴"In this way, biblical fundamentalists find that some subjects neglected by older historical critics are taken up once again, though expressed in the light of critical historical conclusions alien to fundamentalist views regarding the history of the Bible." *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 861.

²¹⁵Mary C. Callaway notes that canonical criticism "does not address the history of these lists or the councils that may have formalized them; those concerns properly belong to the history of canon. Canonical criticism begins instead with the assumption that biblical texts were generated, transmitted, reworked, and preserved in communities for which they were authoritative and the biblical criticism should include study of how these texts functioned in the believing communities. Source, form, and redaction criticism focus on stages in the development of the biblical text prior to its final form, whereas canonical criticism analyzes the text as it was received in its final form. The emphasis may be on the function of the fixed text in the first communities to receive it, or on the process of adaption by which the community resignified earlier traditions to function authoritatively in a new situation and thereby produced the final text." ("Canonical Criticism," in *To Each Its Own Meaning: An Introduction to Biblical Criticisms and Their Application*, ed. Stephen L. McKenzie and Stephen R. Haynes [Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999], 242-43.)

²¹⁶Kevin VanHoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 119. Emphasis mine.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

²¹⁸ Ibid.



of the relationship between the New and the Old Testaments and their subparts. In this respect Philip is following Jesus' own hermeneutic (Luke 24:27- "Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets..."). The intertextual hermeneutic of Jesus is continued in the church post-ascension, aided by the Spirit and emulated by the rest of the New Testament authors.

A canonical approach rooted in supernaturalistic presuppositions espoused in the present work argues that the "fuller meaning" of Scripture—the meaning associated with divine authorship—emerges only at the level of the canon.²¹⁹ For it is in relation to its intentional context that a text yields its maximal sense—its fullest meaning. If one reads the Bible as the Word of God, it is suggested that the context that yields this maximal sense is the canon taken as a unified communicative act. The divine intention does not negate the intention of the human author but rather undergirds and transcends it. Thus, the canon as a whole becomes the unified act for which the divine intention serves as the unifying principle.²²⁰ The unifying rhetorical goal of the canon is the formation both of Christian theological understanding and a covenant life with God through Christ in the realm of his Spirit. Each one of the diverse canonical voices functions as an aspect of the 'rule' or 'canon' that both create the covenant community (Rom 10:17) and measures the integrity and veracity of its covenant life (John 12:47; 2 Tim 3:16). VanHoozer highlights the covenantal nature of the canon in that it "serves as the

²¹⁹This is directly contra canonical critics as represented by Harry Gamble: "Among these various levels of meaning, it is not obvious that the canonical sense has, or ought to be granted, any special preeminence, let alone exclusive validity. So far as it is distinctive, the canonical sense does not spring from the intention of any biblical writer. Rather, it arises through the collocation of diverse texts, and what it reflects above all are *the hermeneutical perspectives of the church* [my italics] which brought these texts together, drew a boundary around them, and provided structural relationships among them." *The New Testament Canon*, 82. His presuppositions clearly do not include divine authorship or providence, but rather, authority and inspiration rests in the church.

²²⁰Inspiration is then an essential element of the Old and New Testaments. To view the divine intention as an 'essential element' of the diverse human communicative acts that comprise Scripture avoids the incoherent position that the divine intention contradicts that of the human author.



'building plan,' as it were, for the people of God.²²¹ The Spirit uses the Scripture precisely to 'edify' the church (cf. 2 Tim 3:16). The canon literally constitutes the covenant community: 'canonicity precisely and properly defined is a matter of *community* life norms.'²²²

On the basis of the assumption that the canon is a unified literary act, canonical criticism so defined argues that while both are inseparable and important, the text's ultimate meaning is derived from its canonical meaning²²³ and penultimately from the reconstruction of the author's original conversation with his audience.²²⁴ The initial move in exegesis is to focus on discovering the full voice of each biblical writer without regard for the integral wholeness of Scripture.²²⁵ But the

²²¹This is to understand canon primarily in functional and formative rather than in epistemic and dogmatic terms. This is well-argued by William J. Abraham, *Canon and Criterion in Christian Theology: From the Fathers to Feminism* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998). Cf. Robert Wall, *The New Testament as Canon: A Reader in Canonical Criticism* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992), 15-16.

²²²VanHoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 140, quotes Meredith G. Kline *The Structure of Biblical Authority* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Pub., 1997), 102. VanHoozer later continues in the same vein: "The canon is a *sapiential criterion*, a means of making judgments about how to speak and act in ways that best conform to Jesus Christ, the wisdom of God." *Ibid.*, 146.

²²³Understood as each part of the canon contributes to and integrates coherently into the metanarrative of Scripture, and thus, the fullest meaning of each part is best understood in the light of the whole and with each of the other parts. This forms the basis of the legitimacy of the discipline of biblical theology.

²²⁴Robert Wall argues that "this 'critical' approach to Acts [Acts criticism that attempts to reconstruct the narrative's 'original meaning' in order to understand what the anonymous narrator had in mind when telling his story to its first reader, Theophilus] seems mistaken to me, not because it is unprofitable or impractical but because it misplaces Scripture's timeless referent—that is, God—for the particular historic moment of a text's composition." Anthony B. Robinson and Robert Wall, *Called to Be Church: The Book of Acts for a New Day* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 261. In an earlier work Wall argued that "it is a mistake of critical scholarship to assume that a biblical text's authority and meaning are qualified only by its original life-setting, by the author's original intent in addressing it, and by the literary genre he used in recasting the various sources at hand. On the basis of this assumption, it is supposed that the text's primary meaning is derived from the reconstruction of the author's original conversation with his audience, thereby making its canonical meaning secondary to its original meaning." ("The Acts of the Apostles in Canonical Context," *BTB* 18 [1988]: 17).

²²⁵In the nineteenth century Friedrich Schliermacher argued that meaning and interpretation began with the intention of the author of a biblical text, with due regard also to the historical context and situation out of which the author wrote. "Only historical interpretation can do



final goal, and thus the primary objective, is to integrate the chorus of the variety of voices into the whole sense of Scripture. To presume simultaneity of subject matter, i.e., theology, (conveying the one and same God working out his covenant relationship with his people through a variety of voices that express a diversity of integrated, coherent aspects of the two-part, unified covenant) between the various parts of the whole of the canon, without also sufficiently ascertaining the literal sense of each part, undermines the cohesive nature of Scripture and truncates the full witness to God. **Thus, the present study embraces a canonical approach that has nothing to do with an ahistorical methodology that views the Bible as a free-floating ‘text,’ as in much of the literary approaches, nor on the other hand with a historicist approach that focuses on the events behind the text.** The canonical approach advocated here incorporates the whole canon as the interpretative framework for understanding God, the world, oneself, and others. Such a canonical understanding is one that reads individual passages and books in the light of their interrelationships within the larger divine drama of redemption.

James Brenneman argues that the value of the canon lies in the paradigmatic nature of the intracanonical voices that it contains.²²⁶ Like Brenneman, Robert Wall, Eugene Lemcio and Anthony Robinson, canonical critics who also embrace supernaturalistic presuppositions similar to the author, perceive that the diverse voices of the Bible are engaged in a sort of “conversation” that provides a model for contemporary interpretation.²²⁷ They understand the intertextual nature of

justice to the the rootedness of the New Testament authors in their time and place.” *Hermeneutics: The Handwritten Manuscripts*, ed. Heinz Kimmerle, trans. James Duke and Jack Fortsman (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1977), 104. By this he did not merely have in mind some shadowy ‘mental state’ or inner psychological process of ‘intending,’ but rather the goal and purpose behind and within a text that signal an author’s desire, will, and action as evidenced in and by the text and its surroundings. Meaning and interpretation include more than these, but these remain his starting point.

²²⁶James E. Brenneman, *Canons in Conflict: Negotiating Texts in True and False Prophecy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997). I do not agree with the further development of his canonical hermeneutics in that he views canonical criticism functioning as a communal variant of reader-response interpretation, speaking from his own pacifist Mennonite tradition.

²²⁷Wall and Lemcio, *New Testament as Canon*, 16-19.



Scripture—the consistent occurrence of citations or allusions to earlier texts, to be rooted in the “simultaneity of its subject”—theology.²²⁸ In their view the current focus on intertextuality²²⁹ is magnified by canon criticism.

1.2.3.5 The Canonical Approach and Its Application in the Present Study

Founded upon the presupposition of the superintendence of the Holy Spirit unifying the diversity of human voices in the canon,²³⁰ it is argued that a valuable perspective may be gained by a fresh hearing of the voice of Luke in Acts in concert with the voice of the apostle John in his gospel (explored in the following two chapters) and in concert with the four gospels as a unit (the final chapter). Based upon the preceding understanding of the canonical approach, the following chapters are an exercise in applying the insights of a canonical approach in order to discover whether it may bear fruit for interpretation and understanding. We will begin with the macro-perspective of viewing the opening discourses of Acts in the light of the immediate preceding canonical context of the Fourth Gospel in order to explore whether such study may bear fruit for discovering possible coherent, consistent

²²⁸R.W. Wall, “Canonical Context and Canonical Conversations,” 169.

²²⁹Du Toit, “New Testament Exegesis in Theory and Practice,” 145. “It has nevertheless become axiomatic that all texts, whether literary or non-literary, form part of a socially and culturally determined network of traditions and textual relations, and that meaning is generated by moving between a specific text and all the others to which it relates. Although the notion of intertextuality and its critical refinement is of recent date, biblical scholars have traditionally realized the importance of reading New Testament texts with the broader context of the Old Testament and of other New Testament books, as well as Jewish and Graeco-Roman texts and tradition. Especially Old Testament quotations have received much attention. However, modern developments must make the exegete even more aware of the critical importance of intertextuality.”

²³⁰The role of the Holy Spirit in creating the scriptural text is an idea of Jewish origin. In Acts, the praying community quotes Psalm 2 as the work of the Holy Spirit: “You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David” (Acts 4:25). Also in Acts, when quoting Isaiah, Paul considers the Holy Spirit to be the speaker: “The Holy Spirit spoke the truth to your forefathers when he said through Isaiah the prophet” (Acts 28:25). The Epistle to the Hebrews repeatedly quotes Scripture with the formula “The Holy Spirit says” (Heb 3:7; 10:15). According to Mark’s Gospel, Jesus himself quotes Psalm 110 as composed by David through the Holy Spirit. Two texts, 2 Tim 3:16 and 2 Pet 1:21, stand out as especially important. Their impact is due to their generality: both envisage neither this nor that quotation but the entirety of Scriptures as such.



historical and theological connections presupposed in a canonical approach. Secondly, the macro-perspective will widen to view the narratives of Acts in the light of the fourfold Gospels as to whether there is a core historical, literary and theological coherence and consistency intrinsic to the narratives of the life and ministry of the church in Acts and the life and ministry of Jesus in the Gospels. It will be argued that in both cases it is an intrinsic theology²³¹ that is embedded within the recorded history and which also drives the literary artistry employed in narrating the history in Acts (my thesis). In taking the following macro or canonical approach I have expanded A.B. du Toit's understanding of discourse analysis to its logical ends—the ever-increasing canonical contexts, and ultimately the whole canon:

It is a well-known axiom that, in studying texts one should work from the larger units downwards as well as from the smaller units upwards. This reciprocal movement is necessary to open up the text. Naturally, this is also true of discourse analysis. However, the critical issue in this process is that of vantage point. Should one's vantage point be the individual sentences that constitute a unit, or the larger unit in its totality? If the first component of the term '*discourse analysis*' is taken seriously, the answer should be self-evident.²³²

The ultimate discourse is the canon, viewed as God's metanarrative—the story of his establishing a faithful covenant people/partner, with all its inter-connected subplots and literary expressions. That love story ends with a glorious wedding of the protagonist and his bride (Rev 19:7-9; 21:3). That is the gospel—the good news—that God will accomplish the goal of the metanarrative in and through Christ.

The canon not only describes God's metanarrative but its arrangement provides hermeneutical insight into specific biblical texts. D.M. Smith argues cogently that the character of the final canon, including its final order, "projects a

²³¹Meaning that though they are expressed in a diversity of genre, there are unified, coherent biblical theological themes woven throughout the canon, centering on the chief protagonist of the metanarrative--God.

²³²"Exploring Textual Structure: Discourse Analysis," in *Focusing on the Message: New Testament Hermeneutics, Exegesis and Methods*, ed. A.B. du Toit (Pretoria: Protea Book House, 2009), 221.



kind of intention that can scarcely be ignored.”²³³ Pertaining more narrowly to the present work he explains that the Fourth Gospel stands last in the gospel canon as if it were to be read after the Synoptics.²³⁴ A.C. Outler proposes that there is a “canon-logic” organizing the final form of the New Testament into four units (gospel, acts, letter, apocalypse) that envisages an intentional rhetorical pattern.²³⁵ He argues that that logic effectively orients the reader to the canonical or divine intention.²³⁶ Each unit in the final form of the New Testament canon is assigned a specific role and function within the whole. Both the placement of the documents and their titles are properties of their canonization and may provide an initial hermeneutical set of clues to the readers.²³⁷

²³³D.Moody Smith, “John, the Synoptics, and the Canonical Approach to Exegesis,” in *Tradition and Interpretation in the New Testament*, eds. Gerald F. Hawthorne with Otto Betz (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 171.

²³⁴*Ibid.*, 176.

²³⁵Albert C. Outler, “The ‘Logic’ of Canon-Making and the Tasks of Canon-Criticism,” in *Texts and Testaments: Critical Essays on the Bible and Early Church Fathers*, ed. W. Eugene March (San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 1980), 263-76.

²³⁶The interest of the interpreter in Scripture’s final literary form—in the text *qua* text—is presumed.

²³⁷The titles assigned in the canonizing process provide hermeneutical guidance as to what particular contribution each unit makes in forming a comprehensive Christian theology. It is doubtful that anyone would say that the order of the New Testament documents exhibits no theological order. For example, although there may be intramural squabbles as to the individual order, the fourfold Gospel is placed at the beginning of the New Testament in order to establish the foundation of the story of Jesus’ earthly ministry as the subtext for all that follows in the New Testament. It has been argued that Matthew’s Gospel is the most appropriate opening document of the New Testament for providing the best historical and theological bridge between the testaments. In the same vein I will be arguing in the next two chapters that the Fourth Gospel provides the best historical and theological bridge from the fourfold gospel to the book of Acts. By titling Luke’s second volume *The Acts of the Apostles* the early church signals a canonical intention, while not violating Luke’s original intention, that orients the reader to view it as the New Testament’s introduction to the apostolic letters that follow in the final literary form of the canon.

John Barton suggests that there is important hermeneutical significance to the titles of the four Gospels: “The titles of the Gospels provide a clear hermeneutical direction for the reader. They do not use the term ‘Gospel’ as the name of a literary genre, but instead speak of each ‘Gospel’ as ‘[the gospel] according to X.’ Thus, the reader is invited to think of there being one ‘gospel’ attested by four witnesses. Titles are in general a very strong way of constraining the interpretation of



Canonical criticism proposes that the final canonical order of the biblical texts constitutes a specific rather than an arbitrary decision about how these diverse, authoritative texts should be read by Christians in every generation. It further suggests that the divine author intends that the reader be aware not only of a specific text, but of the whole canonical context.²³⁸ *Sitz im Kanon* superintends over and in conjunction with each and every *Sitz im Leben*, hermeneutically.²³⁹

Texts.... Certainly the hermeneutical point here, that each of the four Gospels is to be read as *the* Gospel (in one version) is conveyed much more by the titles than by the text itself. If we suppose that one of the evangelists—say Luke—intended to eliminate all other Gospels by his work, then the title appended to his book by some unknown editor thwarted his purpose more effectively in two words than any number of alterations to his text could have done.” *Holy Writings, Sacred Text*, 193, note 45.

²³⁸In an otherwise fine work on New Testament hermeneutics, edited by A.B. du Toit and titled *Focusing on the Message: New Testament Hermeneutics, Exegesis and Methods*, a significant absence is a chapter addressing canonical criticism (Pretoria: Protea Book House, 2009). In reading through the work I am struck by the failure to address the hermeneutical implications of acknowledging the divine authorship. In the second chapter, Bernard Lategan briefly acknowledges the importance of the canon context for reading, but this important insight is not further developed in the book: “For J. Severion Croatto the extension of the semantic axis of the text poses the essence of the canonical process and therefore he insists on a ‘canonical reading.’ Both the canon and the interpretative community provide valuable guidelines for reading the text and for respecting its theological trust.” (Ibid., 102). A.B. du Toit, in his chapter titled “New Testament Exegesis in Theory and Practice,” also acknowledges the importance of the concerns of canonical criticism, but the following chapters of the volume do not pursue the full import of the latter part of his astute observation that “It has nevertheless become axiomatic that all text, whether literary or non-literary, form part of a socially and culturally determined network of traditions and textual relations, and that meaning is generated by moving between a specific text and all the others to which it relates. Although the notion of intertextuality and its critical refinement is of recent date, biblical scholars have traditionally realized *the importance of reading New Testament text with the broader context of the Old Testament and of other New Testament books* [my italics], as well as Jewish and Graeco-Roman texts and traditions. Especially Old Testament quotations have received much attention. However, modern developments must make the exegete even more aware of the critical importance of intertextuality.” (Ibid., 145.) I would argue that the neglect of the broadening of the concept and practice of intertextuality by canonical criticism and its underlying presupposition of divine authorship is a general and far reaching mistake on the part of much critical scholarship when it assumes that a biblical text’s authority and meaning are qualified *only* by its original life setting, by the author’s original intent in addressing it, and by the literary genre he used in recasting the various sources at hand. The apostles in Acts both acknowledge the inspiration of the OT text and exploit the consequent intertextuality principle. The divine author’s inspiration of a closed list of works that sufficiently, coherently and *cohesively* communicates his Word to humanity suggests that the *Sitz im Kanon* is an important hermeneutical principle.

²³⁹Canonical critic Robert Wall emphasizes that “the fundamental continuity between the original and canonical *Sitz im Leben*, and between historical/literary criticisms and canonical criticism is especially important....” *The New Testament As Canon*, 17.



Childs points out that the history of the church's interpretation of Acts has always appreciated Acts as a 'canonical bridge' between the fourfold Gospel and the multiple letters of the New Testament.²⁴⁰ Such a concern shifts the focus away from Luke's intention to that of the canonizing church, yielding hermeneutical implications. Albert Outler expresses his hope that canon criticism "might help turn our inquiries in new directions, with a fresh set of queries and nuances."²⁴¹ Following Outler's suggestion and working from a canonical approach based upon supernaturalistic presuppositions, **it is the intention of the present work to explore a 'new direction' or 'fresh query' as to the potential historical, literary and theological connections between the Gospel of John and the book of Acts** – read from a canonical reader's perspective.

Along this line, Childs has been interested in discovering clues that might help the church to interpret the text for the present age. He is less concerned with reconstructing the historical process by which Acts was brought into the New Testament (Sanders) than with its relationship to other books and collections that also found their way into the New Testament canon.²⁴² He argues that the theological interpretation of Scripture ought to proceed on the basis of the "final (canonical) form" of a given text and with persistent attention to its "full canonical context"—that is, the way that text is related to all other texts in the canon.²⁴³ Thus,

²⁴⁰Childs, *Canon*, 219-25.

²⁴¹Outler, "The 'Logic' of Canon-Making," 271.

²⁴²See also Gamble, *Canon*, 78-80.

²⁴³J.A. Sanders' attention has not been on the final form and fixed canonical context of the documents but upon the process of canonization—that is, the hermeneutical dynamics by which authoritative traditions were not only stabilized but were, over and over, revised and adapted, reformulated and re-written, in order to make them freshly relevant to the ever-changing circumstances of the religious community. His goal in canonical criticism is to discern the hermeneutical processes producing and embedded within the canon in order to use them as paradigms for modern appropriation. "Adaptable for Life: The Nature and Function of the Canon," in *Magnalia Dei, The Mighty Acts of God: Essays on the Bible and Archaeology in Memory of G.E. Wright*, ed. F.M. Cross, W.E. Lemke and P. Miller (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., 1976), 531-



the literary context of the canon is made the basis and touchstone of interpretation, yielding a fuller meaning than the original historical context of the canonical documents. When certain books were collected and formed into Scripture they served additional purposes beyond their immediate *Sitz im Leben*—they served to meet later crises. Von Campenhausen is correct when he argues that in the final stages of its activity, the canonizing community sought to view Acts as standing in continuity with the fourfold Gospel rather than with Luke’s Gospel, and as a bridge to the letters that follow.²⁴⁴ The interpretation of Acts in the following chapters will be informed by the text’s canonical purpose and meaning as holding decisive clues for how the text should be interpreted today by the believing community. Chapter two and three will explicate the historical, theological connection of the Fourth Gospel to the opening discourses of Acts. Chapter four will seek to broaden the canonical, theological connection of Acts to the fourfold Gospel by translating the verb ἤρξατο in Luke’s preface as “*began* to do and teach.” It will be argued that the messianic mission of Jesus, the activity and teaching as prophet, priest and king inaugurated in the four Gospels (Mark 1:1,14) will continue with the apostles. What God accomplished through Christ continues to be done through the apostles he commissions and consequently through the communities that their mission founded (the letters that follow Acts).

60. Though Childs’ and Sanders’ approaches are different, what unites them is their appreciation of the canon for the task of theological interpretation.

²⁴⁴H. von Campenhausen, *The Formation of the Christian Bible* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972), 37-45, 201-203. Violating his own argument for the authority of the final form of the canon, Childs maintains that the canonical significance of Acts is not assigned by its placement with the New Testament canon. *Canon*, 239. This is a conclusion made possible only by dismissing the later stages of the canonizing process as unimportant—as the work of mere publishers and editors.



1.2.3.6 Acts as Canonical Bridge²⁴⁵

The scholarly consensus is that Luke's Gospel and Acts were written in close proximity in time and for a similar life-setting and thus share a common authorial intent and historical, theological and literary continuities.²⁴⁶ Robert Wall argues that this only "intensifies the canonical concern: why were these two halves of a single narrative divided during the canonizing process, only to follow different canonizing paths and to play different canonical roles with the Second Testament?"²⁴⁷ He proceeds to rightly observe that the separation of the Gospel and Acts was made by the church in order to differentiate their canonical functions.²⁴⁸

²⁴⁵Paul Achtemeier, acknowledging an old insight whose time has come, rightly perceives the relationship between the New Testament Gospels with that of the letters to be analogous to the relationship between the Lord and his disciples. As the disciples follow Jesus' lead, so also the letters follow the Gospels, recording the church's following of their Lord as portrayed in the Gospels. Paul J. Achtemeier, "Epilogue: The New Testament Becomes Normative," in H.C. Kee (ed.), *Understanding the New Testament* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 4th ed., 1983), 368-69.

²⁴⁶W.C. van Unnik, "The Book of Acts, the Confirmation of the Gospel," *NovT* 4 (1962): 26-59.

²⁴⁷R.W. Wall, "The Acts of the Apostles in Canonical Context," (*BTB* 18 [1988]: 16-24.) "When the Bible is read sequentially, as it should be, the strategic role of Acts within the biblical canon becomes more apparent. Not only will its many references to Israel's Scripture supply interpretative guidelines for reading the Old Testament as Christian Scripture; its placement between the four Gospels and the following two collections of Epistles implies that it has a bridge-building role in relating the gospel story of Jesus with the biblical writings of his apostolic successors." Anthony B. Robinson and Robert W. Wall, *Called to Be Church: The Book of Acts for a New Day* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 25-26.

²⁴⁸In his survey of the evidence E. Haenchen demonstrates that the Gospel of Luke had a separate history from Luke and did not find broad circulation until later. *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1971), 3-14. Justin Martyr, near mid-second century, is the first writer to show any knowledge of Acts (*Apol.* 2.50.12), but it was later still that any real importance was attached to Acts, possibly as a consequence of the conflicts with Marcion and gnostic groups. This apologetic motivation of the early church may be suggested by the manner in which Irenaeus appeals to Acts as proof of the unity of the apostles and their preaching. He urged that Luke and Acts belonged together, but Christian practice from the second century separated them. "The Acts of the Apostles, although composed as a companion piece to the Gospel of Luke, had a separate history from Luke and did not come into any broad currency until later. Something of the sort is suggested by the manner in which Irenaeus appeals to Acts as a proof of the



Stating the obvious, the superscriptions of the canonical texts were titled by the canonizing community and not by their authors. In his two-part work Luke did not write an 'acts' (πράξεις) but wrote a complete and full 'narrative' (διήγησις)²⁴⁹ (Luke 1:1,3), detailing what God had done through Jesus and continued to do through the missions of the apostles. Though the two descriptions of Luke's writing are compatible in general, it appears that the early church may have viewed Luke's second volume to be literarily in continuity with a fourfold Gospel rather than exclusively in relation to his first volume for theological and apologetic reasons.²⁵⁰ Early on the church included the first part of Luke's two-part work in another collection of works, bound together under the title *Gospel* (see the tables in the chapter addendum).²⁵¹ The church in effect resignified Luke's first volume as one of four renditions of a singular story that testifies to the arrival of God's salvation through God's promised Messiah. Luke's second volume, orphaned in the second

unity of the apostles and their preaching. The authority of Acts for Irenaeus rests on the belief that its author was an inseparable companion of Paul and a disciple of the other apostles. The esteem acquired by Acts at the end of the second century is confirmed by the Muratorian list (lines 34-39), Tertullian, and Clement of Alexandria." Gamble, *The New Testament Canon*, 47.

²⁴⁹I would stress the general compatibility of the two genre and that a significant factor in what motivated the early church in the separation of the two works was the apologetic importance of Acts for the church's own ongoing apostolic identity and ministry. The canonical community's titling of Luke's second work as *πραξεις* calls the hermeneutist to take a particular, aretological stance when reading Acts. Acts provides the epistolary literature and its ethical principle 'imitate the apostles' with a narrative framework suitable for finding and shaping the meaning of the ethical principle for life.

²⁵⁰"It was the achievement of these editors to put into the hands of the late second-century church a key to the interpretation of many of the most difficult problems it faced. The book of Acts tied 'Gospel' and 'Apostle' together. Against Marcion, it placed Paul within a wider apostolic fellowship. Against the claims of the Gnostics, it bound the church to the earthly ministry of Jesus, calling into question the possibility or the necessity of a secret tradition. The polemical work of Irenaeus demonstrated how effectively the publication of Acts could serve the needs of the church in the last quarter of the century." W.A. Strange, *The Problem of the Text of Acts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 181.

²⁵¹Arthur G. Patzia, *The Making of the New Testament: Origin, Collection, Text & Canon* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1995), 90.



century,²⁵² was later added by the church as canonical and subsequently titled ‘Acts of the Apostles.’²⁵³ Harry Gamble makes the following observation concerning the early church’s theological positioning of Acts in the New Testament canon:

But soon enough the same logic [the church’s viewing Acts as a vehicle of substantiating whether the claims of early movements or documents were apostolic and therefore orthodox] led to the placement of Acts as a frontispiece to the entire range of apostolic letters, including Paul’s, for there it gave a perspective from which all of them might be read as expressions of a unitary teaching of the primitive apostles and Paul. In its standard position within the canon, however, Acts plays another and equally important role: it provides the bridgework between Gospels and apostolic letters. By its content it is very well suited to this purpose because it explicitly correlates the teaching and authority of the apostles with Jesus himself and emphasizes their foundational importance for the church.²⁵⁴

Gamble then proceeds to argue that the purveyance of the dominant “formal features” of the canon and its subsections evidences that **the canon is a “hermeneutical construct”²⁵⁵ produced not only by the early church’s circumstances but also by theological intention.** And that intention suggests the “coherence of the several collections within themselves and with each other and so promotes the interpretation of each text with a view to other texts.”²⁵⁶ While, in my opinion, he rightly argues that the significance of each document is qualified by the larger whole and gives rise to new meanings (*sensus plenior*), I have argued that his opinion concerning the separation of Luke and Acts in the canon violates the human

²⁵²W.A. Strange, *The Problem of the Text of Acts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 182.

²⁵³Patzia, *op. cit.*, 90.

²⁵⁴Gamble, *The New Testament Canon*, 78f.

²⁵⁵*Ibid.*, 79.

²⁵⁶*Ibid.*



author's intention and counters his own proposal that the early church's formation of the canon is a "hermeneutical construction." I shall argue in the following two chapters that the separation is perhaps a reflection of the early church's discernment of the divine author's canonical intention. I agree, however, with his conclusion that the canon itself is a "locus of meaning."²⁵⁷ In the final stages of the church's canonizing activity the hermeneutical positioning of Acts appears to emphasize its bridge relationship to the fourfold Gospel as well as to the collection of canonical letters.²⁵⁸ Thus, the canonizing community appears to have sought to expand or extend the theological and narrative continuity envisioned originally by Luke for his two-part work.²⁵⁹ Rather than violate Luke's intention, this would appear to be in keeping with the spirit of his intention as expressed in the preface of Acts and to reflect the broader, encompassing intention of the author of the entire canon.²⁶⁰

²⁵⁷Ibid.

²⁵⁸"The usual position of Acts in the early canon lists was before or after the non-Pauline corpus. This perhaps reflected the early church's desire to insure the acceptance of non-Pauline apostolicity and works within an essentially Pauline church. In the later stages of the canonizing process the church attached the non-Pauline corpus along with Acts to the Pauline corpus assigning a strategic canonical central role to Acts in authorizing both Paul and the Jewish apostolate. The continuities narrated in Acts between Paul's Gentile mission and the Jewish mission of James, Cephas and John insured not only the authority of their shared apostolic witness, but also the essential unity of the church universal." J. Moffatt, *An Introduction to the Literature of the New Testament* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 3rd ed., 1918), 13. See the charts in the appendix to the present chapter.

²⁵⁹H. von Campenhausen, *The Formation of the Christian Bible* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972), 37-45, 201-203.

²⁶⁰ Speaking for many postmodern biblical scholars Walter Brueggemann counters such an understanding of the function of the canon and of hermeneutics when he urges that the proper subject of biblical studies "is the specific text, without any necessary relation to other texts or any coherent pattern read out of or into the text." *The Bible and Postmodern Imagination: Texts Under Negotiation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1993), 58. This approach is congenial to postmoderns because it focuses on 'little' stories rather than the 'great story' or metanarrative.



Addendum

Table C.1 Three Early New Testament Lists Based on Eusebius²⁶¹

<i>Irenaeus</i>	<i>Clement of Alexandria</i>	<i>Origen</i>
Matt	Jude	Matt
Mark	<i>Barn.</i>	Mark
Luke	<i>Apoc. Pet.</i>	Luke
John	Heb	John
Rev	Acts	1 Pet
1 John	Paul (nothing listed)	2 Pet (?)
1 Pet		Rev
<i>Herm.</i>	<i>Gospels:</i>	1 John
Wis	Matt	2-3 John (?)
Paul (mentioned but epistles not listed)	Luke	Heb
	Mark	Paul (mentioned but epistles not listed)
	John	

²⁶¹The following tables are listed in “Appendix C” in *The Biblical Canon: Its Origin, Transmission, and Authority* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 2007), 445-451.



Table C-2 New Testament Lists from the Fourth Century

Eusebius²⁶²	Cyril of Jerusalem²⁶³	Athanasius²⁶⁴	Cheltenham²⁶⁵
Recognized:	Gospels (4)	Gospels:	Gospels:
Gospels (4)	Acts	Matt	Matt
Acts		Mark	Mark
Paul's epistles (14)	<i>Catholic Epistles (7)</i>	Luke	Luke
1 John	Jas	John	John
1 Pet	1-2 Pet		
Rev (?)	1-3 John	Acts	Paul's epistles (13)
	Jude (?)		Acts
Doubtful:		Catholic Epistles:	Rev
Jas	Paul's epistles (14)	Jas	1-3 John
Jude		1-2 Pet	1-2 Pet
2 Pet	<i>Pseudepigrapha</i>	1-3 John	(no Heb)
2, 3 John	Gos. Thom.	Jude	
Rejected:		Paul's Epistles (14)	
Acts Paul		Rom	
Herm.		1-2 Cor	
Apoc. Pet.		Gal	
Barn.		Eph	
Did.		Phil	
Rev (?)		Col	
Gos. Heb. (?)		1-2 Thess	
		Heb	
Cited by Heretics:		1-2 Tim	
Gos. Pet		Titus	
Gos. Thom.		Phlm	
Gos. Matt.			
Acts Andr		Rev	
Acts John		Catechetical:	
		<i>Did.</i>	
		<i>Herm.</i>	

²⁶²Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.25.1-7 (ca. 320-330, Caesarea, Palestine).

²⁶³Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* 4.33 (ca. 35, Jerusalem).

²⁶⁴Athanasius, *Ep. Fest.* 39 (ca. 367, Alexandria, Egypt).

²⁶⁵The Cheltenham Canon is also known as the Mommsen Catalogue (ca. 360-370, Northern Africa).



(Table C-2, continued)

<i>Epiphanius</i> ²⁶⁶	<i>Apostolic Canons</i> ²⁶⁷	<i>Gregory of Nazian.</i> ²⁶⁸	<i>African Canons</i> ²⁶⁹	<i>Jerome</i> ²⁷⁰
Gospels (4)	Gospels (4)	Matt	Gospels (4)	" <i>Lord's Four</i> ":
Paul's epistles (13)	Matt	Mark	Acts	Matt
Acts	Mark	Luke	Paul's epistles (13)	Mark
	Luke	John	Heb	Luke
Catholic Epistles:	John	Acts	1-2 Pet	John
Jas		Paul's epistles (14)	1-3 John	
Pet	Paul's epistles (14) ²⁷¹		Jas	Paul's epistles (14)
1-3 John	Peter's epistles (2)	Catholic Epistles:	Jude	Rom
Jude	1-3 John	Jas	Rev	1-2 Cor
	Jas	1-2 Pet		Gal
Rev	Jude	1-3 John	<i>OK to Read:</i>	Eph
Wis	<i>1-2 Clem.</i>	Jude	Acts of martyrs	Phil
Sir	Acts			1-2 Thess
				Col
				1-2 Tim
				Titus
				Phlm
				Heb
				1-2 Pet
				1-3 John
				Jude
				Jas
				Acts
				Rev

²⁶⁶Epiphanius, *Pan.* 76.5 (ca. 374-377, Salamis, Western Syria).

²⁶⁷*Apostolic Canons* 85 in *Apostolic Canons and Constitutions* 8.47 (ca. 380, Western Syria)

²⁶⁸Gregory of Naianzus. *Carm.* 12.31 (ca. 390, Cappadocia, Asia Minor) and later ratified by the Trullan Synod in 692.

²⁶⁹African Canons (ca. 393-419, Northern Africa).

²⁷⁰Jerome, *Epistle* 53, (ca. 394 Bethlehem, Palestine).

²⁷¹The number 14 indicates that Hebrews was included as one of Paul's letters.



(Table C-2, continued)

<i>Augustine</i> ²⁷²	<i>Amphilochius</i> ²⁷³	<i>Rufinus</i> ²⁷⁴	<i>Innocent</i> ²⁷⁵	<i>Syrian Catalog</i> ²⁷⁶
Gospels (4)	Gospels (4)	Matt	Gospels (4)	" <i>Lord's Four</i> ":
Paul's epistles (13)	Matt	Mark	Acts	Matt
Acts	Mark	Luke	Paul's epistles (13) ²⁷⁷	Mark
	Luke	John	Heb	Luke
Catholic Epistles:	John	Acts	1-2 Pet	John
Jas		Paul's epistles (14)	1-3 John	
Pet	Paul's epistles (14) ²⁷⁸		Jas	Paul's epistles(14)
1-3 John	Peter's epistles (2)	Catholic Epistles:	Jude	Rom
Jude	1-3 John	Jas	Rev	1-2 Cor
	Jas	1-2 Pet		Gal
Rev	Jude	1-3 John	<i>OK to Read:</i>	Eph
Wis	<i>1-2 Clem.</i>	Jude	Acts of martyrs	Phil
Sir	Acts			1-2 Thess
				Col
				1-2 Tim
				Titus
				Phlm
				Heb
				1-2 Pet
				1-3 John
				Jude
				Jas
				Acts
				Rev

²⁷²Augustine, *Christian Instruction* 2.8-9.12-14 (ca. 395-400, Hippo Regius, North Africa).

²⁷³Amphilochius, *Iambi ad Seleucum*, 289-319 (ca. 396, Iconium, Asia Minor). The list concludes by acknowledging that some have questions about 2 Pet, 2-3 John, Heb, Jude and Rev.

²⁷⁴Rufinus, *Commentarius in symbolum apostolorum* 36 (ca. 394, Rome, Italy).

²⁷⁵Pope Innocent I, *Ad Exsuperius Toulouse* 2.1-2 (ca. 405, Rome, Italy).

²⁷⁶Syrian catalogue of St. Catherine's (ca. 400, Eastern Syria).

²⁷⁷Some add Hebrews to this and make it 14. It is uncertain.

²⁷⁸The number 14 indicates that Hebrews was included as one of Paul's letters.



(Table C-2, continued)

<i>Augustine</i> ²⁷⁹	<i>Amphilochius</i> ²⁸⁰	<i>Rufinus</i> ²⁸¹	<i>Innocent</i> ²⁸²	<i>Syrian Catalog</i> ²⁸³
Gospels (4)	Gospels (4)	Gospels (4)	Gospels (4)	Gospels (4)
Matt	Matt	Matt	Paul's epistles (13) ²⁸⁴	Matt
Mark	Mark	Mark	1-3 John	Mark
Luke	Luke	Luke	1-2 Pet	Luke
John	John	John	Jude	John
			Jas	
Paul's epistles (14)	Acts	Acts	Acts	Acts
Rom		Paul's epistles (14)	Rev	Gal
1-2 Cor	Paul's epistles (14)	1-2 Pet		Rom
Gal	Rom	Jas	<i>Repudiated:</i>	Heb
Eph	1-2 Cor	Jude	Matthias/	Col
Phil	Gal	1,2,3 John	James the less	Eph
1-2 Thess	Eph	Rev	Peter + John =	Phil
Col.	Phil		Leucian	1-2 Thess
1-2 Tim	Col	<i>Ecclesiastical:</i>	(Andrew =	1-2 Tim
Titus	1-2 Thess	<i>Herm.</i>	Xenocharides	Titus
Phlm	1-2 Tim	<i>Two Ways</i>	& Leonida)	Phlm
Heb	Titus	<i>Pre. Pet.</i>	<i>Gos. Thom.</i>	
1-2 Pet	Phlm			
1-3 John	Heb (?)			
Jude				
Jas	<i>Catholic Epistles (7)</i>			
Acts	Jas			
Rev	Pet			
	John			
	Jude (?)			
	Rev (?)			

²⁷⁹Augustine, *Christian Instruction* 2.8-9.12-14 (ca. 395-400, Hippo Regius, North Africa).

²⁸⁰Amphilochius, *Iambi ad Seleucum*, 289-319 (ca. 396, Iconium, Asia Minor). The list concludes by acknowledging that some have questions about 2 Pet, 2-3 John, Heb, Jude and Rev.

²⁸¹Rufinus, *Commentarius in symbolum apostolorum* 36 (ca. 394, Rome, Italy).

²⁸²Pope Innocent I, *Ad Exsuperius Toulouse* 2.1-2 (ca. 405, Rome, Italy).

²⁸³Syrian catalogue of St. Catherine's (ca. 400, Eastern Syria).

²⁸⁴Some add Hebrews to this and make it 14. It is uncertain.



Table C-2, continued

<i>Muratorian Fragment</i> ²⁸⁵	<i>Laodicea Synod</i> ²⁸⁶	<i>Carthage Synod</i> ²⁸⁷
Gospels:	<i>Gospels (4):</i>	<i>Gospels (4):</i>
...	Matt	Acts
...	Mark	Paul (13)
Luke ("third book")	Luke	Heb
John ("fourth book")	John	1-2 Pet
		1-3 John
John's epistles	Acts	Jas
Acts		Jude
	<i>Catholic Epistles (7)</i>	Rev (later added)
Paul's Epistles to Churches	Jas	
Cor	1-2 Pet	
Eph	1,2,3 John	
Phil	Jude	
Col		
Gal	<i>Paul's Epistles (14)</i>	
Thess	Rom	
Rom	1-2 Cor	
	Gal	
Epistles to Individuals:	Eph	
Phlm	Phil	
Titus	Col	
1-2 Tim	1-2 Thess	
	Heb	
Jude	1-2 Tim	
1, 2 or 3 Jn (2 Eps.)	Titus	
Wis	Phil	
Rev		
Apoc. Pet	(Rev missing)	

²⁸⁵The Muratorian Fragment. While many scholars contend that this was a late second-century C.E. fragment originating in or around Rome, a growing number hold that it was produced around the middle of the fourth century (ca. 350-375) and that it originated somewhere in the eastern part of the Roman Empire, possibly in Syria.

²⁸⁶Synod of Laodicea, Canon 60 (ca. 363, Asia Minor).

²⁸⁷Synod of Carthage, Canon 39 (397, North Africa). Revelation was added later in 419 at the subsequent synod at Carthage. *Forged (rejected): Ep. Lao.; Ep. Alex.; Others (?rejected): Herm.; Works of Arsinous; Valentinus; Miltiades; Basilides.*



Table C-3 New Testament Lists from the Fifth and Sixth Centuries

<i>Eucherius</i> ²⁸⁸	<i>Gelasius</i> ²⁸⁹	<i>Junilius</i> ²⁹⁰	<i>Cassiodorus</i> ²⁹¹	<i>Isidore</i> ²⁹²
Matt	<i>Gospels:</i>	<i>Gospels:</i>	<i>Gospels:</i>	<i>Gospels:</i>
Mark	Matt	Matt	Matt	Matt
Luke	Mark	Mark	Mark	Mark
John	Luke	Luke	Luke	Luke
Rom	John	John	John	John
1 Cor				
2 Cor	Acts	Acts	Acts	Paul's epistles (14)
(Gal missing)		Rev	1 Pet	Rom
Eph	Paul's epistles (14)		Jas	1-2 Cor
1 Thess	Rom	Paul's epistles (14)	1 John	Gal
(2 Thess missing)	1-2 Cor	Rom		Eph
Col	Eph	1-2 Cor	<i>Paul's Epistles (13)</i>	Phil
1 Tim	1-2 Thess	Gal	Rom	1-2 Thess
2 Tim	Gal	Eph	1 Cor	Col
(Titus missing)	Phil	Phil	2 Cor	1-2 Tim
(Phil missing)	Col	1-2 Thess	Gal	
Heb	1-2Tim	Col	Phil	Heb
Acts	Titus	1-2 Tim	Col	Titus
Jas	Phlm	Titus	Eph	Phlm
1 John	Heb	Phlm	1-2 Thess	Heb
(2-3 John missing)		Heb	1-2 Tim	
(Jude missing)	Rev		Titus	1-3 John
Rev	1-2 Pet	Jas	Phlm	1-2 Pet
	1 John	1-2 Peter	Rev	Jude
	2-3 John	Jude		Jas
	Jude	1-2 John	<i>Omitted:</i>	Acts
			(2 Pet)	Rev
			(2-3 John)	
			(Jude)	
			(Heb)	

²⁸⁸Eucherius, *Instructines* (ca. 424-55, Lyons)

²⁸⁹*Decretum gelasianum de libris recipiendis et non recipiendis* (ca. sixth cent.).

²⁹⁰Junilius, *Instituta regularia divinae legis*, book I (ca. 551, North Africa).

²⁹¹Cassiodorus, *Institutiones divinarum et saecularium litterarum* (ca. 551-562, Rome).

²⁹²Isidore, bishop of Seville, *In libros Veteris ac novi Testamenti prooemia* (ca. 600).



Table C-4 New Testament Lists from Biblical Manuscripts of the Fourth and Fifth Centuries

<i>Vaticans (B)</i>	<i>Sinaiticu (S)</i>	<i>Peshitta (Syr^P)</i>	<i>Alexandrinus (A)</i>	<i>Claromantanus (D)</i>
Matt	Matt	Matt	Matt	Matt
Mark	Mark	Mark	Mark	John
Luke	Luke	Luke	Luke	Mark
John	John	John	John	Luke
Acts	Rom	Acts	Acts	Rom
Jas	1 Cor	Jas	Jas	1-2 Cor
1 Pet	2 Cor	1 Pet	1 Pet	Gal
2 Pet	Gal	1 John	2Pet	Eph
1 John	Eph	Rom	1 John	1-2 Tim
2 John	Phil	1 Cor	2 John	Titus
3 John	Col	2 Cor	3 John	Col
Jude	1 Thess	Gal	Jude	Phlm
Rom	2 Thess	Eph	Rom	1-2 Pet
1 Cor	Heb	Phil	1 Cor	Jas
2 Cor	1 Tim	Col	2 Cor	1-3 John
Gal	2 Tim	1 Thess	Gal	Jude
Eph	Titus	1 Thess	Eph	<i>Barn.</i>
Phil	Phlm	Heb	Phil	Rev
Col	Acts	1 Tim	Col	Acts
1 Thess	Jas	2 Tim	1 Thess	
2 Thess	1 Pet	Titus	2 Thess	<i>Others:</i>
Heb	2 Pet	Phlm	Heb	<i>Herm.</i>
	1 John	Heb	1 Tim	<i>Acts Paul</i>
<i>Omitted:</i>	2 John		2 Tim	<i>Apoc. Pet.</i>
(1 Tim)	3 John		Titus	
(2 Tim)	Jude		Phlm	<i>Omitted:</i>
(Titus)	Rev		Rev	(Phil)
(Phlm)	<i>Barn.</i>		<i>1 Clem.</i>	(1-2 Thess)
(Rev)	<i>Herm.</i>		<i>2 Clem.</i>	(Heb)
	...		<i>Pss. Sol.</i>	



CHAPTER TWO

THE AUTHORITY AND MISSION OF JESUS AS DELEGATED IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN: THE THEOLOGICAL, CANONICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND FOR READING AND UNDERSTANDING ACTS

2.1 Recap and Transition

Against the prevailing view that Acts should be connected first and foremost to Luke's earlier volume as a continuous narrative,¹ the canonical approach argues for respecting the church's ultimate canonical decisions and for discovering and clarifying the hermeneutical implications.² A.B. Robinson and Robert Wall draw attention to two prime examples of the hermeneutical implications of retaining the final form of the four-fold Gospel rather than joining Luke-Acts.³ They

¹"The combination of Luke-Acts is a familiar part of present-day scholarship, and the study of both works together is common, but it is necessary to be reminded that there is no strong evidence to suppose that the two works were issued or ever circulated together. There is no early manuscript of the New Testament which places Acts with Luke. The separation of the two was established at a primitive stage, and ran very deeply in the tradition." W.A. Strange, *The Problem of the Text of Acts*, 181.

²James Barr dissents sharply from the canonical approach. He sees the canon only as a late development without hermeneutical significance. For Barr the notion of the canon is thoroughly within the parameters of an historical-critical approach that understands Scripture in naturalistic terms as a purely human production; much more is this true of the canon. For him, the canon is not an absolute standard, nor does it provide a comprehensive norm. It appears to me that his attempt to maintain any sense of biblical authority is a struggle for him and is the most muddled part of his discussion on canon. This is because of his underlying presuppositions. Barr has discussed the canon in a series of works: *The Bible in the Modern World* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973); *Holy Scripture: Canon, Authority, Criticism* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983); *The Scope and Authority of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1980).

³For an introduction to the canonical approach to Acts see Anthony B. Robinson and Robert Wall, *Called to Be Church: The Book of Acts for a New Day* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000).



propose that the Third Gospel does not adequately prepare for the leading role Peter performs in the opening chapters of Acts. The Gospel of John narrates Peter's restoration at the close of his gospel (21:15-17) and thus offers to the reader a better historical, theological transition to his chief role in the beginning chapters of Acts. They further argue that Jesus' teaching in the Fourth Gospel about the post-Easter role of the Holy Spirit (14-16) best facilitates an introduction to and understanding of the Spirit's role as the primary character in the book of Acts.⁴ These examples "suggest the important role that John's Gospel performs in preparing the reader for the story of Acts. Moreover, what it means to be a 'witness' of the risen Jesus (Acts 1:8) is now more fully understood by the reader in the context of John's Gospel (John 15:26-27; cf. Luke 24:48)."⁵

Thus, the canonical approach does not regard the strategic role of Acts within the final form of the biblical canon to be an accidental consequence of an arbitrary decision. To read Acts *only* as a continuation of his first volume and to view the insertion of John's Gospel as an interruption and as an ecclesiastical mistake in the formation of the final form of the canon may be too quickly dismissive of the possible theological discernment of the early Fathers.⁶ I am proposing that the reading of Acts in the light of its final canonical position and order may yield

⁴I will explore in detail these hermeneutical observations in the following two chapters.

⁵*Ibid.*, 270.

⁶"Independent of any theory of a unified Luke-Acts, then, the ancient church's reception of Acts as divinely inspired Scripture followed an independent path into the New Testament canon for different reasons and with a different role to perform from that of Luke's Gospel or that of the four-fold Gospel within which it circulated and was canonized. Those few canon lists, mostly in the East, that begin the fourfold Gospel with John's Gospel and conclude it with Luke's Gospel, and then place Acts adjacent to Luke's Gospel, perceive a 'canon logic' that is incidental to a critically constructed Luke-Acts. The apparent theological motive of these lists was to grant priority to John's Gospel for identifying Jesus as the incarnate Logos. To make the case for an intentional Luke-Acts and to review the reception of Acts on this basis as phenomenon of the canonical process is an anachronism of contemporary biblical scholarship. From the perspective of the biblical canon, there is simply no Luke-Acts: Acts is a stand-alone book with its own role to perform in shaping Christian discipleship." Robinson and Wall, *op. cit.*, 267f. The authors flesh out the implications of the canonical position of Acts in chapter 15, "Concluding Reflections."



significant insight into the logic of God for the continuation of the kingdom of God following the ascension. The words and actions of his Son, as particularly testified to in the Fourth Gospel, may be highly insightful for the theology of the opening scenes of Acts. In his recent work, Martin W. Mittlestadt makes a call for the exploration of the possible benefits of bringing Johannine theology into the canonical conversation with Acts:

Furthermore, given the scholarly dominance on questions surrounding the relationship between the likes of Lukan and Pauline hermeneutics and pneumatologies, whither the Fourth Gospel? How might scholars so focused on the relationship between Lukan and Pauline unity and diversity enlarge the conversation by bringing Johannine theology and practice into the mix?⁷

Speaking from a rhetorical criticism perspective, Johannes Vorster contends that the “main constituent of the rhetorical situation can be called the ‘problematization,’” defined as “the act by means of which a rhetorical situation is called into existence.”⁸ The proposal explored in the following chapters is that the ‘problem’ that calls forth the rhetoric of the *divine author* and, derivatively, the human author of Acts is the ‘problem’ created by the event of the ascension.⁹ How will the mission to establish the kingdom of God inaugurated by Jesus continue post-ascension and in what form? It is noteworthy that this problem is anticipated by and highlighted in the only recorded question asked by the disciples during the forty days of Jesus’ post-resurrection instruction on the kingdom of God: Οἱ μὲν οὖν

⁷*Reading Luke-Acts in the Pentecostal Tradition* (Cleveland, Tennessee: CPT Press, 2010), 160. The present work was in its closing stages when I gained access to this work. Hopefully I have made a good start in the following chapters in addressing his inquiry.

⁸*Focusing on the Message: New Testament Hermeneutics, Exegesis and Methods*, ed. Andrie du Toit (Pretoria: Protea, 2009), 543.

⁹Robinson and Wall highlight this point: “Not only does the story of Acts function as substantial proof of Jesus’ resurrection as “lord and Messiah” (2:36), without which there would be no story to tell; it also issues a normative response to the theological crisis for Christian discipleship occasioned by his bodily absence (cf. John 13:31-14:31). That is, those disciples who follow after the exalted Lord are to continue in the power of the Holy Spirit to do and say what Jesus began (cf. Acts 1:1-2).” *Called to Be Church*, 270.



συνελθόντες ἡρώτων αὐτὸν λέγοντες· κύριε, εἰ ἐν τῷ χρόνῳ τούτῳ ἄποκαθιστάνεις τὴν βασιλείαν τῷ Ἰσραήλ; (1:6). From a canonical point of view it is proposed that among the four gospels the “*problem* of the ascension” was most anticipated and most intentionally, directly and comprehensively addressed by Jesus in the second half of the Fourth Gospel. Evidence from the Gospel of John for this proposal will be expounded in the present chapter. Chapter three will assess whether Jesus’ anticipation of and pre-planned response to the “problem” of the ascension is actualized in the opening scenes of Acts. In the final chapter the “problem” created by the ascension as to the extension and continuation of the mission of Jesus in Acts will be viewed and addressed from the broader canonical perspective of the comprehensive four-fold Gospel testimony. In that chapter I will attempt to argue in detail that the reader of Acts who has comprehensively read the four-fold Gospel will readily perceive the striking resemblance of Jesus’ mission, gospel and the concurrent conflict and controversy he provoked to that which characterizes the church’s life and ministry in the narrative of Acts. I will argue in the final chapter from a broader canonical approach that the tri-fold Old Testament missional roles of prophet, priest and king, which Jesus fulfills as the anointed servant (μεσσίας) in the Gospels, continues to be the theology which drives the author’s literary choices in the narration of the history of the church in Acts. The church’s continuation of Jesus’ tri-fold missional roles in Acts (περὶ πάντων... ὧν ἤρξατο ὁ Ἰησοῦς ποιεῖν τε καὶ διδάσκειν) yields a second primary plot line that permeates the historical narrative of Acts: persecution. It will be argued that these two core elements of theology endemic to canonical history permeate and control the contrapuntal plot movements of the history and literary art of Luke in Acts. This is evident from the beginning of the church’s exercise of authority and tri-fold ministry in the name of Jesus in healing the lame man in Acts 3. What follows in Acts 4 is the first recorded persecution of the church. The church’s response was **to frame their experience in canonical perspective**, understanding that persecution is a primary theological theme woven throughout the history recorded in the canon (Acts 4:23-30). The church’s continuation of Jesus’ tri-fold missional roles leads to the ongoing



fulfillment in Acts of Jesus' words: “μνημονεύετε τοῦ λόγου οὗ ἐγὼ εἶπον ὑμῖν· οὐκ ἔστιν δοῦλος μείζων τοῦ κυρίου αὐτοῦ. εἰ ἐμὲ ἐδίωξαν, καὶ ὑμᾶς διώξουσιν” (John 15:20).

2.2 Introduction

The key problem in religious authority is to find the central principle of authority and the pattern through which it expresses itself concretely and practically. Most treaties on religious authority assert that God is the final authority in religion, but this bare assertion does not make its way. Unless the assertion is expressed in a more concrete fashion it becomes mere platitude. A principle of religious authority, along with its pattern designed for its practical and concrete expression and execution, should incorporate all the necessary elements associated with such a complex notion as religious authority.¹⁰

The primary concern of this chapter will be the challenge posed in the final two statements in the above quotation, as related to the Gospel of John and the book of Acts.¹¹ Particular interest will be in the delegation or extension of the

¹⁰Bernard Ramm, *The Pattern of Religious Authority* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 18. Ramm continues, “The authority of God, of Jesus Christ, of sacred Scripture, and of truth must be properly related, as well as proper regard given for human personality and freedom. The result will be a mosaic of authority, with the central piece being the principle of authority. Properly understood, one could even speak of a chain of authority with the principle of authority being the first and most important link.” The intertwining of multiple, closely related concepts is evident here, making the effort to isolate and explicate two or three strands of a multi-stranded cable of authority, revelation, and mission a formidable task.

¹¹Some might object to a “John-Acts connection,” claiming that the literary-historical connection should be restricted to Luke-Acts. But this is to not take seriously what Vern Poythress labels ‘the principle of unified divine authorship’: “Many commentators in the classical historical-critical tradition, by contrast, refuse in principle to let the New Testament cast further light on the implications of the verses [in this case OT verses], because they do not allow the principle of unified divine authorship to exercise an influence on interpretation.” [“Divine Meaning of Scripture,” *WTJ* 48 [1986]: 2630.] Acknowledgment of the unifying authorship of Scripture by God warrants the assumption that there is consistent theo-logic interconnecting the individual books of Scripture. Thus, a fundamental hermeneutical assumption informing the present study is that in a significant way the theology of John, specifically chapters 13ff., decisively informs the theo-logic of the sovereign God who is Lord of the events of the history (specifically church history) recorded by Luke in Acts.



authority and mission of Jesus as described in the second central section¹² of the Fourth Gospel, 13:1 – 20:31, the Book of Glory.¹³ The Son's agency/mission will be examined in this section of the Fourth Gospel as ground work for the central inquiry—the extension of the Son's authority and agency/mission in the opening narrative discourses of Acts. I will argue in the following chapters that the challenge of delegating authority to others by Jesus becomes a central plot issue in the opening sections of Acts (e.g. 4:7).

2.3 Part I: The Son's Agency/Mission and Its Relationship to the Apostles and the Holy Spirit in the Gospel of John: Establishing the Historical Redemptive Foundations to Acts Chapters One and Two.

2.3.1 Introduction

The Son's agency/mission has been the subject of a multitude of studies.¹⁴ Perhaps the most thorough treatment is the recent work by Andreas Köstenberger.¹⁵ This excellent study fully develops the various facets of the mission of the Son. The present monograph accepts and seeks to build upon the important work done in the major portion of his study, but would differ from his work in reference to the extension of the Son's agency. Köstenberger presents the extension of the agency/mission of Jesus as primarily accomplished through the

¹²“Interpreters generally agree that 13:1 marks the most significant transition in the Gospel, introducing not only the scene of the footwashing but the entire second half of the Gospel.” R. A. Culpepper, “The Johannine *Hypodeigma*,” *Semeia* 53 (1991): 133-52.

¹³D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 103.

¹⁴The bibliography gives a number of important studies on the topic.

¹⁵*The Missions of Jesus & the Disciples According to the Fourth Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).



disciples, and then secondarily through the Spirit.¹⁶ In contrasting his work with that of McPolin (1969), he states that “it may be better still to subordinate the missions of John and of the Spirit to the missions of Jesus and of the disciples.”¹⁷ Thus, while acknowledging the work and mission of the Holy Spirit, his study makes few references to the Spirit’s involvement in the missions of Jesus and the disciples.¹⁸ It is the thesis of the present chapter that the mission and authority of the Son is extended through the cooperative (synergistic) work of both the Apostles and the Holy Spirit, while respecting that there is a salvation-historical order that is important to note in Acts.¹⁹ This point, well argued for by Hermann Ridderbos, is what I intend to elaborate in this chapter, by demonstrating the historical and theological connection of the Gospel of John to the opening sections of the book of Acts.

That ambivalent character of the New Testament witness finally enables us to understand in what sense it lays claim on our faith. Its claim is not made solely in a secular sense, whereby everything would depend on the personal trustworthiness of the eyewitnesses, a trustworthiness that could only be established on historical grounds. Rather, its claim is made because the Holy Spirit himself bears witness in and by the words of the apostles, so that those who deny the trustworthiness of that witness oppose the Holy Spirit. It is not simply the case that the Spirit sets His seal on the trustworthiness of historical information, so that those who accept the factuality of the content of

¹⁶Ibid., 320.

¹⁷Ibid., 8.

¹⁸While Köstenberger does outstanding work on the mission of Jesus, I think that the implications for present missions work would be more fully served by recognizing the importance of acknowledging the *equal* importance and involvement of the agency of the Spirit in conjunction with that of the disciples in the extension of Jesus’ mission.

¹⁹In chapter four I will argue that there is an important order of events that is theologically-historically established for the Church. That order is Ascension-Apostles reconstituted-the Spirit sent, and not Ascension-the Spirit sent-the Apostles reconstituted. Essentially I will argue that in the ordering of events it is the priority of the Word that is set for the Church. If anything comes to pass that proposes to be of the Spirit of Christ, (e.g., manifestations that cause the confusion on the day of Pentecost) it must thenceforth be judged by the testimony of the Apostles, which eventually becomes written in the New Testament. All ‘Spirit manifestation’ must be judged by the Word.



this witness satisfy its claim to faith. Rather, *New Testament witness is fully the witness of the Spirit only because the Spirit himself testifies through this word and convinces men that this word of testimony is the word of life (John 16:8). For that reason, one cannot separate the two components that give the New Testament witness its specific character without destroying the witness itself.* One cannot abstract the witness, as though it were simply a report of facts, from its call to put trust in these facts as redemptive facts.²⁰

That the two primary delegated, joint witnesses in the extension of Jesus' mission and authority are promised and bound together in the Fourth Gospel (especially in 13:1 – 20:31, the Book of Glory) and actualized in the book of Acts is what I will attempt to establish in this chapter. I am proposing the thesis that true apostolic succession is from Jesus to the joint witness of the Apostles and the Holy Spirit, and that witness being inscripturated in the New Testament. I will argue that the church in Acts can only carry on the mission of Jesus as it draws upon and is guided by the authoritative joint witnesses. Without submission to that delegated authority actualized in Acts, the church has no authority and mission.

As a foundation to the main purpose of this chapter, Part I will be an initial exploration into the inter-relationship of the concepts of authority, revelation, and mission in the Fourth Gospel.²¹ First, the three aspects will be examined together. Second, the triad will be examined in dyads: (1) authority and revelation, (2) revelation and mission, and (3) authority and mission, in an attempt to better

²⁰Hermann Ridderbos, *Redemptive History and the New Testament Scriptures* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1963), 67. Italics mine.

²¹In 1953 C. H. Dodd cleverly described the Fourth Gospel as a musical fugue: "A theme is introduced and developed up to a point; then a second theme is introduced and the two are interwoven; then a third and so on. A theme may be dropped, and later resumed and differently combined, in all manner of harmonious variations." *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: University Press, 1953), 383.



understand the various movements in the Johannine theological symphony.²² Part I will close with a brief examination of Jesus as the “primary apostle” of the Father.

Building upon this foundation, Part II of the chapter will develop and argue the central thesis stated above. Part III will then demonstrate the John-Acts connection by exploring the historical realization of the thesis in the opening sections of the book of Acts.

2.3.2 Authority, Revelation and Mission: Theological Correlates in the Gospel of John—A Prolepsis to the Book of Acts

A key passage where the interrelationship of the three concepts of authority, revelation and mission is clearly seen in the Fourth Gospel is in “the Lord’s Prayer” in chapter seventeen.

1 Ταῦτα ἐλάλησεν Ἰησοῦς καὶ ἐπάρας τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς αὐτοῦ εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν εἶπεν· πάτερ, ἐλήλυθεν ἡ ὥρα· δόξασόν σου τὸν υἱόν, ἵνα ὁ υἱὸς δοξάσῃ σέ, **2** καθὼς ἔδωκας αὐτῷ ἐξουσίαν πάσης σαρκός, ἵνα πᾶν ὃ δέδωκας αὐτῷ δώσῃ αὐτοῖς ζωὴν αἰώνιον. **3** αὕτη δέ ἐστιν ἡ αἰώνιος ζωὴ ἵνα γινώσκωσιν σὲ τὸν μόνον ἀληθινὸν θεὸν καὶ ὃν ἀπέστειλας Ἰησοῦν Χριστόν. **4** ἐγὼ σε ἐδόξασα ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς τὸ ἔργον τελειώσας ὃ δέδωκάς μοι ἵνα ποιήσω·

1 After Jesus said this, he looked toward heaven and prayed: “Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. 2 For you **granted him authority over all people** that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. 3 Now this is eternal life: **that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.** 4 I have brought you glory on earth **by completing the work you gave me to do.**”²³

²²D. A. Carson, *The Farewell Discourse and Final Prayer of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 174.

²³Scripture quotations through this monograph are from the *New International Version* (East Brunswick, New Jersey: International Bible Society, 1984).



(1) The Father has granted *authority* to the Son;²⁴ (2) that authority is exercised in the mode of *making known* (revealing) the Father;²⁵ (3) and in the ultimate mission of glorifying the Father by speaking the words of the Father *and by completing the works* the Father assigned to him (the penultimate mission).²⁶ The grand goal or purpose of the authorization, revelation and mission of Jesus is to bring eternal life (John 10:10; 17:2; 20:31; 1 John 4:9).²⁷

I will argue in the following chapters that the three issues of authority, revelation and mission in the Gospels will reappear in narrative form in Acts, but not necessarily in the same explicit terminology. Authority clash or power struggle is *the* core issue in multiple narrative plots, both in the Gospels and in Acts. A clear example in Acts is when the Jewish authorities question the Apostles, “By what power or by what name did you do this?” (4:7). Jesus warned his disciples, saying, “If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also” (John 15:20). The exclusive

²⁴Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 555. “Rather, v. 2b refers to the Father’s gift, in eternity past, of authority over all humanity, on the basis of the Son’s prospective obedient humiliation, death, resurrection and exaltation. It is nothing less than the redemptive plan of God, for the second part of the verse makes the purpose of this grant clear: it is that the Son might give eternal life to those the Father has given him.”

²⁵*Ibid.*, 556. “Eternal life turns on nothing more and nothing less than knowledge of the true God. Eternal life is not so much everlasting life as personal knowledge of the Everlasting One...But because this one true God has supremely revealed himself in the person of his Son (1:18), knowledge of God cannot be divorced from knowledge of Jesus Christ. Indeed, knowledge of Jesus Christ, whom God has sent, is the ultimate access to knowledge of God (cf. 14:7; 20:31; especially Mt. 11:27).”

²⁶*Ibid.* 557. “Once that is seen, it makes best sense if v. 4 includes all the work by which Jesus brings glory to his Father, and that includes his own death, resurrection and exaltation (cf. 4:34; 5:36; 19:30).”

²⁷See R. E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 2 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1966, 1970), Appendix I, 505-508. Also Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 663. “But such faith is not an end in itself. It is directed toward the goal of personal, eschatological salvation: that by believing you may have life in his name. That is still the purpose of this book today, and at the heart of the Christian mission (v. 21).” Also J. McPolin, “Mission in the Fourth Gospel,” *Irish Theological Quarterly* 36 (1969): 118. “The object of Jesus’ mission, then, is described in various ways- to confer life, to reveal his Father as the light and the truth, to accomplish his work, to do his Father’s will. But from various texts it emerges that the primary purpose, to which all others are subordinated, is to confer life.”



and authoritative claims of both Jesus and his disciples received harsh resistance as they faithfully carried out their divine mission. This is the important interconnection of these three themes. As I will explore in particular in the opening sections of Acts and the following narrative discourses, these topics are at the heart of the history and theology, and drive the literary artistry of Luke in the narratives. Through narrative conventions Luke conveys the theo-logic that is at work in the historical events.

2.3.2.1 Authority and Revelation

Foundational to Biblical authority is the scriptural correlation of authority and revelation. In the Old Testament, Exodus 3:1ff is a definitive text for this concept. Moses claimed that God revealed himself to him and gave him authority to challenge the highest authority in the land. How, then, does God express His authority? It is most fundamentally by divine self-revelation.

Objects in creation convey their properties to scientists in a number of ways—through the five senses and technological extensions of those senses, using means and instrument appropriate to the nature of the object. But in theology the knowledge of God, the uncreated, invisible object, necessarily is conveyed to the subject of theology by revelation (Rom 1:20; Col 1:15; 1 Tim 1:17) initiated by God.²⁸ Otherwise, knowledge of God is unattainable. Revelation is the scientific data by which the theological object conveys knowledge. P. T. Forsyth states:

In religion the fundamental movement of knowledge is in the reverse direction from that of science. In science we move to the object of

²⁸Ramm, *Patterns of Authority*, p.15f. “Authority is justifiable in the pursuit of knowledge. Authority in knowledge is the authority of the object investigated. Authority in the empirical sciences means that the investigator does not dictate to nature, but lets nature speak to him. It means that theories await the evidence, not evidence the theories. The freedom demanded in science is not freedom from evidence but freedom to determine what the evidence is; it is not freedom for freedom’s sake, but freedom for truth’s sake. Once truth is known, it wears its imperial crown and all should gladly submit to its sovereignty. Knowledge is gained only as there is submission to the authority of the object investigated. For the laws and the objects have the right to compel obedience and demand compliance.”



knowledge, in religion it moves to us. Religion is only possible by Revelation.²⁹

Thus, revelation is the key to religious authority.

For John, Christ is the supreme and primary agent of the revelation of God. This is expressed in several ways in the Fourth Gospel: principally in terms of the *logos* made flesh (1:14), the signs and works, and the “I am” sayings, all recognized as important elements in John’s revelatory theological vocabulary.³⁰ The primary way in which revelation is expressed is through the “sending” or “coming” of the Son: The transcendent God relates to the world through Christ as the “one sent” or “the one who comes from above.” These terms dominate the first half of the Fourth Gospel. Haenchen highlights this relationship between “sending” and the Johannine doctrine of revelation.³¹ He maintains there is only one possible way to gain knowledge of the invisible Father: when the Father himself sends someone with the knowledge. An opening premise of the Fourth Gospel is that Jesus is the emissary sent to reveal the Father and the things above (John 1:18 - No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known.). He stands for the Father in the world and is the visible expression of the invisible Father (cf. Col. 1:15). In Jesus, as the one sent, the world hears God speaking and sees God working. In that the Son is sent by the Father, he is the authorized, authoritative revelation of the Father.

²⁹*The Principle of Authority*, 105f. The way that Forsyth constructs his statement implies that theology is not scientific. I would hold that theology is scientific, and that the science cannot *a priori* rule out the possibility of revelation as scientifically valid, when dealing with the unique nature of the object, the Creator, as opposed to scientific investigation of things created. This divine object is beyond scientific discovery, as initiated and controlled by His created beings, unless He wills to reveal Himself.

³⁰H. Schneider, “‘The Word Was Made Flesh’: An Analysis of the Theology of Revelation in the Fourth Gospel,” *CBQ* 31 (1969): 344-45.

³¹E. Haenchen, *A Commentary on the Gospel of John*, 2 vols., Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984): 1.94-97.



As such, then, the incarnation and the resurrection together form the basic framework in the interaction of God and mankind in space and time, within which the whole Gospel is to be interpreted and understood. But *they are ultimates, carrying their own authority* and calling for the intelligent commitment of belief, and providing the irreducible ground upon which continuing rational inquiry and theological formulation take place.³²

2.3.2.2 Revelation and Mission

Haenchen notes the centrality of the inter-relationship of revelation and mission in the Fourth Gospel. Reflecting on John 8:41 he notes that though the world was created by the Logos it is unable to know God. Seeking its own glory it self-deceptively believes it already knows him. He rightly contends that the Fourth Gospel presents the incarnation initiated by God as the only possibility for humans to obtain knowledge of God (John 1:14,18). He correctly argues that it is this event that presents the central “problem of Johannine Christology” which is set forth in the reoccurring phrase, “the Father who sent me.” Thus, Jesus is the one sent by the Father to be the revelation of God.³³ Out of the association of the Son with the Father (1:1,2,18), the Son of God was sent forth to make him fully known. This mission of revelation is then one of the dominant threads woven throughout the Fourth Gospel. John 3:31-34 is one of many examples of this consistent revelatory mission theme:

31 Ὁ ἄνωθεν ἐρχόμενος ἐπάνω πάντων ἐστίν· ὁ ὢν ἐκ τῆς γῆς ἐκ τῆς γῆς ἐστίν καὶ ἐκ τῆς γῆς λαλεῖ. ὁ ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἐρχόμενος [ἐπάνω πάντων ἐστίν]: **32** ὃ ἐώρακεν καὶ ἤκουσεν τοῦτο μαρτυρεῖ, καὶ τὴν μαρτυρίαν αὐτοῦ οὐδεὶς λαμβάνει. **33** ὁ λαβὼν αὐτοῦ τὴν μαρτυρίαν ἐσφράγισεν ὅτι ὁ θεὸς ἀληθῆς ἐστίν. **34** ὃν

³²T.F. Torrance, *Space, Time, & Resurrection* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 20. Underline is mine.

³³*Der Vater der mich gesandt hat*, NTS 9 (1963): 210, quoted in G. R. Beasley-Murray, “The Mission of the Logos-Son,” in *The Four Gospels: Festschrift Fans Neiryck*, BETL. C. ed. Van Segbroeck et al., 3:1855-68.



γὰρ ἀπέστειλεν ὁ θεὸς τὰ ῥήματα τοῦ θεοῦ λαλεῖ, οὐ γὰρ ἐκ μέτρου δίδωσιν τὸ πνεῦμα.

The one who comes from above is above all; the one who is from the earth belongs to the earth, and speaks as one from the earth. The one who comes from heaven is above all. He testifies to what he has seen and heard, but no one accepts his testimony. The man who has accepted it has certified that God is truthful. For the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God gives the Spirit without limit.

Further statements on the revelatory task of the Son to speak the words of God and to do the works of the Father may be seen in John 5:16, 31-47; 7:17; 14:10; 17:3; 18:37. The two revelatory modes appear together in 14:10:

10 οὐ πιστεύεις ὅτι ἐγὼ ἐν τῷ πατρὶ καὶ ὁ πατήρ ἐν ἐμοί ἐστιν; τὰ ῥήματα ἃ ἐγὼ λέγω ὑμῖν ἀπ’ ἐμαυτοῦ οὐ λαλῶ, ὁ δὲ πατήρ ἐν ἐμοὶ μένων ποιεῖ τὰ ἔργα αὐτοῦ. **11** πιστεύετε μοι ὅτι ἐγὼ ἐν τῷ πατρὶ καὶ ὁ πατήρ ἐν ἐμοί· εἰ δὲ μή, διὰ τὰ ἔργα αὐτὰ πιστεύετε.

Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? *The words* that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does *his works*. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of *the works* themselves.

But also notice the third element of the revelation-mission-authority triad appears in the first two lines of the quote. There is the denial that the Son speaks or acts “on his own.”

2.3.2.3 Authority and Mission

In all the varied aspects of the mission of Jesus to act as the messenger/agent of God, his authority is expressed or implied in the Fourth Gospel.³⁴ Since this is fundamental to the whole concept of mission in the Fourth

³⁴“We are told, not only of the sending of the disciples, but above all of the sending of Jesus, and moreover of the sending of the Baptist and the Spirit . . . Jesus’ divine sonship rests in his



Gospel. it is essential to explicitly demonstrate it from specific texts. The inter-connection of authority and mission is exhibited in John 6:38-40:

38 ὅτι καταβέβηκα ἀπὸ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ οὐχ ἵνα ποιῶ τὸ θέλημα τὸ ἐμὸν ἀλλὰ τὸ θέλημα τοῦ πέμψαντός με. **39** τοῦτο δέ ἐστιν τὸ θέλημα τοῦ πέμψαντός με, ἵνα πᾶν ὃ δέδωκέν μοι μὴ ἀπολέσω ἐξ αὐτοῦ, ἀλλὰ ἀναστήσω αὐτὸ [ἐν] τῇ ἐσχάτῃ ἡμέρᾳ. **40** τοῦτο γάρ ἐστιν τὸ θέλημα τοῦ πατρός μου, ἵνα πᾶς ὁ θεωρῶν τὸν υἱὸν καὶ πιστεύων εἰς αὐτὸν ἔχη ζωὴν αἰώνιον, καὶ ἀναστήσω αὐτὸν ἐγὼ [ἐν] τῇ ἐσχάτῃ ἡμέρᾳ.

For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. This is indeed the will of my Father, that all who see the Son and believe in him may have eternal life; and I will raise them up on the last day.

The power and authority of the Son to give life to the world, from his sacrificial death on behalf of the world, derives from his commission from the Father who sent him for this purpose (mission).

Obedience, then, is an essential requisite for the authority of the one given a mission.³⁵ The trustworthiness of a messenger is necessary to those who would receive him as an authorized agent of the one who sent him. This appears in the passage just cited (6:38): “I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me.” This element in the mission of Jesus as the messenger/agent of God occurs in a number of other passages in the gospel. It is

being sent by the Father (10:36)...What is decisive in the idea of sending is the thought of authority that is bound up with it.” Ferdinand Han, *Mission in the New Testament*, trans. Frank Clarke (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1965), 157.

³⁵“With that pre-understanding, how does the FG’s [Fourth Gospel] portrait of ‘the sending of the Son’ contribute to its entire mission theology? Perhaps most significantly, sending terminology clearly focuses on the themes of obedience and dependence. Coupled with the FG’s identification of Jesus as the “Son” of the Father (which stresses the uniqueness of Jesus, and thus the unique relationship he enjoys with God, “the Father”), the FG’s sending language underscores that the Son, the Sent One par excellence (cf. 9:2), carried out his mission (cf. ergon, erga terminology and the section on Terms Denoting Movement and Signs and Works Terminology above) in obedience and dependence upon his sender, the Father.” Andreas Köstenberger, *The Missions of Jesus and of the Disciples*, 167.



expressed in a general sense in what Jesus says to his disciples: “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work” (4:34). In 5:30 Jesus restates what he had said earlier (5:19): “I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge; and my judgment is just, because I seek to do not my own will but the will of him who sent me.” Here, it is seen that Jesus is not simply aware of his mission to be obedient to the Father’s will, but has a complete commitment to it that takes precedence over even life’s basic necessities, and in the end, even over the tenacious, core human desire for life itself—voluntarily giving up his life on the cross in obedient surrender to the Father’s will.³⁶

In all the aspects of the mission of Jesus he acts with authority given by the Father who sent him. This is seen in the Evangelist’s conclusion to the public ministry of Jesus in 12:44-55 where the three major elements of the mosaic of divine authority in the Fourth Gospel appear together at the conclusion of the “Book of Signs”:

44 Ἰησοῦς δὲ ἔκραξεν καὶ εἶπεν· ὁ πιστεύων εἰς ἐμὲ οὐ πιστεύει εἰς ἐμὲ ἀλλὰ εἰς τὸν πέμψαντά με, **45** καὶ ὁ θεωρῶν ἐμὲ θεωρεῖ τὸν πέμψαντά με. **46** ἐγὼ φῶς εἰς τὸν κόσμον ἐλήλυθα, ἵνα πᾶς ὁ πιστεύων εἰς ἐμὲ ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ μὴ μείνη. **47** καὶ ἐάν τις μου ἀκούσῃ τῶν ῥημάτων καὶ μὴ φυλάξῃ, ἐγὼ οὐ κρίνω αὐτόν· οὐ γὰρ ἦλθον ἵνα κρίνω τὸν κόσμον, ἀλλ’ ἵνα σώσω τὸν κόσμον. **48** ὁ ἀθετῶν ἐμὲ καὶ μὴ λαμβάνων τὰ ῥήματά μου ἔχει τὸν κρίνοντα αὐτόν· ὁ λόγος ὃν ἐλάλησα ἐκεῖνος κρινεῖ αὐτὸν ἐν τῇ ἐσχάτῃ ἡμέρᾳ. **49** ὅτι ἐγὼ ἐξ ἐμαυτοῦ οὐκ ἐλάλησα, ἀλλ’ ὁ πέμψας με πατὴρ αὐτός μοι ἐντολὴν δέδωκεν τί εἶπω καὶ τί λαλήσω. **50** καὶ οἶδα ὅτι ἡ ἐντολὴ αὐτοῦ ζωὴ αἰώνιος ἐστίν. ἃ οὖν ἐγὼ λαλῶ, καθὼς εἶρηκέν μοι ὁ πατήρ, οὕτως λαλῶ.

Then Jesus cried aloud: “Whoever believes in me believes not in me but in him who sent me (*mission*). And whoever sees me sees him (*revelation*) who sent me (*mission*). I have come as light into the world, so that everyone who believes in me should not remain in the darkness

³⁶“The picture of Christ in the FG is entirely determined by the idea of obedience.”
Eduard Schweizer, “Jesus as the One Obedient in Suffering and Therefore Exalted to the Father,” in *Lordship and Discipleship*, SBT 38 (London: SCM Press, 1960): 68. (cf. 4:34; 5:19; 6:38; 8:28-29,35; 10:17; 12:49; 15:10; cf. also 13:4-14).



(*revelation*). I do not judge anyone who hears my words and does not keep them, for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world (*mission*). The one who rejects me and does not receive my word (*revelation*) has a judge; on the last day the word that I have spoken will serve as judge, for I have not spoken on my own, but the Father who sent me (*mission*) has himself given me a commandment about what to say and what to speak (*authority*). And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I speak (*revelation*), therefore, I speak just as the Father has told me (*authority*).”

The implications of this are substantial. There is no activity in the mission of Jesus in which he acts alone. As the messenger/agent of the Father, every word and action of his is said and done under the authoritative guidance of the Father.

2.3.2.4 Brief Preliminary Application to the Opening Discourse of Acts

In the light of these themes, Luke’s recording of the disciples’ single question during Jesus’ forty days of instruction on the kingdom of God in the opening discourse of Acts is quite revealing and agenda setting: “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” Surely this was not the only question asked during the forty days. Then why does Luke record this particular one? Leland Ryken labels this literary convention “selectivity.”³⁷ He says that this is one of the techniques employed by a storyteller to “embody their point of view.”³⁸ When this question is combined with the only other ‘selective’ topic and snippet of conversation during the forty days of conversation and instruction it may be highly revealing as to the author’s point of view for the entire discourse of Acts.

4 καὶ συναλιζόμενος παρήγγειλεν αὐτοῖς ἀπὸ Ἱεροσολύμων μὴ χωρίζεσθαι ἀλλὰ περιμένειν τὴν ἐπαγγελίαν τοῦ πατρὸς ἧν

³⁷Leland Ryken, *Words of Delight: A Literary Introduction to the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book, 1987). A storyteller “makes his statements by selection, and if he is any good, he selects every word for a reason, every detail for a reason, every incident for a reason, and arranges them in a certain time-sequence for a reason.” Flannery O’Connor. *The Nature and Aim of Fiction* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux), 75.

³⁸Ryken defines ‘point of view’ as the perspective we are “invited to share with the storyteller as we look at the experience that is presented.” *Word of Delight*, 84.



ἤκούσατέ μου, **5** ὅτι Ἰωάννης μὲν ἐβάπτισεν ὕδατι, ὑμεῖς δὲ ἐν πνεύματι βαπτισθήσεσθε ἀγίῳ οὐ μετὰ πολλὰς ταύτας ἡμέρας. **6** Οἱ μὲν οὖν συνελθόντες ἠρώτων αὐτὸν λέγοντες· κύριε, εἰ ἐν τῷ χρόνῳ τούτῳ ἀποκαθιστάνεις τὴν βασιλείαν τῷ Ἰσραήλ; **7** εἶπεν δὲ πρὸς αὐτούς· οὐχ ὑμῶν ἐστὶν γινῶναι χρόνους ἢ καιροὺς οὓς ὁ πατήρ ἔθετο ἐν τῇ ἰδίᾳ ἐξουσίᾳ, **8** ἀλλὰ λήμψεσθε δύναμιν ἐπελθόντος τοῦ ἀγίου πνεύματος ἐφ' ὑμᾶς καὶ ἔσεσθέ μου μάρτυρες ἐν τε Ἱερουσαλήμ καὶ [ἐν] πάσῃ τῇ Ἰουδαίᾳ καὶ Σαμαρείᾳ καὶ ἕως ἐσχάτου τῆς γῆς.

1:4 On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: “Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. **5** For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.” **6** So when they met together, they asked him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” **7** He said to them: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. **8** But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Luke is communicating through his ‘literary artistry’ the theological perspective of the history he is about to narrate. Again, the disciples are promised Holy Spirit empowerment and *authority* to carry out their *mission* to proclaim the exclusive *revelation* of God in Jesus, the King of the Kingdom that is to be restored and extended to the ends of the earth. With the words “you will be my witnesses,” the disciples are both given their *mission* and authorized by the ‘author’ of their *authority*, and their mission will be to reveal, through their witness to the King, the restoration of the Kingdom to Israel, albeit a reconstituted Israel in its fulfilled form--the Church. This is the central theo-logic that controls the historiography of Luke in Acts.

2.3.3 Jesus- the Primary Apostle and Delegated Authority of the Father

The Fourth Gospel does not attribute the title ἀπόστολος either to Jesus or to his disciples. Yet the most dominant designation of the Father in the Fourth Gospel is “the one who sent me”; and Jesus understands himself consistently as the



one who has been sent by, and returns to the Father, or comes down and goes back to the Father.³⁹ Jesus functions in every way in the Fourth Gospel as the supreme, unique apostle of the Father,⁴⁰ surpassing any other apostle, by being His Son.⁴¹ His authority and mission is derived from the Father with whom he was identified⁴² and who acted through him.⁴³ “The Father loves the Son and has placed everything

³⁹One of the great strengths of Köstenberger’s methodological approach is that he undertakes to much more broadly examine the semantic field of mission terminology, recognizing the theological complexity of a given theme. Sending may be the dominant term, but his search yields a much wider range of terms: the terms “send” (ἀποστέλλω, πέμπω); “come” (ἔρχομαι and derivatives); “go” (πορεύομαι, ὑπάγω); “become” (γίνομαι; but note that not all meanings of this term will be relevant here—ultimately, the term’s meaning in context is determinative); “descend” (καταβαίνω); “ascend” (ἀναβαίνω); “leave” (μεταβαίνω); “follow” (ακολουθέω); “bring,” “lead” (ἄγω); and “gather” (συνάγω). *The Missions of Jesus and the Disciples*, 67.

⁴⁰Calvin Mercer argues that “If Jesus functions like an apostle in the fourth gospel, why did John not utilize *apostolos*, a term that most likely was readily available to him, given the consensus that John dates after the synoptics and long after Paul? The most reasonable explanation is that the apostles, while clearly authoritative and revered, were men. For John to call Jesus an apostle—given the prior use of the term in early Christianity—would be to run the risk of demeaning his Lord by demoting him to the level of man. Therefore to refer to God sending Jesus on a religious mission John used *apostellein* (as opposed to *pempein*), which was different from but related to the title *apostolos*. In this way John communicated the idea of Jesus as the apostle from God but in a manner that preserved Jesus’ special status and was consistent with John’s high Christology. Hebrews 3:1 is the only place in the New Testament where Jesus is called an apostle, and there it clearly expresses a high Christology by virtue of both the manner of rendering and the book in which it is located.”

⁴¹“I would suggest, first, that the model in the evangelist’s mind was not just any agent, but the agent who is the principal’s son. A son, after all, was the best agent a man could ever have, and the one whose credentials were most likely to be accepted.” A. E. Harvey, “Christ as Agent,” in *The Glory of Christ in the New Testament. Studies in Christology in Memory of George Bradford Caird*, ed. L. D. Hurst and N. T. Wright (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 243.

⁴²In the FG the personal identity between the Son and the Father is stated in several different ways. One statement is “I and the Father are one” (10:30) and another is “the Father is in me and I am in the Father” (10:38; cf. 14:10-11 and 17:21-23). In 10:36-38 it is explicitly stated that it is the agent, the Son in the capacity of being sent into the world, who is one with the sender. Similarly, in 17:20-23, the unity between the Son and the Father will make it possible for the world to recognize the Son as agent of the Father, as made manifest in Jesus’ words and works which also are said to be the works of the Father.

⁴³Rengstorf, “*apostello (pempo)*,” 443, suggests that Jesus as the one sent is in reality *the apostolos* of the FG; J. Painter, *John: Witness and Theologian* (London: SPCK, 1975), 78, refers in passing to Jesus’ mission as his “apostleship.”



in His hands” (John 3:35); and “I have not come on my own; but He sent me” (John 6:42).⁴⁴ Here we have a clear expression of the grounds of Christ’s authority and mission. This means that nothing can be received from God except through Christ and thus, secondarily, through any authority He may delegate. Köstenberger, in summary of his examination of the mission of the “Sent One *par excellence*,” concludes that the role of the mission theme in the Fourth Gospel is to provide a complete, multi-perspectival portrait of Jesus’ person and work. And the goal of his mission is to lead people to faith in him as the revelation of the Father.⁴⁵

The religious authorities repeatedly challenged Jesus’ authority. They constantly sought to maintain control by demanding compelling, empirically verifiable demonstrations by Jesus that would meet *their* criterion of judgment. This reaches a climax before the crucifixion when they directly questioned Jesus concerning his authority.

One day as he was teaching the people in the temple courts and preaching the gospel, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, together with the elders, came up to him. “Tell us by what authority you are doing these things,” they said. “Who gave you this authority?” He replied, “I will also ask you a question. Tell me, John’s baptism—was it from heaven, or from men?” They discussed it among themselves and said, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ he will ask, ‘Why didn’t you believe him?’ But if we say, ‘From men,’ all the people will stone us, because they are persuaded that John was a prophet.” So they answered, “We don’t know where it was from.” Jesus said, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.” (Luke 20:1-8)

What Jesus proceeds to do is to tell them the parable of the tenants of a vineyard who disrespected him by rejecting the servants he sent, and then his son, thus challenging his ownership and authority. The listening Jewish authorities once again did not discern immediately that Jesus was indicating one more time that the cross was the answer to the question of his ultimate authority. But they did understand,

⁴⁴Cf. Matt 11:27; 28:18.

⁴⁵Köstenberger, *The Missions of Jesus and the Disciples*.



when he added quotes from Psalms concerning the builders rejecting the stone, that he gave them this parable to reveal that he was aware of their duplicity. Their question was a disguise for an excuse to kill him in order to retain their own positions of authority. These Jewish rulers desired to illicit from Jesus an appeal to some authority above, beyond, and outside of himself in order to believe in him. But Jesus would see through their subterfuge for not wanting to submit to him—always wanting to control their relation to him from a position of superiority. In a telling move, Jesus responded by questioning them concerning the baptism of John. His clear intention was to push them back to the searching question God had already confronted them with in the preaching of John the Baptist concerning sin and repentance. Thus, if they truly understood his question, they needed to repent from their duplicity and embrace Jesus' divine authority. God the Father and his delegated missionary and authority would control the questioning, not them. The irony is palpable. The highest of all authority is standing in the flesh in front of them and they are blind. Their questions are irresponsible and self-contradictory and Jesus reserves his harshest language for them.

“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former. 24 You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel.... “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. 26 Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean. (Matt 23:23, 25)

In the narrative of Acts the clash of authorities will continue, post-ascension, with the apostles, the delegated authorities of Jesus confronted by the same Jewish authorities.



2.4 Part II: The Delegation of the Authority, Revelation and Mission of Jesus to the Disciples and the Holy Spirit

2.4.1 Introduction

In conclusion we can only say that the deepest foundation of the canon can only lie in Christ himself, and in the nature of his coming and work. The very basis or ground for the recognition of the canon is, therefore, in principle redemptive-historical, i.e. Christological. For Christ is not only himself the canon in which God comes to the world, and in which he glorifies himself in contrast to the world, but Christ *establishes* the canon and gives it a concrete historical form. In the first place, Christ establishes the canon in his own word and work, but then also in the transfer of authority (*exousia*) to His representatives, in the Holy Spirit witnessing with them and through them, and in the apostolic tradition.⁴⁶

In the so-called Book of Glory (chapter 13ff), after Jesus exegeted the Father (John 1:18; 20:30-31) through the signs he performed and realized he would soon return to the Father, he became preoccupied with delegating his mission to others.⁴⁷ Jesus then began to spell out what he had in mind for his followers during his absence. John 13ff is dominated by the theme of Jesus' return to his Father: "Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God..." (13:3). From this moment in the narrative, Jesus begins to prepare for his ascent. The emphasis changes from his origins in

⁴⁶Ridderbos, *Redemptive History*, 37.

⁴⁷"Rather, we must recognize this episode [ch. 13] as the point on which the action of the entire gospel hinges: the action which is a dramatization of the principal theme to follow, and thus of the disciples' (readers') preparation for what will happen when Jesus is 'glorified.'" Peter G. Ahr, "He Loved Them to Completion": The Theology of John 13-14," in *Standing before God. Studies on Prayer in Scriptures and in Tradition with Essays In Honor of John M. Oesterreicher*, ed. Asker Finkel and Lawrence Frizzell (New York: Ktav, 1981), 76. Also, R. Alan Culpepper, "The Johannine Hypodeigma: A Reading of John 13," *Semeia* 53 (1991): 135: "Interpreters generally agree that 13:1 marks the most significant transition in the Gospel, introducing not only the scene of the footwashing but the entire second half of the Gospel."



previous chapters, to his destiny—his home going. The question of his hearers is now not so much, “How did you get here?” or, “Where did you come from?” but “Where are you going?” (John 13:36; 14:5; 16:18). The “Book of Signs” was dominated more by the terms of “sending,” “coming,” and “descending,” but the “Book of Glory” is dominated more by the terms of “going,” “ascending,” and terms of delegation: “sending” and delegating “greater works.” There is, then, a shift in the theology of sending which portends an alteration in the status of Jesus. While he has up to this point been the one sent by the Father, he now becomes, like the Father, the sender, anticipating his ascension.

In the “Book of Signs” it appears that what Jesus was saying over and over again in word and sign was that the glory of God was something the disciples saw and heard and touched in the person of Jesus, in time and space: in Cana of Galilee, in Capernaum, in Bethany, on the Sea of Tiberias, in Jerusalem (1:14; 2:11; 11:4; 1 John 1:1-3). But now with talk of Jesus leaving, where will the glory and the presence of God yet be experienced?

Jesus answers this question throughout the text of the discourse at the Last Supper. First, the authority, revelation and mission of Jesus will be transposed to the disciples. Second, the presence of the historical Jesus will be succeeded by the presence of the Spirit of Truth, the Paraclete, who will dwell with believers and be in them. But these are not separate, unrelated witnesses/missions. Both the disciples and the Spirit are sent to perform closely inter-connected tasks that relate to continuing the mission of Jesus.

2.4.2 The Joint Authorization and Mission of the Apostles and the Holy Spirit

In Christ, the one sent by the Father and the unique Son of God—and so the bearer of divine authority—God can be said to have revealed himself as canon over against the world. But the material authority of the New Testament originates in the history of redemption in another respect. For the *communication* and *transmission* of what was seen and heard in the fullness of time, Christ established *a formal authority structure to be the source and standard for all future preaching of the*



gospel. From the beginning of His public ministry, we see Jesus' intent on sharing His own power (exousia) with others so that this authority would take visible, tangible shape for the foundation and extension of the church on earth.⁴⁸

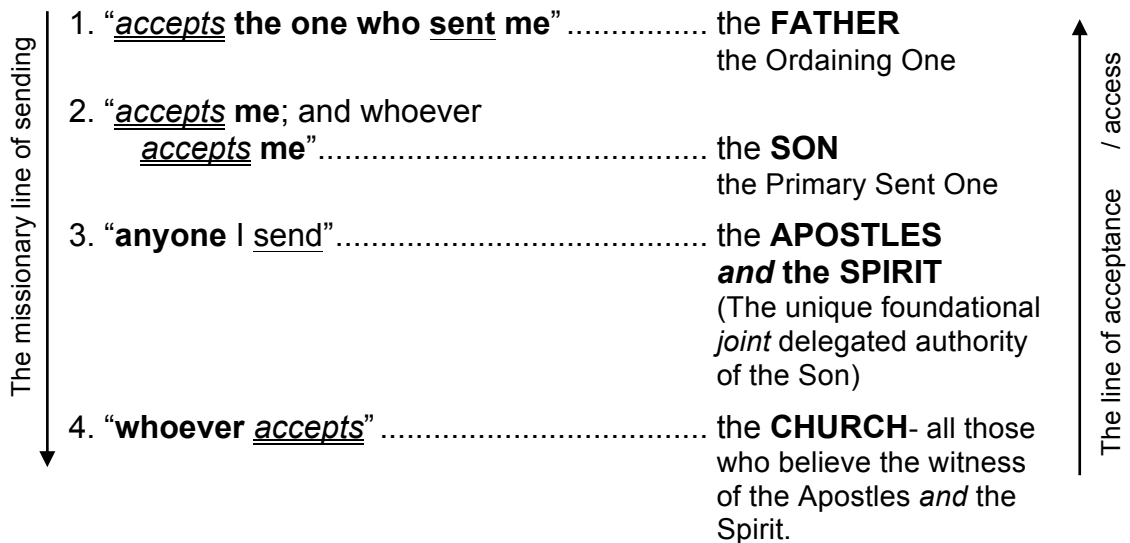
In the pivotal chapter thirteen we see the first formal general statement⁴⁹ of the principle of delegation of sending/authority by the Son: "I tell you the truth, whoever accepts anyone I send accepts me; and whoever accepts me accepts the one who sent me" (John 13:20). Here we have a statement of delegated authority "traced backwards"—a statement of scriptural apostolic succession. In context the repeated concepts of 'sending' and 'accepting' have to do with 'mission', 'authority' and 'revelation,' in that being 'sent' means both that one is on a 'mission' and is 'authorized' for that mission. It also entails the content of the mission: revelation of and witness to the 'sender.' The concept of 'accepting' also involves all three concepts. The present task will be to identify the antecedents to the pronouns in the passage. The antecedents to the pronouns of the first two phrases are identified and developed primarily in the "Book of Signs" (John chapters 1-12) and the antecedents to the pronouns of the second two phrases are identified primarily in "The Book of Glory" (chapters 13-20). The verse is charted below in reverse order to highlight the line of 'acceptance' of 'authorized missionaries' identified in the right hand column:

*SEE FIGURE ON FOLLOWING PAGE

⁴⁸ Hermann Ridderbos, *Redemptive History and the New Testament Scriptures*, 13.

⁴⁹ Köstenberger, *The Missions of Jesus and the Disciple*.

Figure 2.1



The church envisioned in phrase four is again specified in John 17:20- "I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their [apostles] word." The proper antecedents to the "anyone" in the third phrase, the *duality* of delegated sending/authority, is stated explicitly in John 15:26f- "When the *Advocate* comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the *Spirit of truth* who comes from the Father, *he will testify on my behalf. You [apostles] also are to testify* because you have been with me from the beginning." The sending (mission and authorization) of the dual witnesses is a topic throughout chapters 13-17 as Jesus becomes more and more expressive of his going back to the Father (ascension). This duality of delegated witnesses has much to do with the doctrine of Scripture and its place as the foundation to all extension of the mission of Jesus.

2.4.3 The Mission of the Apostles

In addition to implicit texts like John 17:20, there are three explicit texts in the Fourth Gospel that state that Jesus "sends" the disciples, of which the second two are directly relevant to the present discussion.



John 4:38 ἐγὼ ἀπέστειλα ὑμᾶς θερίζειν ὃ οὐχ ὑμεῖς κεκοπιάκατε· ἄλλοι κεκοπιάκασιν καὶ ὑμεῖς εἰς τὸν κόπον αὐτῶν εἰσεληλύθατε.
ονη

John 17:18 καθὼς ἐμὲ ἀπέστειλας εἰς τὸν κόσμον, καὶ γὰρ ἀπέστειλα αὐτοὺς εἰς τὸν κόσμον·

John 20:21 εἶπεν οὖν αὐτοῖς [ὁ Ἰησοῦς] πάλιν· εἰρήνη ὑμῖν· καθὼς ἀπέσταλκέν με ὁ πατήρ, καὶ γὰρ πέμπω ὑμᾶς.

John 4:38 I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labor.

John 17:18 As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world.

John 20:21 Again Jesus said, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.”

The apostolic ministry is a significant step in the delegation of authority because it is the translation of the “self-ministry” of Jesus into ministry in His name: “And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it” (John 14.13f). It is the unique transition of the direct ministry of the Redeemer to the delegated ministry of the Redeemer through redeemed sinners, and thus all further ministry of the church thereafter is affected “at its root by the special function of the Apostles in their immediate relation to Jesus’ ministry on the one hand and to the historical Church of forgiven sinners and its mission in the world on the other hand.”⁵⁰ God’s sending of

⁵⁰T. F. Torrance, “Foundation of the Church,” in *Theological Foundations For Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 214. He continues: “The important point here is to discern both the rooting of the apostolic ministry in the ministry of Jesus, and to discern the difference which comes about when the self-ministry of Jesus is translated into ministry in his name. It is the vicarious mediation of Jesus which is of fundamental importance here and explains why the Early Church worshipped the Father and ministered only in the name of Christ, and why they regarded Christ in the absolute and proper sense, as the only Minister of the Church before God, the only One who was appointed and anointed (Christos) for office in the Kingdom- the supreme ‘Householder’ in God’s Kingdom who at the end would hand over everything to the Father.”



Jesus has its counterpart and continuation in the commissioning of the Apostles (Matt 10:40; 28:18f; John 20:21; Acts 9:17; 10:29).

2.4.4 The Mission of the Spirit

This sending, commissioning or authorizing of the Apostles does not stand alone in the “apostolic succession.” The Spirit is also sent by Jesus: “Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you (16:7). In chapters fourteen through sixteen the Spirit’s coming is promised five times.

John 14:16 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever— 17 the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. 18 I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.

John 14:26 But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.

John 15:26 When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me.

John 16:7 But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. 8 When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: 9 in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; 10 in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; 11 and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.

John 16:13 But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. 14 He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you. 15 All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you.

The sending of the Apostles is indivisibly linked with the sending of the Spirit. Read from a canonical reader’s perspective, this is a crucial point as linked



historically and theologically to Acts 1 and 2. The Church Fathers perhaps consciously seeing the pneumatological final chapters of the Gospel of John, deliberately placed it immediately prior to Acts--as the narrative of the Spirit-empowered expansion of the Church.

In John's gospel, therefore, the sending of the Son and the sending of the Spirit grew together into a unity. But in this gospel, likewise, is the sending of the Spirit very closely associated with the sending of the disciples. The disciples are messengers and witnesses of their Lord, because the Spirit supports their testimony and helps them in their service, whatever may befall them.⁵¹

This close association is reinforced in John 20:21: "Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you [*apostles*].'" When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the *Holy Spirit*.'" In the "line of sending" this is a joint commission (John 15:26-27). It is not one following the other in the ladder of authority but the two fused together,⁵² though there is a redemptive-historical order as I shall argue in the examination of Acts 1 and 2.

The joint sending of the Apostles and the Spirit and their relationship is explicitly spelled out in John 16:13ff, where all four parties of ultimate authority and delegated authority appear together.

⁵¹Ferdinand Hahn, "Sendung des Geistes—Sendung der Jüger. Die pneumatologische Dimension des Missionsauftrages nach dem Zeugnis des Neuen Testaments," in *Universales Christentum angesichts einer pluralen Welt*, Beiträge zur Religions-Theologie 1, ed. Andreas Bsteh (Mödling bei Wien: Verlag St. Gabriel, 1976), 104, quoted in Köstenberger, *The Missions of Jesus and of the Disciples*, 319.

⁵²Hermann Ridderbos, *Redemptive History*, 29f. "Furthermore, Christ expressly stated that the Spirit would not speak on His own initiative but would take the things of Christ and proclaim them to the apostles. The content of the Spirit's testimony, then, is inseparable from that of the apostles, and the power the apostles received from Christ to establish their word as the church's canon was realized in terms of the Spirit's leading and inspiring them. Therefore to make the canonicity of the apostolic word dependent on the contemporary operation of the Spirit and to oppose the latter to the objective content of the apostolic word clashes head on with the redemptive, historical significance of the canon. It abolishes the once-and-for-all character of the history of redemption and leaves no place for the canon as its authorized witness."



ὅταν δὲ ἔλθῃ ἐκεῖνος, τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς ἀληθείας, ὀδηγήσει ὑμᾶς ἐν τῇ ἀληθείᾳ πάση· οὐ γὰρ λαλήσει ἀφ' ἑαυτοῦ, ἀλλ' ὅσα ἀκούσει λαλήσει καὶ τὰ ἐρχόμενα ἀναγγελεῖ ὑμῖν. **14** ἐκεῖνος ἐμὲ δοξάσει, ὅτι ἐκ τοῦ ἐμοῦ λήμψεται καὶ ἀναγγελεῖ ὑμῖν. **15** πάντα ὅσα ἔχει ὁ πατὴρ ἐμὰ ἐστίν· διὰ τοῦτο εἶπον ὅτι ἐκ τοῦ ἐμοῦ λαμβάνει καὶ ἀναγγελεῖ ὑμῖν.

“But when **He**, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide **you** into all truth. **He** will not speak on **His** own; He will speak only what **He** hears, and **He** will tell **you** what is yet to come. **He** will bring glory to **me** by taking from what is **mine** and making it known to **you**. All that belongs to **the Father** is **mine**. That is why I said **the Spirit** will take from what is **mine** and make it known to **you**.”

Here again we have a summary of all the interconnections of scriptural apostolic succession and Biblical authority. Authority is involved: “He will not speak on his own; He will speak only what He hears.” Mission is pervasive: “He will guide you into all truth”; “He will tell you what is yet to come”; “He will bring glory to me.” Revelation is included: “and making it known to you”; “and make it known to you.” This passage also points to the joint sending of the Apostles and the Holy Spirit as having great bearing on the doctrine of Scripture. From his examination of John 15:26 and 16:13ff Hermann Ridderbos perceives an identical relationship between the testimony of the apostles and the testimony of the Spirit.⁵³ He argues that the two testimonies are indistinguishable because it is the Spirit that guided the apostles into all truth (16:13), by reminding them of everything Jesus said to them (14:26). But the additional work of the Spirit is distinguishable from that of the apostles in that he *convicts others* that the apostles’ witness is true. Ridderbos then concludes: “the redemptive, historical bond between the work of the Spirit and the canon is not to be found first of all in subjectively perceiving the gospel as canon but in its objective

⁵³Ibid., 29.



proclamation.”⁵⁴ That bond is to be found in the inspiration of the apostolic witness recorded in the canon and not in the Spirit’s illumination of believers.

2.4.5 Conclusion to Part II

The ministry of the Twelve was unique. Along with the Spirit they laid the foundation to the church, with Christ being the cornerstone of the house God promised to build David (2 Sam 7; Eph 2:20; 1 Pet 2:6; Rev 21:14). The document of their unique ministry is the New Testament, the written record of the fulfillment of their mission.⁵⁵ It is *the* missionary document of the Church. Thus, the term ‘apostolic’ in a definite sense refers to the New Testament as the source and norm of the Church’s life and existence throughout history. The Church as a whole is successor to the Apostles’ *and* the Holy Spirit’s missions (John 13:20 as diagrammed above). The Church’s mission is first and foremost defined by and derivative of the joint delegated missions of the Apostles and the Spirit as the original witnesses and the original messengers. This means that every individual member of the Church stands in this “apostolic succession.” The source from which the ἐκκλησία draws is a *double one*, the Christ-tradition, which has the original tradition of the apostolic witness as its norm, and the Holy Spirit, which bears witness to Christ. Every later generation remains bound to the word, the witness, and the service of the first apostolic generation. The Apostles are and remain the once-for-all and irreplaceable original witnesses, delegated by the Son. The Church not only lives by the New Testament, as the canon of its life and faith, but also it is the only sword of the Spirit, the primary weapon of the church in its mission. The Church not only continues to be built up through the exegetical study of the record of their fulfilled mission, but also the mission of Jesus is continued from generation to generation as the written

⁵⁴Ibid.

⁵⁵Emil Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine*, Vol. 3 (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1962), 48. “Since the death of the Apostles the Apostolate has validity only in one form: as the norm of the original tradition fixed in writing, the norm of the original witness, the New Testament.”



testimony of the apostles and the Spirit is proclaimed and taught. In this primary way the mission of Jesus continues throughout history upon the foundation of his designated apostles.⁵⁶ Every generation must live in accordance with both the apostolic witness (Scripture) and the apostolic service (missionary extension in the world and the building up of the community). The church can only hear the Lord of the harvest and continue His mission via this apostolic witness.

Emil Brunner contends that we must “take seriously the bond between the Spirit and the kerygma, *as that bond is revealed in redemptive history itself.*”⁵⁷ In the present chapter I have attempted to exposit that bond in redemptive history as recorded in the Fourth Gospel. Of the four gospels, the redemptive history recorded in the second half of the Gospel of John is preoccupied with the transference of Jesus’ mission and authority to others in anticipation of his return to the Father. And that transference entails Jesus’ creation of a bond between the kerygma and the Spirit. Brunner concludes that “the kerygma is revelatory and a part of redemptive history above all because in *itself*, in its written form, it is the proclamation, prepared by the Holy Spirit, of the redemptive event that occurred in the fullness of time.”⁵⁸

⁵⁶Bernard Ramm, *The Pattern of Religious Authority* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 55. “The New Testament written by the apostles is the delegated authority of the Lord Jesus. It is not surprising that the New Jerusalem has the apostles’ names on the twelve foundation stones (Rev. 21:14).”

⁵⁷Emil Brunner, *Ekklesia and the Church*, 51.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*



2.5 PART III: The Theological, Historical Integration of the Narrative Discourses of Acts Chapters One and Two: The Pre-Ascension ‘Theo-logic’ and Promises of Jesus Realized.

The expression ‘theo-logic’ in the above title is intentionally chosen to emphasize that in the present and following chapters an attempt is made to discern and emphasize the rationale or logic of God’s sovereign guidance in the history recorded in the opening narrative discourses of Acts. This thesis assumes the Reformed doctrine on the relationship between history and theology in Scripture, which in turn is undergirded by their doctrine of the sovereignty of God. Paul R. Noble observes: “For the Reformers there was a natural coherence between the biblical texts and the ‘subject matter’ which made them religiously significant writing—to study, say, the Fourth Gospel’s account of the life of Christ was to study the life of Christ, and hence to study what we ought to believe for our salvation. There was simply no ‘critical distance’ between these things; rather the history and doctrine were directly rendered to the reader by the canonical text.”⁵⁹

In the pages that follow I will endeavor to argue that the historical-theological rationale driving the program that Jesus preset in the Gospel of John for the transference of his mission and authority to others is the same logic of God, not only orchestrating the events themselves and their historical relationships in Acts 1 and 2, but is that which is also at work in inspiring the literary art of Luke in his recording of those events. It is here that I arrive at the heart of the thesis expressed in the dissertation title: The Interrelationship of Theology, History and Literary

⁵⁹Paul R. Noble, *The Canonical Approach: A Critical Reconstruction of the Hermeneutics of Brevard Childs* (New York: E.J. Brill, 1995), 307. He further observes: “For Childs, then, the orientation of critical scholarship towards the *sensus historicus* or *sensus originalis* signifies a quest for something behind the text, which is typically recovered by historical reconstructions and/or an investigation of original meanings or original contexts. This was clearly very different from what the Reformers meant by the *sensus historicus*. According to Childs, however, critical scholars nonetheless continued to identify ‘the historical sense’ with ‘the literal sense,’ and thus engendered a correspondingly transformed understanding of what it means to ‘interpret the Bible literally’: For the Reformers this was a reading of the canonical text; for critical scholarship it was a reading *through* the text to recover something else behind it.” 307f.



Artistry. I am attempting to ascertain more clearly the scriptural details of the theology that underlies both the history itself and consequently the literary, artistic choices employed by Luke in his historiography.

The structure and content of Luke's narrative in Acts 1 and 2 are the historical verification and actualization of Jesus' preplanning in the Gospel of John for the extension of his ministry through the joint witness of the Apostles and the Holy Spirit upon his ascension. After the recording of the ascension of Jesus in Acts 1:1-11,⁶⁰ the next two narrated episodes have to do first, with the apostles, and second, with the Holy Spirit.⁶¹ These three events are consistent with what Jesus predetermined in the Fourth Gospel for the continuation of his ministry and the expansion of the kingdom of God. After the ascension/enthronement, the first two "acts" of the ascended King were to put in place his two authorized witnesses or missionaries by reestablishing the *twelve* apostles (Acts 1:12-26) and by sending the Spirit (Acts 2:1-4).⁶² These first two "acts" of the ascended Lord are strategic when

⁶⁰I take verses 1-11 as the first discourse segment and verses 12-26 as the second narrative segment.

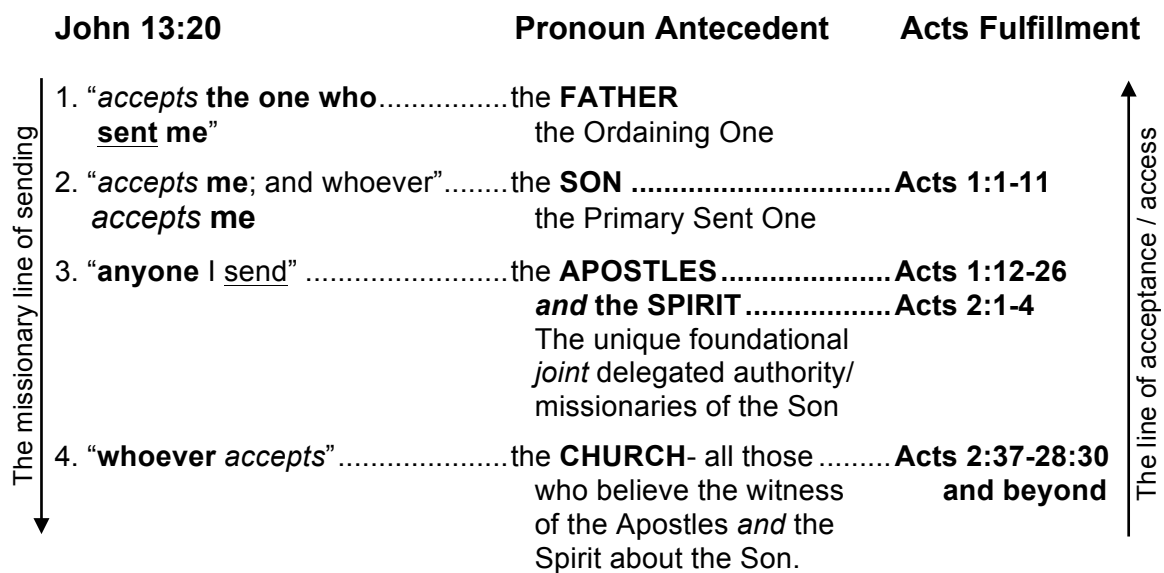
⁶¹"The original witness crystallized in the New Testament canon is, in Pauline thinking, not a fully valid substitute, for no letter (*gramma*) can replace the spirit (*pneuma*). But an apostle without *pneuma* is not an apostle. The sentence should therefore be formulated thus: 'The authority in the Church is the witness to Christ in agreement with the apostolic witness, as we possess it in the New Testament, so far as it is borne in the power of the Holy Spirit.' The witness must always be an uttered word, behind which stands the person of the witness as a man apprehended by Christ. The *pneuma* distinguishes the *Ekklesia* from the synagogue; bare Scripture is not the authority, but Scripture as it is witnessed to by the Holy Spirit and interpreted by Him. The source from which the *Ekklesia* draws is a double one, the Christ-tradition which has the original tradition of the apostolic witness as its norm, and the Holy Spirit which bears witness to Christ." Emil Brunner, *Ekklesia and Church*, 51. It is interesting that Bruce comments that "Luke makes it plain that it is by the power of that same Spirit that all the apostolic acts which he goes on to narrate were performed, so much so that some have suggested, as a theologically more appropriate title for his second volume, *The Acts of the Holy Spirit*." F.F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), p. 31. In the light of my argument I would understand a title "The Acts of the Apostles" as "The Acts of the Apostles and the Holy Spirit," understanding the Apostles in the title to mean the Twelve and by extension, in a derivative secondary sense, those who proclaim the apostolic message.

⁶²Jervel recognizes the dual witness in the opening of Acts: "The testimony of the Twelve is that God has fulfilled his promise to his people. The Spirit also testifies that Israel's Messiah has come" (2:33ff.). *The Theology of Acts*, 81.



read in the light of the second half of the Fourth Gospel from a canonical reader's perspective. Using the diagram developed previously, the opening narrative discourses of Acts may now be placed side by side in order to view how the theologic preset by Jesus pre-cross and resurrection in John's Gospel concerning the continuation of his ministry is historically actualized in the first four "acts" of the Book of Acts.

Figure 2.2



Reading the chart in reverse order, beginning with Acts 2:37 to the present time, incorporation into the Body of Christ, the Church, only occurs through accepting and believing the joint testimony of the 'external' witness of the Apostolic message and the 'internal' testimony of the Holy Spirit, who "will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment" (John 16:7-11). That joint testimony is the only access to Jesus provided and available to humanity as instituted by Christ in the Fourth Gospel. The Apostles and the Holy Spirit are the joint exclusive missionaries (sent ones) of the Son. But the content of their witness is not complete with their testimony to the incarnation, life, ministry, death and resurrection only, but with their eyewitness to the capstone event of the ascended Lord and King. It is the ascension of Christ recorded in Acts 1:1-11 that completes



the content of witness to which they must testify ('**Act I**' – Acts 1:1-11). Once this opening event of Acts occurs, the King establishes his two missionaries by completing the twelve⁶³ ('**Act II**' – Acts 1:12-26) and sending the Holy Spirit⁶⁴ ('**Act III**' – Acts 2:1-4). These joint witnesses will now have a 'complete' testimony to proclaim to the world, and that is precisely what occurs in '**Act IV**' (2:5-41). Peter stands with the eleven to testify to Jesus, which results in three thousand souls accepting and believing the apostolic testimony and consequently also experience incorporation into the church—the fourth level in the chart above (2:41- "Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day"). Examination of the content of Peter's Pentecost message shows that he testifies to the life, ministry, death, resurrection *and the ascension* of Jesus. The crowd hears the 'external' witness while the Holy Spirit is present as the 'internal' witness, as promised in John 16:7-11. An explicit acknowledgment of their joint witness activity is stated in Acts 5:32, "We [the apostles] are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him." Again, following the chart in the right hand column from bottom to top, three thousand people are incorporated into the **Church** through their trust in the joint testimony of the **Apostles** *and* the **Holy Spirit**, with the result that they place their faith in **Jesus**, as "both Lord and Christ" (2:36). And finally, to have knowledge of Jesus, who came to exegete or make known the **Father** (ἐξηγήσατο John 1:18; 6:45; 14:9) as the exclusive missionary of the Father according to the Fourth Gospel, is to have knowledge of the Father.

⁶³Either the Spirit of Christ is directing Peter's mind, according to the preset theo-logic he taught in the Fourth Gospel, in reminding him of the Psalms and inspiring application, or Peter randomly or coincidentally recalls the passages and concludes on his own to instigate the replacement of Judas. I believe there is a hint in the text by Peter himself as to which option is more likely. His words in 1:16 are, "Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled which the Holy Spirit spoke long ago through the mouth of David...." The same Spirit directing David long ago is most likely directing Peter at that moment.

⁶⁴John 15:26- "When the Counselor comes, *whom I will send to you from the Father*, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me."



CHAPTER THREE

The Theological and Historical Integration of the Narrative Discourses of ACTS 1 - 2: The Pre-Ascension Theology and Promises of Jesus Realized

3.1 The John-Acts Connection: Acts Chapters One and Two

3:1.1 An Overview

That the twelve apostles are commissioned in conjunction with the Spirit and jointly become the indispensable link between Christ and His Church appears to find historical actualization and verification in the narrative discourses of Luke in Acts chapters 1 and 2, as indicated both by structure and content. After the ascension of Jesus, recorded in Acts 1:1-11, the next two narrated episodes have to do first, with the apostles, and second, with the Holy Spirit. I divide the first three discourses of Acts into 1:1-11, 12-26; 2:1-4.¹ These three events are consistent with what Jesus predetermined in the Fourth Gospel for the continuation of his ministry and the expansion of the kingdom of God. After the ascension/enthronement, the first two “acts” of the ascended King were to put in place his two authorized witnesses or missionaries by reestablishing the *twelve* apostles (1:12-26) and by sending the Spirit (Acts 2:1-4).² These first two “acts”

¹Verse divisions of the discourses will be discussed below under 3.1.2 “Structure.”

²Jervel recognizes the dual witness in the opening of Acts: “The testimony of the Twelve is that God has fulfilled his promise to his people. The Spirit also testifies that Israel’s



of the ascended Lord are not incidental or accidental events when read in the light of the second half of the Fourth Gospel. There is a clear divine intentionality to the history recorded in the opening events of Acts. Once Jesus had completed the seven signs³ in his mission to reveal the Father in the first half of the Fourth Gospel in the “Book of Glory” (chapters 1-12), his attention turns to the cross and his departure from this world. Consequently, Jesus is preoccupied with the continuation of his mission upon his return to the Father.⁴ Jesus’ role changes from being a ‘missionary’ of the Father to the role of missionary sender, beginning at the theological midpoint of the Gospel of John in 13:1; “It was just before the Passover Feast. *Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father.* Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love.” As Jesus increasingly speaks of his *ascension* in the second half of the Fourth Gospel his conversation turns to *sending the Holy Spirit* to empower the Apostles to testify of him.⁵ From chapter thirteen forward these three elements are theologically and historically bound together by Jesus (prophetically, as promises: 15:26- “he [the Spirit] *will* testify [μαρτυρήσει -future] about me”; and 20:21 “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you”).

Being observed from a canonical reader’s perspective and now referring to the diagram developed previously from John 13:20, the opening narrative discourses of Acts may now be placed side by side in order to view how

Messiah has come” (*The Theology of Acts of the Apostles* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996], 81.)

³I am in agreement with A.J. Köstenberger in his number and list of seven signs, and with his dividing the overall structure of the Fourth Gospel into four parts: Prologue (1:1-8); The Book of Signs (1:19-12:50); The Book of Glory (13-20); and Epilogue (21) (*The Missions of Jesus & the Disciples* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans] 70f).

⁴‘Descension’ terminology dominates the first half of the Fourth Gospel (3:13,31; 6:32, 33, 38, 41, 50, 51, 58), while ‘ascension’ terminology is pervasive in the second half (13:1, 33, 36; 14:2-5, 12, 28; 16:5, 7, 10, 17, 28).

⁵See fn 61, page 138.



the theo-logic preset by Jesus’ pre-cross, resurrection and ascension in John’s Gospel, concerning the continuation of his ministry, is historically actualized in the first four “acts” of the Book of Acts. As discussed in chapter one, the legitimacy of such analysis rests upon the presuppositions of the divine-human authorship of Scripture and the subsequent logical correlate of the unity of Scripture.

Figure 3.1

John 13:20	Pronoun Antecedent	Acts Fulfillment
1. “ <u>accepts the one who</u>the FATHER <u>sent me</u> ”.....the Ordaining One		
2. “ <u>accepts me</u> ; and whoever”.....the SON Acts 1:1-11 <u>accepts me</u>the Primary Sent One		
3. “ anyone I send ”the APOSTLES Acts 1:12-26 and the SPIRIT Acts 2:1-4 The unique foundational <i>joint</i> delegated authority/ missionaries of the Son		
4. “ Whoever accepts ”	the CHURCH- all those Acts 2:37-28:30 who believe the witness and beyond of the Apostles <i>and</i> the Spirit about the Son.	

Throughout church history, (reading the chart in reverse order from bottom to top, following the word order of the verse) beginning with Acts 2:37 to the present time, incorporation into the Body of Christ, the Church, only occurs through accepting and believing the joint testimony of the ‘external’ witness of the Apostolic message and the ‘internal’ testimony of the Holy Spirit, who “will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment” (John 16:7-11). As instituted by Christ in the Fourth Gospel, that joint testimony is the only access to Jesus provided by the Father and available to humanity. The Apostles and the Holy Spirit are the primary, joint, exclusive missionaries (sent ones) of the Son. But the content of their witness is not complete with their testimony to the incarnation, life, ministry, death, and resurrection only, but with their



eyewitness to the capstone event of the ascension and exaltation of Jesus as Lord and King. It is the *ascension* of Christ recorded in Acts 1:1-11 that completes the content of witness to which they must testify (**‘Act I’** – Acts 1:1-11). Once this opening event of Acts occurs, in accordance with his teaching in the Fourth Gospel, the exalted King establishes his two witnesses by completing the twelve⁶ (**‘Act II’** – Acts 1:12-26) and by sending the Holy Spirit⁷ (**‘Act III’** – Acts 2:1-4). These joint witnesses⁸ now have a ‘complete’ testimony to proclaim to the world, and that is precisely what occurs in **‘Act IV’** (2:5-41). Specifically and significantly, Luke records in Acts 2:14 that *Peter stands with the eleven* to testify to Jesus, which results in three thousand souls accepting and believing the apostolic testimony and consequently experience incorporation into the church—the fourth level in the chart above (2:41 “Those who *accepted* (points three and four in the above chart) his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.”). Examination of the content of Peter’s Pentecost message shows that he testifies to the life, ministry, death, resurrection, *and the ascension* of Jesus. As evidenced by what occurs at the conclusion of Peter’s message, one’s turning from unbelief (repentance) to belief in the ‘full gospel’ apostolic witness to Jesus makes one a Christian. The crowd hears the ‘external’ witness by the apostles, while the Holy Spirit is present as

⁶Either the Spirit of Christ is directing Peter’s mind, according to the preset *theology* taught in the Fourth Gospel, in reminding him of the Psalms and inspiring application, or Peter randomly or coincidentally recalls the passages and concludes on his own to instigate the replacement of Judas. I believe there is a hint in the text by Peter himself as to which option is more likely. His words in 1:16 are, “Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled which the Holy Spirit spoke long ago through the mouth of David....” The same Spirit directing David long ago is most likely directing Peter at that moment.

⁷John 15:26- “When the Counselor comes, *whom I will send to you from the Father*, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me.”

⁸“Luke-Acts is a work of art, organized from its smallest components to the whole in terms of the ‘law of duality.’ The meaning-function of this duality in the Lucan writings has its roots in the Israelite-Jewish principle that true testimony must be established by the mouths of at least two witnesses (Deut 19:15).” Charles H. Talbert, *Literary Patterns, Theological Themes, and the Genre of Luke-Acts* (Missoula, Montana: Scholars Press, 1974), 2.



the ‘internal’ witness, as promised in John 16:7-11. An explicit acknowledgment of their joint witness activity is stated in Acts 5:32, “We [the apostles] are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.” In summary, following the chart in the right hand column, beginning from bottom to top, three thousand people are incorporated into the **Church (Act IV)** through their trust in the joint testimony of the **Apostles (Act III)** and the **Holy Spirit (Act II)**, with the result that they place their faith in **Jesus** as “both Lord and Christ” (2:36), because of his life, ministry, death, resurrection, crowned with his ascension (**Act I**). And finally, to have knowledge of Jesus, who came to make known the **Father** (ἐξηγήγηρομαι John 1:18; 6:45; 14:9) is to have knowledge of the Father, resulting in eternal life (John 5:24). But how would people hear the words of Jesus and obtain eternal life except through the joint witnesses commissioned by him? It would appear, from Jesus’ teaching and from the narrative of Acts, it is impossible to become a Christian without both witnesses. If one only had the testimony of the Apostles, but not the active presence and authorized ministry of the Spirit, one could not biblically become a Christian, for it entails the convicting work of the Spirit (John 16:7-11) and the regeneration work of the Spirit by which one must be born again (John 3:5-8). Alternately, if one only had the active presence and authorized ministry of the Spirit, but no witness of the Apostles (New Testament), one could not become a Christian, for “faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ” (Rom 10:17).⁹

⁹It is interesting to me to possibly view Christian denominations through this lens. My father was Dutch Reformed in his up-bringing and my mother was Pentecostal in her roots. The former was more reticent about the gifts and manifestations of the Spirit, while the latter was weaker in the Word. Could there be a tendency for Christians and Christian groups to lean to one side or the other, while perhaps balance should be the goal—full of the Word and the Spirit? Yet I will argue later that there is a redemptive/historical priority to the Word, while acknowledging that both Word and Spirit are equally necessary to the birth, growth and nurture of a Christian.



3.1.2 Implications for the Structure of the Opening Discourses of Acts

There has been a significant amount of variation among scholars as to the determination of the verse boundaries of the opening discourses of Acts. The theology and consequent literary structures of the beginning discourses of Acts for which I have argued, have significant implications for this discussion (1:1-11; 1:12-26; 2:1-4; 2:5-41).

Steve Walton determines that “at least six different delimitations of Luke’s introduction have been proposed in twentieth-century scholarship namely, 1,1-5; 1,1-8; 1,1-11; 1,1-14; 1,1-26; 1,1-2-41; and 1,1-2,47.”¹⁰ Walton then proceeds to examine and evaluate the arguments of typical proponents of each view. Concerning the first division as being 1:1-5, Walton evaluates I. Howard Marshall’s argument as representative and concludes “Marshall’s argument is not conclusive.”¹¹ I concur. He then evaluates Haenchen’s arguments as representative of those who see 1:1-8 as the first discourse and rightly argues that “the separation of vv. 6-8 from vv. 9-11 seems artificial.”¹² He next examines L.T. Johnson’s argument as representative for 1:1-11 as the beginning of the end of the introduction to Acts and does not give objections.¹³ I will argue that 1:1-11 marks the limits of the first discourse in Acts, but not the end of the introduction. Walton proceeds to add that some scholars, as represented by Barrett, want to

¹⁰Steve Walton, “Where Does the Beginning of Acts End?” in *The Unity of Luke-Acts*, ed. J. Verheyden (Leuven, Belgium: Leuven Univ. Press, 1999), 447.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 448.

¹²*Ibid.*, 448.

¹³David W. Pao argues that 1:1-11 constitutes the prologue to Acts, *Acts and the Isaianic New Exodus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000), 91. Contra C. K. Barrett who argues that the whole of 1:1-14 is paralleled in Luke and the new section only starts in verse 15. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Acts of the Apostles* (ICC vol. 1; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994), 61. Pao responds correctly that Acts 1:11 closes the earthly work of Christ and 1:12 signifies the beginning of the apostolic history with the main character of Jesus’ ministry transferring from Jesus to the Apostles and the Holy Spirit as I have argued earlier.



include verses 12-14 and so see the introduction as 1:1-14. He then comments that James Dunn holds that 1:1-26 is the introduction. Pesch's assessment is a variant of Dunn's conclusion in that the two sub-parts of 1:1-11 and 1:12-26 together constitute a prologue to the book. I agree with Pesch on the subdivision of these two discourse segments, but disagree that they alone constitute the introduction to Acts. Lastly, Walton notes that "Longenecker sees 1:1-2:41 as setting the scene for the ministry of the church, a ministry which is outlined in the thematic paragraph 2:42-47 and then illustrated by a series of snapshots from 3:1 onward. After reviewing and evaluating these proposals for the "end of the beginning of Acts," Walton offers his own assessment:

A further step can be made for accepting Longenecker's view that 2:42-47 is a thematic statement. 1:1-2:47 can be seen as the introduction to the book. Looking back from the end of Acts 2: the departure of Jesus has happened after he has left instructions to his community (1,3-14); the symbolic number of twelve apostles has been restored, so that the church can be the true and renewed Israel (1,15-26; cf. Luke 22,30); the power of the Spirit has come upon the core of the renewed Israel (2,1-13) and the community of believers has become established (2,14-47). Now we are to see the initial mission of the church in Jerusalem (3,1-7,60) before movement into Judaea and Samaria (8,1).¹⁴

I have essentially (with only slight variation in verse divisions) come to the same conclusions as Longenecker and Walton, but from a different perspective. I suggest that reading the opening of Acts through the lens of the Fourth Gospel, from a canonical reader's perspective, gives broader canonical, theological support and insight as to why the structural verse division of Longenecker and Walton may be accurate. It is noteworthy that the Walton and Longenecker structure includes a number of proposed structures by those Walton reviewed. Several of the scholars correctly perceived individual parts, but

¹⁴Walton, *Where Does the Beginning*, 450.



not their integration within the whole. Other scholars discern the larger segments, but did not detect the theological integration of the parts. For example, Longenecker's large division of 1:1-2:41 as the introduction and 2:42-47 as a thematic or summary paragraph is well justified, but he fails to appreciate that there are parts to that whole that are highly theologically integrated and explicitly preset by Jesus in the Gospel of John. Reading – as a canonical reader – the Fourth Gospel as a 'preface' to the opening of Acts deepens the reader's understanding of the theological and historical significance of what is occurring in the opening narratives in Acts.¹⁵ Viewing the introductory discourses of Acts from this perspective may contribute to clarifying the scholarly discussions grappling with the question: "Where Does the Beginning of Acts End?"¹⁶

Walton concludes his essay by stating that Acts chapters one and two may be seen:

...as a bridge between the story of Jesus and the story of the church. Again and again we have seen Luke highlighting themes in Acts 1-2 which have appeared in the Gospel and which will be developed in Acts, almost always using vocabulary which is focused in Acts 1-2, but which can be mapped throughout the rest of Luke-Acts....It is as though a wide road from the Gospel narrows down to a small bridge (Acts 1-2) and then widens out on the other side into Acts....We may see these chapters in relation to the rest of Acts as like the overture to a longer piece of music.¹⁷

I argue that that narrow bridge Walton refers to is constructed from the theology introduced by Jesus in the Fourth Gospel, especially the pneumatology. The John-Acts viewpoint emphasizes themes and perspectives that are complimentary to those observed in studying Luke-Acts, but which offer an

¹⁵"Luke's view of Scripture spills over into the wider theme of God's superintendence of history, both in the past and in the time of Jesus and the early church." *Ibid.*, 454.

¹⁶Walton, *Where Does the Beginning*, 447.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 466.



important, distinctive canonical frame of reference in filling out meaning and understanding of what is occurring in the first two chapters of Acts. The John-Acts perspective highlights the explicit delegation of Jesus' mission and authority to the two foundational witnesses: the apostles and the Holy Spirit. From the John-Acts perspective, the King ascends to the throne (Acts 1:1-11), and the first two acts he accomplishes upon his exaltation are to put his two vice-regents in place—the Apostles reconstituted (Acts 1:12-26) and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1-4). From the John-Acts viewpoint of a canonical reader's perspective, the governance of the new Kingdom of restored Israel was explicitly preset by Jesus in the second half of the Fourth Gospel and comes into place in Acts 1-2. I also concur with Walton's second analogy that Acts 1-2 functions in relation to the remainder of Acts like an overture to a longer piece of music. But again, when seen canonically through the eyeglasses of the Gospel of John, the events narrated in Acts 1-2 are seen as the laying of the foundations by the exalted Christ, on which the 'new temple' will be built throughout the book of Acts. The remainder of Acts narrates the stories of the proclamation of the apostolic message as witnessed to by the Holy Spirit, beginning in Jerusalem, spreading to Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. According to what was established in the Fourth Gospel and actuated in Acts 1-2, the Church is only truly apostolic if it is preaching a gospel and demonstrating a lifestyle that is judged to be authentically of Christ as witnessed to by the Apostles and the Holy Spirit. These two are the permanent 'judges' instituted by Christ by which all proclamation and lifestyle are assessed to be of Christ or not of Christ.

Luke 22:28 ὑμεῖς δέ ἐστε οἱ διαμεμενηκότες μετ' ἐμοῦ ἐν τοῖς πειρασμοῖς μου· 29 **κἀγὼ διατίθεμαι ὑμῖν** καθὼς διέθετό μοι ὁ πατήρ μου βασιλείαν, 30 ἵνα ἔσθητε καὶ πίνητε ἐπὶ τῆς τραπέζης μου ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ μου, καὶ καθήσεσθε ἐπὶ θρόνων τὰς δώδεκα **φυλάς κρίνοντες τοῦ Ἰσραήλ.**

John 16:7 ἀλλ' ἐγὼ τὴν ἀλήθειαν λέγω ὑμῖν, συμφέρει ὑμῖν ἵνα ἐγὼ ἀπέλθω. ἐὰν γὰρ μὴ ἀπέλθω, ὁ **παράκλητος** οὐκ ἐλεύσεται



πρὸς ὑμᾶς· ἐὰν δὲ πορευθῶ, πέμψω αὐτὸν πρὸς ὑμᾶς. 8 καὶ ἐλθὼν ἐκεῖνος **ἐλέγξει** τὸν κόσμον περὶ ἁμαρτίας καὶ περὶ δικαιοσύνης καὶ περὶ **κρίσεως**: 9 περὶ ἁμαρτίας μὲν, ὅτι οὐ πιστεύουσιν εἰς ἐμέ· 10 περὶ δικαιοσύνης δέ, ὅτι πρὸς τὸν πατέρα ὑπάγω καὶ οὐκέτι θεωρεῖτέ με· 11 περὶ δὲ **κρίσεως**, ὅτι ὁ ἄρχων τοῦ κόσμου τούτου κέκριται.

Luke 22:28 You are those who have stood by me in my trials. 29 **And I confer on you** [apostles] **a kingdom**, just as my Father conferred one on me, 30 so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones, **judging the twelve tribes of Israel**.

John 16:7 But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, **the Counselor** will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. 8 When he comes, **he will convict the world** of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and **judgment**: 9 in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; 10 in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; 11 and in regard to **judgment**, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.

Figure 3.2

SUMMARY, SEAM AND TRANSITION PARAGRAPH- Acts 2:42-47	
THE FORMAL INCORPORATION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH—IN RESPONSE TO THE FOUNDATIONAL WITNESSES TO CHRIST - Acts 2:5-41	
THE APOSTLES- Acts 1:12-26	THE HOLY SPIRIT- Acts 2:1-4
CHRIST- THE ASCENDED / EXALTED KING- Acts 1:1-11	

Seen, canonically, in the light of the John-Acts connection, awareness may be heightened concerning the interconnection and foundational nature of the events and structure of the discourses of Acts 1-2. The faith in Christ of a believer is grounded in the ‘external,’ inscripturated testimony of the Apostles in union with the ‘internal’ witness and work of the Holy Spirit. Any community that adds to or



subtracts from the foundations laid in Acts and yet claims to be Christian, is a cult.

For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work (1 Cor 3:11-13).

Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone (Eph 2:19-20 NIV).

3.1.3 Summary

The title of this dissertation proposed to address the interrelationship between theology, history and literary artistry of Luke in Acts. Thus far I have attempted to demonstrate the interrelationships from the perspective of the canonical context of Acts—specifically the immediate preceding context of the Fourth Gospel. When viewed from this vantage point, I proposed that there is a theological basis for and unity to the historical narratives recorded in Acts 1-2, which also controls the literary artistry of Luke. I shall now turn to examine the text of Acts to demonstrate in detail that theology is driving both the history and literary aspects of the text.



3.2 ACT I: Acts 1:1-11 The Ascension, the Inaugurating Event of Jesus' Continued Ministry On Earth in His New Body, the Church

3.2.1 Preliminary Comments on the Literary Art of Luke and its Relationship to His Historiography and Theology

Basic to my understanding and use of the term 'art'¹⁸ and to defining the relationship of literary artistry to theology and history is an understanding of artistry "as connoting not simply craft or artistry, but also slant and perspective."¹⁹ Access to the theology and historical perspective of Luke's narrative discourses is through his literary artistry and these three elements are inseparably intertwined. Robert Alter agrees:

Rather than viewing the literary character of the Bible as one of several "purposes" or 'tendencies,' I would prefer to insist on a complete interfusion of literary art with theological, moral, or historiosophical vision, the fullest perception of the latter dependent on the fullest grasp of the former.²⁰

Charles Talbert is right when he says, "the author of Luke-Acts is not only a theologian, but that he is also 'a consummate literary artist' with a 'mind that is tuned to the aesthetic.'"²¹ Tremper Longmans says:

the point is that we do not have so-called objective, neutral, or unshaped reporting of events. (As many have pointed out, there is

¹⁸Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 135. "As I have come to understand it, 'art' in this context should not be understood only in the sense of 'skill', 'craft', 'technique', but in the sense of an art-form, like painting and music. Biblical narrative is a form of literary art."

¹⁹V. Philips Long, *The Art of Biblical History* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 12.

²⁰Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 19.

²¹C. Talbert, *Literary Patterns*, 1, quoting B. H. Streeter, *The Four Gospels* (London: Macmillan, 1924), 548, and Wayne G. Rollins, *The Gospels: Portraits of Christ* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963), 97.



no such thing as brute fact; an uninterpreted historical report is inconceivable.)...The biblical narrators are concerned not only to tell us facts but also to guide our perspective and responses to those events.²²

Intention and convention are cooperative, not competitive principles in literary discourse. Textual meaning is communicated in large part through the literary conventions an author uses in presenting the narrative.²³ Thus, I will be paying close attention to literary conventions as I examine the discourses of Acts. Discourse structure is one of the important literary conventions of narrative to which I will be particularly attentive.

3.2.2 Discourse Structure of Acts 1:1-11²⁴

The opening discourse of Acts is agenda setting for the book of Acts and for Church history.²⁵ In the narrative both the foundations for the New Testament people of God and the mission of the new covenant community are

²²Tremper Longman III, *Literary Approaches to Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1987), 57.

²³For example, an author decides to follow one set of conventional rules rather than another, i.e., the rules for history or the rules of fiction.

²⁴Darrell L. Bock holds 1:1-11 as the opening discourse of Acts. "On the other hand, 1:12 shows the response to the command to wait in Jerusalem and sets up the 'waiting' commanded by Jesus (note *tote*, then, in v. 12), moving directly into the replacement of Judas (with a mere *kai*, and, in v. 15). So I have chosen to view this waiting as the first act of the church gathered in Jerusalem rather than a part of the introduction (with Bavena 2003:62). Brian Rosner says Acts 1:1-11 functions 'as the beginning of the narrative of Acts.'" ("The Progress of the Word," in *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts*, ed. I. Howard Marshall and David Peterson [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998], 217); Cf. R.P.C. Hanson, *The Acts*, New Clarendon Bible (Oxford: Clarendon, 1967), 57f; F.S. Spencer, *Acts, Readings: A New Biblical Commentary* (Sheffield: Academic Press, 1987), 24-27; Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1990), 2 (n. 9), 9f.; L.T. Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Sacra Pagina 5 (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1992), 28; Mikeal C. Parsons, *The Departure of Jesus In Luke-Acts*, *Journal for the Study of the New Testament, Supplement Series* 21 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1987), 151ff.

²⁵Parsons, *Departure*, 173: "Just as the end of a narrative should function to exit the reader from the story world to the real world, so the beginning of a text should provide access from the world of the reader to the world of the text."



narrated in artistic form. In the chiasmic²⁶ structure²⁷ diagram that follows, it is significant that all four elements in the John 13:20 diagram appear in a mirrored or balanced form:²⁸ (1) the ascension, (2) the Apostles, (3) the Holy Spirit, (4) the

²⁶“Chiasmus (or chiasm) is a term based on the Greek letter *chi* (χ) which refers to an inverted parallelism or sequence of words or ideas in a phrase, sentence, or any larger literary unit.” Nils W. Lund, *Chiasmus in the New Testament* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1942), vii. In his recent work on *chiasmus* John Breck makes the following observation: “It has long been recognized that biblical writers made use of a rhetorical pattern known as ‘chiasmus,’ a literary form consisting of two or more parallel lines structured about a central theme. Only recently has it become apparent that chiasmus is one of the most frequently occurring patterns in both the Old and New Testaments, and that its detection and proper analysis open new and significant avenues toward understanding the author’s message.” *The Shape of Biblical Language: Chiasmus in the Scriptures and Beyond* (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1994), 1.

Talbert has pointed out that the surface structure of Acts 1:4-8 and 1:9-11 are formally parallel. Acts 1:4-8 contains (a) the risen Jesus’ word not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father (1:4-5); (b) the disciples’ query (1:6); (c) the risen Jesus’ response in two parts: a reproof (1:7), and a promise (1:8). Likewise, 1:9-11 is comprised of similar elements: (a) the risen Jesus’ action of being taken into heaven (1:9); (b) the disciples’ behavior (1:10a); (c) and the angelic response in two parts: a reproof (1:11a) and a promise (1:11b). C.H. Talbert, *Acts*, Knox Preaching Guides (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1984), 7. Talbert’s observations are drawn from a narrow text of the open discourse, most of which I think are tenuous. Authors such as D.W. Palmer see individual connections within the prologue of Acts, but to my knowledge no one has formulated the total number of mirrored connections suggested in the diagram. “Luke’s reference on which. . . ‘he was taken up’ [1:2]. . . points back to the Gospel of Luke; but also inevitably anticipates the description of the ascension in Acts 1.9.” (“The Literary Background of Acts 1.1-14,” *NTS* 33 [1987]: 430.) David Petersen acknowledges that “references to Jesus’ ascension in v. 2 and v. 11 form an inclusion or bracket around the intervening material, suggesting the introduction reaches its climax with the ascension narrative.” *The Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 100. This clearly appears to contradict his own previous decision that the first narrative segment ends with verse 14. His observation lends support to my designation of the outer limits of the opening discourse segment of Acts.

²⁷Talbert suggests that all of the possible patterns of Luke-Acts have not necessarily been brought to light. “First in addition to the confirmation of some of the insights of past research, there has been an accumulation of evidence for more formal patterns expressive of the principle of balance in the various parts of the Lucan writings.” C. Talbert. *Literary Patterns*, 2.

²⁸Talbert laments that the “study of Lucan theology today goes on, for the most part, divorced from a consideration of the formal patterns expressive of the principle of balance which control large segments of the Lucan writings.” He goes on to state that “the conquest of subjectivity in the employment of the redaction critical method demands an awareness of the *smaller patterns* and the larger architectonic designs which govern an author’s arrangement of his material.” C. Talbert, *Literary Patterns*, 3f. [Italics mine]. Kenneth R. Wolfe also perceives the tendency of Luke to incorporate mirror structures: “Another structural pattern found in Luke-Acts



Kingdom of God/Israel. The fourth element in the chart above is labeled ‘the Church.’ A fifth element is added to these four to form a concentric ABCDE...E’D’C’B’A’ structure.²⁹ The fifth surrounding element refers to the first and second advents of Christ. I suggest that the theology driving Luke’s content and ‘artistic’ structuring of verses 1-11 reflects Jesus’ teaching and promises prior to his death as recorded in the Fourth Gospel and the Synoptic Gospels.³⁰

***See Figure 3.3 on the next page.**

consists of the placing of two sections with similar or contrasting contents and even sequences over against one another.” (“The Chiastic Structure of Luke-Acts and Some Implications for Worship”, *Southwestern Journal of Theology*, 22 Spr [1980]: 60.)

²⁹David G. Peterson notes that “techniques such as simple juxtaposition of events, analogical patterning of events, and interplay between narration and dialogue are used to give meaning and significance to the developing narrative, following the practices of classical writers....A reader with some rhetorical appreciation would be alert to the significance of many of the techniques highlighted above.” *The Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 22.

³⁰Here my presuppositions concerning biblical theology and history are determinative. I take into account the divine authorship of the Bible. I then approach Scripture in terms of its parts rather than just viewing it as a whole, as I want to account for progressive revelation on the terms that the Bible itself determines. In this case the progression is from Jesus’ teaching and promises in the Gospels to fulfillment in Acts.



Figure 3.3

1 In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach

A Summary of the First Coming of Christ

2 until the day **he was taken up to heaven,**

B The Ascension

after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. 3 After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days

C The Apostles and the Holy Spirit

and spoke about **the kingdom of God.**

D The Kingdom of God

4 On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about.

E The Holy Spirit

5 For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

E' The Holy Spirit

6 So when they met together, they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore **the kingdom to Israel?**" 7 He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority.

D' The Kingdom to Israel?

8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

C' The Apostles and the Holy Spirit

9 After he said this, **he was taken up before their very eyes,** and a cloud hid him from their sight. 10 They were looking intently up **into the sky as he was going,** when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. 11 "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who **has been taken from you into heaven,**

B' The Ascension

will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven."

A' The Second Coming of Christ

In the chiasmic diagram above the term 'church' does not appear as it does in the previous diagram of John 13:20 (fig. 3.1). I suggest that this is



because it has not formally come into existence.³¹ Therefore, the two terms in reference to which it must eventually be defined are included: ‘the Kingdom of God’ and ‘the kingdom to Israel.’ At the opening of Acts it is an open question as to how the church is to be understood in terms of the past (Israel) and the future (the eschatological Kingdom of God).³² At the opening of Acts the Church is in the process of becoming the ‘this age’ manifestation of the Kingdom of God, and is in the process of becoming Israel restored or reconstituted. The first occurrence of the term *ekklēsia* occurs in 5:1, and then twenty-two more times interspersed throughout the remainder of Acts.

³¹Perhaps a useful analogy is that the ‘church’ is conceived with the birth, life, ministry, death and resurrection, but comes to birth with the ascension, the ‘filling up’ of the twelve and the sending of the Spirit. Analogical terms from the New Testament are ‘cornerstone’ for Christ (Eph 2:19; 1 Pet 2:6) and ‘foundations’ for the twelve apostles (Rev 21:14), upon which the church is built. It may be argued that the formal placement of that cornerstone from which the whole building is built is finalized with the completion of Jesus’ incarnate mission at the ascension in his exaltation. If this be true, then the first four ‘acts’ in Acts, as described earlier, may be considered together as the ‘birth’ of the Church, the new covenant people of God.

³²The proclamation of the arrival of ‘the kingdom of God,’ the inauguration of the new order ushered in by the Christ event, lay at the very center of Jesus’ preaching and was frequently spoken of in his conversation (i.e., Matt 4:23; 10:7; Mark 1:15; Luke 4:43; 10:9). References to the kingdom of God outside the Synoptic Gospels are significantly less frequent (only three times in the Fourth Gospel; six times in Acts; thirteen times in the Pauline Epistles). Apart from that, the kingdom is mentioned five times in Revelation, twice in Hebrews, and once each in James, 1 Peter, and 2 Peter. Inversely, the term ‘church’ is rare in the Gospels, but becomes the dominant way of referring to the people of God post-ascension. Beginning in Acts, but rooted in the Gospels, the Church becomes the manifestation in this world of the Kingdom of God ‘in this present’ age, until the second advent, when as Paul states, God makes “known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ” (Eph 1:9,f). The eschatological Kingdom of God includes the Church, but encompasses “*all things in heaven and on earth.*” This perhaps explains that on occasion ‘Kingdom of God’ is still infrequently used outside the Gospels, but that the Church dominates proclamation and teaching post-Acts because it is the present manifestation of the Kingdom of God. It is with this eschatological understanding of the Kingdom of God that Christian writers such as Arthur Glasser and others should be understood, “A right understanding of mission focuses on the kingdom of God—the Good News Jesus announced displayed to his generation.” Arthur Glasser and Donald McGavran, *Contemporary Theologies of Mission* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983), 31. Johannes Verkuyl says, “Missiology is more and more coming to see the kingdom of God as the hub around which all mission work revolves. One can almost speak of a consensus developing on this point.” *Contemporary Missiology: An Introduction*, trans. Dale Cooper (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1978), 203.



The three elements of Ascension,³³ Apostles and Holy Spirit from the Gospel of John also dominate the chiasmic structure of Acts 1:1-11. The literary-‘aesthetic’ question is: “Why structure this opening discourse in a chiasm?” John Breck suggests the answer in principle:

“It is axiomatic that the form or structure of a given literary work serves as an important vehicle for its content...Rediscovery of chiasmus, one of the most important rhetorical forms in biblical literature is already having a major impact on the way we read Scripture. Lund, Ellis, Welch and a host of other scholars have detected chiasmic patterns in small, isolated units as well as in whole compositions. *They have rightly sensed the intimate connection that exists between rhetorical form and thematic content, between the structure of a literary passage and its theological meaning.*³⁴

With Breck’s last statement in mind, I suggest that there is a theo-logic to the aesthetic arrangement of the chiasm. Moving from the outer elements ‘A’ and ‘A’ to the center elements ‘E’ and ‘E’ the following logic is suggested. Between the first (‘A’) and second (‘A’) coming, the ascended, enthroned King (‘B’ and ‘B’) has designated two vice regents, the Apostles and the Holy Spirit (‘C’ and ‘C’) through whom he will continue his ministry and extend the Kingdom (‘D’ and ‘D’), but the critical central element is the key—the need for the disciples to be filled with the Holy Spirit (‘E’ and ‘E’). Concerning the outer elements encompassing the whole, Ben Witherington states, “This opening section shows that Luke conceives of the story of the church within an eschatological framework—between the ascension and the parousia, with Jesus going and

³³ David Peterson notes the parallelism of ‘ascension,’ and thus recognizes at least one element of the chiasm: “References to Jesus’ ascension in v. 2 and v. 11 form an inclusion or bracket around the intervening material, suggesting that the introduction reaches its climax with the ascension narrative.” *The Acts*, 100.

³⁴Breck, *The Shape of Biblical Language*, 16. [Italics mine]



coming again in similar manner.”³⁵ The plot that will begin to unfold in Acts, between the end of Jesus’ ministry in the flesh at the ascension and the parousia, is that the Kingdom of God in the present age form of reconstituted Israel will advance through Spirit-empowered witnesses. The apostolic testimony to Jesus is confirmed to hearts of men by the witness of the Spirit. The event that launches this all-encompassing plot inaugurated in Acts and continuing throughout Church history is the ascension of Christ. The newly enthroned King continues to work in history through his servants to bring about his kingdom’s universal extension in order to bring all things on earth and in heaven under his feet (Rom 16:20; 1 Cor 15:25, 27; Eph 1:22; Heb 2:7f; Rev 12:1).

While I think an argument may be made that the parallelism of elements A-A’, B-B’, D-D’, and E-E’ is conceptually straightforward, the parallelism of C-C’ appears on the surface to not be formally parallel. In the first half of the parallelism (‘C’) the relationship of the Holy Spirit is with Jesus, and not the Holy Spirit with the Apostles. But I think that a deeper connection and emphasis is being made here. At first glance it seems odd that Luke does not record any of the forty days teaching of Jesus on the Kingdom of God during this interim period between the resurrection and ascension. Luke’s writing in the Gospel records all that Jesus began to do and teach about the kingdom of God pre-resurrection. In other words, Luke does not project back into his first work teachings about the kingdom of God that actually were taught by Jesus during this forty days period, but making it appear in the Gospel that that teaching was done pre-cross, pre-resurrection. One would have thought it would have been important to write down the content of the forty day’s teaching.³⁶ But all Luke

³⁵Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 114.

³⁶I suppose one could argue that Jesus may have essentially repeated and/or restated teaching he had done before, so it was unnecessary to record it. Even if this were the case, it does not affect the point being made here about the possible rhetorical intention in the parallelism.



does is give a summary statement. For the purpose of the theology that drives his literary choices and structure in this opening narrative discourse, it appears his exclusive interest was to emphasize the *mode* of Jesus' teaching. Luke deliberately highlights that *Jesus taught them through the Holy Spirit* (1:2). I believe Luke is emphasizing that even God in the flesh did not minister without the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. The rhetorical effect of Luke's intentional noting of this in the parallelism to 1:8 (**C—C'**) is to heighten the need for the disciples to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Jesus was filled and empowered by the Spirit from the beginning of his public ministry beginning with his baptism (John 1:32) until he was taken up. If Jesus needed the empowerment of the Spirit to accomplish and complete his witness to the Father, how much more would his disciples need the Holy Spirit's empowerment to accomplish and complete their witness to Jesus, even in some cases, unto death.

3.2.3 The Center of the Chiasm

Concerning the importance of the central element of a chiasm Breck writes:

*For authentic chiasmus produces balanced statements, in direct, inverted or antithetical parallelism, constructed symmetrically about a central idea. The uniqueness of chiasmus, as distinct from other forms of parallelism, lies in its focus upon a pivotal theme, about which the other propositions of the literary unit are developed. It therefore presupposes a center, a "crossing point. The image of concentric circles, rather than that of parallel lines illustrates this characteristic most clearly. For in most cases of biblical chiasmus, as we shall see further on, the parallel themes focus upon and derive their meaning from the center...The essential characteristic of genuine chiasmus remains the pivot about which the whole is centered. Chiasmus then may best be described by the expression concentric parallelism."*³⁷ [Italics his]

³⁷ Breck, John, *The Shape of Biblical Language: Chiasmus in the Scriptures and Beyond*. Crestwood (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1994), 32.



I suggest that canonical biblical theology strongly supports what Luke has stressed as the focal point of the chiasm: the critical need for the apostles to “wait for the gift the Father promised” (**E**); to “be baptized with the Holy Spirit” (**E'**) in order to witness and advance the Kingdom of God (**D**) or to bring about the restoration of the Kingdom to Israel (**D'**). The New Testament indicates that the lack of the work of the Spirit in circumcising the heart (Rom 2:29) or being born again by the Spirit (John 3:5f); and the inaccessibility to the baptism of the Holy Spirit to the Old Covenant people of God (Joel 2:28ff) are the central reasons that the history narrated in the OT records the miserable failure of Israel. And that failure was two-fold: (1) *vertical*—unfaithfulness to Yahweh (Jer 3:7,10; Ezek 39:23; Hos 4:12)—being uncircumcised in heart (Jer 9:26); and (2) *horizontal*—failing to fulfill their mission (Gen 12:3)- “and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you”; (Isa 42:6)- “I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness.”

Central to the OT promises of restoration of Israel in the coming new age is the two-fold promise of Yahweh:

(1) to put his Spirit in his people to change the heart.

I will give you a new heart **and put a new spirit in you** [וְנָתַתִּי לָכֶם] וְנָתַתִּי לָכֶם וְנָתַתִּי לָכֶם [לֵב הַדָּשׁ וְרוּחַ]...And **I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws** [וְאֶתֵּרוּחִי אֶתְּנֶה בְּכֶם וְעָשִׂיתֶם אֶת אֲשֶׁר־בְּחַקִּי תִלְכוּ וּמִשְׁפָּטַי תִּשְׁמְרוּ וְעָשִׂיתֶם]³⁸. (Ezek 36:24-28 NIV).

The promise in Ezekiel links the gift of putting the Spirit in his new covenant people as the power that will enable them “to follow my decrees” and “keep my laws,” radically distinguishing them from the old covenant people who walked in

³⁸*Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia : With Werkgroep Informatica, Vrije Universiteit Morphology; Bible. O.T. Hebrew. Werkgroep Informatica, Vrije Universiteit. 2006; 2006 (Eze 36:27). Logos Bible Software.*



disobedience and were unable through unaided, self-generated will power to free themselves from the bondage of their will to idolatry;³⁹

and (2) to pour out His Spirit upon all flesh.

The fortress will be abandoned,
the noisy city deserted;
...**till the Spirit is poured upon us from on high** (Isa 32:14-15 NIV)

[⁴⁰עַד־יֵעָרָה עָלֵינוּ רוּחַ מְמַרְוֹם] (BHS/WIVU)

For I will pour water on the thirsty land,
and streams on the dry ground;
I will pour out my Spirit on your offspring,
and my blessing on your descendants. Isa 44:3 NIV

[כִּי אֶצְקֶנְהֶם עַל־צִמָּא וְנִזְלִים עַל־יְבֹשֶׁה אֶצְקֶנּוּ רוּחִי עַל־דַּרְעֵךְ⁴¹] (BHS/WIVU)

³⁹The prohibition of idolatry in the First Commandment shows us the chief sin and the source of every other sin against God. It is the reason for the curse of the human race and God’s displeasure over it. Idolatry is identified by Luther as the (original) sin of Eve. Luther writes: “The source of all sin truly is unbelief and doubt and abandonment of the Word. Because the world is full of these, it remains in idolatry, denies the truth of God, and invents a new god. A monk is an idolater. He imagines that if he lives according to the rule of Francis or of Dominic, this is the way to the kingdom of God. But this is equivalent to inventing a new god and becoming an idolater, because the true God declares that the way to the kingdom of heaven is by believing in Christ. Therefore when faith has been lost, there follows unbelief and idolatry, which transfer the glory of God to works. Thus the Anabaptists, the Sacramentarians, and the papists are all idolaters—not because they worship stones and pieces of wood, but because they give up the Word and worship their own thoughts. And so this passage helps us to learn that this temptation of the devil was the beginning of original sin, when he led Eve away from the Word of God to idolatry, contrary to the First, the Second, and the Third Commandments. Here properly belong these words: “Did God actually command you?” This is an instance of the awful boldness of the devil, as he invents a new god and denies the former true and eternal God with such unconcern and assurance. It is as if he were to say: “Surely you are silly if you believe that God has given such a command, for it is not God’s nature to be so deeply concerned whether you eat or not. Inasmuch as it is the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, how can such ill will come upon Him that He does not want you to be wise?” Martin Luther, *Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 1-5*, Luther’s works, vol. 1, J.J. Pelikan, H.C. Oswald & H.T. Lehmann, eds. (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House: 1999, c1958), 149. Interestingly, the growth of the Kingdom of God in Acts is described in terms of the advancement of the Word of God (6:7; 12:24; 19:20).

⁴⁰Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia.

⁴¹Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia.



of God. From this perspective the cross is not an end in itself, but a means to an end. The incarnation, life, ministry, cross, resurrection and ascension of Christ made it possible for the Spirit of God to indwell repentant and believing humans, and to empower them to accomplish the mission of Israel to the whole world. As Paul says, it is the indwelling of the Spirit that is the key to resurrection life: “And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead *is living* in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies *through his Spirit, who lives in you*” (Rom 8:11). It is the work of the Spirit in the heart that distinguishes the new, reconstituted Kingdom of Israel from the Old Kingdom of Israel: “No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is *circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit*, not by the written code. Such a man’s praise is not from men, but from God” (Rom 2:29).

But the work of Christ also makes possible the empowerment of believers for witness by Spirit baptism. This is Luke’s primary concern at the opening of Acts. Ben Witherington notes this, stating that:

the receiving power from on high has chiefly to do with witnessing. Luke does not really comment on its soteriological significance, nor is he all that interested in its ecclesiological significance, if by that one is referring to the church offices. For example, the reception of the Spirit by the Samaritans or Cornelius did not make them apostles, but it did make them witnesses, and this book is about witnesses, whether apostles or not.⁴⁵

According to verse 3, Jesus instructs his disciples for forty days about the Kingdom of God, “a phrase which elsewhere sums up the theme of his earthly ministry (Lk. 4:43).”⁴⁶ This begs the questions: How will the message of the Kingdom continue when the King departs this world? Who will instruct about the King and the Kingdom in Jesus’ absence? Witherington comments that “this

⁴⁵Witherington, *The Acts*, 112, n. 30.

⁴⁶I. Howard Marshall, *Acts* (Inter-Varsity Press, 1980), 57.



account (vs. 1-11) is about the passing on of the power and authority to Jesus' witnesses so that they might continue the kingdom work he had begun."⁴⁷ I agree completely with Witherington and argued in chapter two that, from a canonical reader's perspective, Jesus was concerned about this very issue and made arrangements beforehand in the Fourth Gospel for this very time. Verses 4-8 indicate that Jesus' singular preoccupation, as his last words in Acts before his departure indicate, is his concern for the disciples to be empowered by the Spirit in order to fulfill the mission to proclaim the good news of the Kingdom to the ends of the earth. Luke highlights in his programmatic text⁴⁸ Acts 1:8- "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." "It is no exaggeration to say that 'each successive stage of the outreach of the gospel to the wider world receives confirmation by the Spirit' (see e.g. 1:8; 2:3, 38; 5:32; 6:1-3; 7:51; 8:16-17; 10:45; 11:12,15-16; 15:8; 11:24; 13:1-2)."⁴⁹ To trace the activity of the Spirit in Acts is to observe the progress of the word. Howard Kee's description of the Spirit as "God's instrument in the present age" is

⁴⁷Witherington, *The Acts*, 112. This is the very issue with which I began at the opening of chapter two: "The key problem in religious authority is to find the central principle of authority and the pattern through which it expresses itself concretely and practically. Most treaties on religious authority assert that God is the final authority in religion, but this bare assertion does not make its way. Unless the assertion is expressed in a more concrete fashion it becomes mere platitude. A principle of religious authority, along with its pattern designed for its practical and concrete expression and execution, should incorporate all the necessary elements associated with such a complex notion as religious authority." Bernard Ramm, *The Pattern of Religious Authority* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 18.

⁴⁸"We may agree with the consensus of these scholars that Luke has a worldwide mission which will include Gentiles in mind, and that Acts 1,8 should therefore be understood as setting an agenda which the remainder of the book addresses..." Steve Walton, "Where Does the Beginning of Acts End?" in *The Unity of Luke-Acts*, ed. J. Verheyden (Leuven, Belgium: Leuven University Press, 1999), 463.

⁴⁹Brian Rosner, "The Progress of the Word," in *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts* (ed. I. Howard Marshall and David Peterson: Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 224f.



on the mark.⁵⁰ All of Luke's most important human characters who advance the mission to witness to the ends of the earth in Acts are described as "men of the Spirit." Each of them is described as "filled with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 4:8; 5:32; 6:3; 7:55; 11:24; 13:9). They are described as "bold" in their witness (4:13; 13:46; 28:31). The content of their witness is the proclamation of "Good News" (5:42; 8:4, 12, 25, 40; 11:20; 13:32; 14:7; 15:35), or "the Word of God" (4:29; 8:14; 13:5). They continue the prophetic role of Jesus, filled and empowered by the Spirit as he was. The immediate and broader contexts of Acts indicate that Luke's primary concern is with the horizontal aspect of the ministry of the Holy Spirit—the empowerment for witness in order for the Gospel to be spread to the ends of the earth.

3.2.4 History, Theology, and Literary Artistry in Acts 1:1-26

James D.G. Dunn makes the following observations about the Prologue of Acts:

The problem is that the theological shaping of the account is so extensive that we cannot be sure just how much is rooted in sound historical memory of any participants. On the whole, in Acts we can be confident that at least most of the basic narrative data is derived from good eyewitness recollection. But here it would appear that the theological emphases have been given top priority—precisely in order to drive home several points relating to the theological character of the new movement's beginnings. In which case, since Luke has been the less concerned with brute facts, the less able are we to say what they were.⁵¹

For Dunn the theology has clearly trumped historiography in the prologue. At the end of the same section he states, "All that being said, however,

⁵⁰Howard Clark Kee, *Good News* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990), 30.

⁵¹James D.G. Dunn, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Valley Forge, Penn.: Trinity Press International, 1996), 3. Dunn believes the Prologue consists of the first chapter (1:1-26).



we can be confident of the basic historical data utilized by Luke.”⁵² He then proceeds to say that our confidence in the accuracy of the history in the Prologue is limited to three things: (1) that the story of Acts did begin in Jerusalem; (2) that there was a period of time between the resurrection and ascension that Jesus did appear to groups and individuals; (3) Judas did die.⁵³ But Dunn offers no explanation of why we can even be confident in the accuracy (truth value) of Luke’s record of these events. Dunn has serious doubts about the historical reliability of the prologue, especially the narrative regarding the replacement of Judas. He opines, “The very oddity of what is narrated in Acts 1:23-26 may even indicate that these were actions of bewildered men uncertain what to do, waiting for something to happen, and taking the only action they could in the meantime.”⁵⁴ Dunn contradicts himself. Then how is it that Luke comes to record such an event? Dunn’s answer is that historiography is trumped by theology: “...it was a matter of theological principle for the first Christians to be able to speak of an unbroken group of ‘the twelve’ as a fundamental factor in Christian beginnings (1 Cor 15:5; Rev 21:14).”⁵⁵ Dunn clearly concludes that the early church needed to invent this story in order to have a nice, tidy theology--“to be able to speak of an unbroken group of ‘the twelve.’”⁵⁶ Here we arrive at the heart issue of my thesis: the interrelationship of theology, history and literary artistry. I shall return

⁵²Ibid., 4.

⁵³Ibid., 4f.

⁵⁴Ibid. 5.

⁵⁵Ibid., 4f.

⁵⁶Vanhooser describes this hermeneutic: “The neo-pragmatist is, hermeneutically speaking, pro-choice. Neither the author nor even the notion of truth has any authority for the user. Truth is demoted from its prior status as timeless and absolute to ‘what is good for us to believe here and now’ or ‘what works for me in this situation.’” *Is There Meaning*, 5.



to engage Dunn's comments shortly. Prior to that, I will address the two issues of 'truth claim' and 'truth value.'⁵⁷

3.2.4.1 'Truth Claim' and Luke's Historiography

When Luke states his intention to write his own "orderly account," after having "carefully investigated everything from the beginning" he explicitly declares his intention to communicate objective historical facts in his writings.⁵⁸ I. Howard Marshall notes that "It is probable that the average reader approaches the Acts of the Apostles as *the history book of the early church*."⁵⁹ Terrance Callan agrees that "The stated purpose of Luke-Acts seems to mark it as a history...written to provide a true account of something."⁶⁰ David Aune's assessment is that "Luke introduces the careers of *both* John and Jesus with similar devices because his intentions are historical rather than biographical."⁶¹ In the conclusion of his examination of Acts 1:1-2 Ben Witherington concurs with these assessments. He believes Luke's intent was to thoroughly investigate and

⁵⁷By 'truth claim' I mean what a literary work intends to do (illocutionary act); by 'truth value' I mean whether the truth claim succeeds. The truth claim, or genre descriptor, historiography, implies a basic claim to referentiality. On the 'macro-genre' level one may hold to the veracity of the Bible in a sweeping sense, but one's commitment to the truth value of the Bible does not automatically settle the question of the truth claim(s) of any given sub-genre. Because the Bible contains a compendium of works of diverse literary genres, the truth claim(s) of any particular text may be discovered only as each text is read on its own terms, with due recognition of its genre and due attention to its content and wider and narrower contexts.

⁵⁸On the diversity of the Bible's truth claims, see Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "The Semantics of Biblical Literature: Truth and Scripture's Diverse Literary Form," in *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon*, ed. Carson and Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995), 49-104.

⁵⁹Marshall, *Acts*, 17.

⁶⁰Terrance Callan, "The Preface of Luke-Acts and Historiography," *New Testament Studies* 31 (1985), 580. See also Collin Hemer, *Book of Acts in its First Century Setting*. Vol. 4 *The Book of Acts in Its Palestinian Setting* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 85; Mark Allan Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism?* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1990), 3.

⁶¹David Edward Aune, *The New Testament in Its Literary Environment* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1987), 133.



record the events and utterances in his account that had, and would continue to, significantly impact history.⁶² One may choose to deny the truth-value of all or part of Luke's account as Dunn does, but one is not free to read Luke as if no historical truth claim has been made.

3.2.4.2 'Truth Value' and Luke's Historiography

Philips Long contends that there are two tests that should be applied to whatever "historical truth claims the biblical witness is making."⁶³ The first is to assess whether that testimony is 'internally consistent' (coherence). The second is what he refers to as 'correspondence theory'—whether the historical truth claims of Scripture correspond to external reality and sources (understanding truth to be defined as 'that which accords with reality').

I will now explore the two dominant theories of truth in relation to the historical method: the coherence and correspondence theories. An extended description of the two theories advocated by Long will form the basis of my further response to Dunn, et. al. He concludes from his survey of the literature on the theories the following general understandings and uses of the terms:

(1) Correspondence theory or 'common sense' theory refers to the way statements about the 'facts' are related to the 'way things are,' i.e., reality. If there is found to be no incongruences between the statement and reality, the statement is viewed to be true or accurate.

(2) Coherence theory refers to the relationship that the statements have to each other. Statements that are logically coherent or consistent with each other are deemed to be true.

⁶²Witherington, *The Acts*, 11,13.

⁶³V. Philips Long, *The Art of Biblical History* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 185. [My brackets].



He argues that the coherency theory must be coupled with the correspondence theory, as it is potentially vulnerable to error when exercised alone when considering historical truth. He says the best way to view the synthesis is to separate the *theory* of truth from the *criterion* of truth. The correspondence theory functions well as a *theory* of historical truth, but not as a *test* of truth, because the past is inaccessible and unrepeatable. On the other hand, the coherence theory is inadequate as a *theory*, but has a useful function as a *criterion* of truth if it is understood as assessing whether a proposition is true if it fits with everything else we know. Applied to any proposed historical reconstructions would mean that they would be held to be accurate or true if: (1) they were judged to not be in conflict with all that we might know about a subject [coherence or internal and external consistency] and (2) that there is no ontological dissonance [how a representational painting corresponds to its subject].⁶⁴

3.2.4.2.1 The Correspondence Theory and Luke's Historiography

Lightfoot once stated: "The Acts of the Apostles in the multiplicity and variety of its details probably affords greater means of testing its general character for truth than any other ancient narrative in existence: and in my opinion it satisfies the tests fully."⁶⁵ At the turn of the century, the extensive research of William Ramsay provided further means of checking the book's

⁶⁴Long, *The Art*, 191-93.

⁶⁵J.B. Lightfoot, *Saint Paul's Epistle to the Galatians: A Revised Text and Introduction, Notes and Dissertations* (London: MacMillan and Co., 1982), 347. In his article on Acts for William Smith's *A Dictionary of the Bible*, 3 vols. (London: John Murray, 1893), 1:25-43, especially 35-37, Lightfoot illustrated this point. It is, therefore, perplexing that C. K. Barrett, "Quomodo Historia Conscribenda," *NTS* 28 (1982): 313, views Lightfoot as simply assuming the credibility of Acts and so failing to indicate the "criteria by which these qualities may be assessed." In a letter dated January 19, 1985, Professor Barrett points out that the qualities to which he refers "are not credibility but 'simplicity, straightforwardness, and naturalness', on which Lightfoot's argument for credibility rests." But if thoroughly read, Lightfoot did provide evidence of other sorts to support his confidence in Acts.



veracity at numerous points.⁶⁶ It is noteworthy that Ernst Haenchen included a thirty-six-page survey of research during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and there is not one reference to Ramsay, not even in the footnotes.⁶⁷ Olmstead observed that to the “professional student of the ancient world, it seems unbelievable that [Ramsay’s books] met almost universally hostile reception from contemporary [New Testament] critics.”⁶⁸ This was due to the history of religions approach, with its anti-supernaturalistic presuppositions. More recently, Bruce notes in reference to whether Luke’s account corresponds to contemporary history that his knowledge of historical details such as the titles of dignitaries in the various levels of the Roman Empire proves accurate.⁶⁹ Bruce argues that virtually everything that the book asserts, where it *can* be verified, checks out; yet most contemporary scholars maintain that the book is not to be trusted at those points where it *cannot* be falsified (e.g., Dunn, et. al.)!⁷⁰ This would not be so egregious if a *serious* attempt were made to refute the significant body of

⁶⁶William M. Ramsay, *The Bearing of Recent Discovery on the Trustworthiness of the New Testament* (1915: reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), esp. 3-89. Cf. also the summary in W. Ward Gasque, *A History of the Criticism of the Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 136-38.

⁶⁷Ernst Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles*, trans. Bernard Noble and Gerald Shinn (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1971). Similarly, the standard work by Werner Georg Kümmel, *Introduction to the New Testament*, rev. ed. (London: SCM, 1975), includes four pages (151-54) of bibliography on Acts, but Ramsay’s name is missing.

⁶⁸A.T. Olmstead, “History, Ancient World, and the Bible,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 2 (1943): 23.

⁶⁹F.F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, 17.

⁷⁰Other scholars are even more skeptical. E.A. Clark exudes a postmodern worldview in assessing Luke’s historiography: “The critic’s task, then, is to show how ‘seemingly politically innocent objects, forms of subjectivity, actions, and events’ are the effects of power and authority, that is, the task to denaturalize and rehistoricize what ideology has produced.” *History, Theory, Text: Historians and the Linguistic Turn*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 176. Scott Shauf defines Luke’s historiography as “imaginative narration,” and avoids the historicity issue altogether, if for no other reason, his sources would already have been socially influenced. *Theology as History, History as Theology: Paul in Ephesus in Acts 19* (Beihfte zur Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft 133; Berlin: de Gruyter), 66-75.



evidence that has addressed the issue. Colin Hemer remarks that “opinion about the book of Acts has become polarized, and often between those who differ profoundly on the matter of historicity, but this aspect of their disagreement is often implicit rather than explicit.”⁷¹ Tannehill exemplifies the implicit approach in his second volume on Luke-Acts: “The vital issue in the study of Acts is not whether it is historically accurate but whether it promotes values worthy of respect and presents models worthy of imitation.”⁷² He then immediately proceeds to argue that access to those values is through Luke’s narrative rhetoric, so that in one sentence the issue of historicity is broached, not to be engaged again.⁷³

Hemer made an extensive study of Luke’s historiography. He thoroughly explored literary works, inscriptions, other archaeological evidence, geographical details and chronology contemporaneous to Luke’s writing. He compared his research results with Luke’s writing and perceived “the existence of a distinctive and rigorous theory of historiography.”⁷⁴ Marguerat’s approach is more nuanced. He proposes that there are three strands of historiography permeating Luke’s narrative: ‘documentary’ history (factual), ‘explicative’ history (evaluative) and ‘poetic’ history (theological). Marguerat’s analysis of the three aspects has merit, but he has Luke using one or the other indiscriminately: that

⁷¹Colin Hemer, *The Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History*, ed. C. Gempf, *WUNT* 49 (Tübingen: Mohr; reprinted Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990): 1.

⁷²Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation*. Vol. 2: *The Acts of the Apostles* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 3.

⁷³No footnote is offered for reference to any previous discussion by himself or others concerning the issue of historicity.

⁷⁴*Ibid.*, 100.



one appears at one point in Acts and then another aspect at another time.⁷⁵ The narratives where Luke portrays God's activity are "poetic," and not to be confused with the other two categories. Those narratives are a type of fictive act—a construct of Luke. Marguerat says that "historiography should not be regarded as descriptive, but rather (re) constructive." Robert Altar's view is more satisfactory. He insists that "Rather than viewing the literary character of the bible as one of several 'purposes' or 'tendencies' (*megamot* in the original), I would prefer to insist on a complete interfusion of literary art with theological, moral, or historiosophical vision, the fullest perception of the latter dependent on the fullest grasp of the former."⁷⁶

3.2.4.2.2 The Coherence Theory and Luke's Historiography

A significant amount of scholarly energy has been devoted to the correspondence criterion of assessing the historiography of Luke. Outside the Luke-Acts parameters of exploration, lesser energy has been directed to the coherence criterion in assessing Luke's historiography. What I have attempted to do in chapter two, and in the first half of chapter three—from a canonical reader's perspective—is to demonstrate that the eye and ear-witness testimony of John in the Fourth Gospel tightly *coheres* with what Luke records in Luke-Acts when he says that "I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning" (Luke 1:3). Under the criterion of coherence, that reliable testimony must be consistent with itself and with other reliable witnesses or evidence.⁷⁷ Based on my study, my confidence in the truth value of the theological history, artfully

⁷⁵Daniel Marguerat, *The First Christian Historian: Writing the 'Acts of the Apostles.'* trans. K. McKinney, G.J. Laughery, and R. Bauckham, Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series 121 (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2002), 5-7.

⁷⁶Altar, *The Art*, 135.

⁷⁷In this case it must be consistent with the eyewitness testimony of the Apostle John.



communicated by Luke in Acts is solid, founded upon eyewitness testimony and the witness of the Spirit.⁷⁸ My hope is that I have added another dimension or level of evidence of a coherent canonical story line than has previously been recognized in reference to the opening discourse of Acts. Coherence of a narrative is not in and of itself an absolute guarantee of historicity, but it is a necessary criterion. And when joined together with strong correspondence evidence the case becomes compelling. Only where a text's 'truth claims' involve historicity does a denial of historicity become a denial of the 'truth value' of the biblical text, and thus become a problem for those holding a high view of Scripture. A Christian who holds a high view of Scripture is convinced that any faith not based on historical truth is illusory (e.g. 1 Cor 15:17; 2 Pet 3:16) and will continue to be scoffed at for failing to adopt a post-Kantian dichotomy between the religions and the scientific. But too commonplace among biblical scholars are those like James Robinson who argue that the risk of faith must not be avoided by appealing to objective historical reality.⁷⁹ That reminds me of Jesus' parable about the man who built his house upon the sand. Geerhardus Vos succinctly addresses the view typified by Robinson that biblical faith could survive even if biblical history were destroyed. Vos' keen assessment of the importance of history for faith pierces to the heart of the matter.

For the sake of argument Vos suggests that one could begin with the assumption that for the Christian faith there was no actual historical event such as the fall and its subsequent need for the atoning work of Christ on the cross. On this assumption one might attempt to still hold that the Christian faith is yet valuable for spiritual enlightenment or moral benefit, though anchored only

⁷⁸As Carl F. Henry aptly stated, "Empirical probability can indeed be combined with inner certainty when the meaning of specific happenings is transcendentally vouchsafed, that is, when that meaning is objectively given by divine revelation." *God, Revelation and Authority* (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1976), 2:330.

⁷⁹James M. Robinson, *A New Quest of the Historical Jesus* (London: SCM, 1959), 44.



partially in facts or based purely in legend, myth or fiction. He concludes that if this supposition is held, one can have no certainty in real time and space whether one has been ontologically transformed from sinner to a saint, from death to life, from sin to holiness, and not merely in the realm of consciousness. If history is merely incidental to the biblical narratives and not part of the ‘essence’ of truth, then what are the ontological implications? What would one make of Paul’s statement that “if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come” (2 Cor 5:17 NIV; ὥστε εἴ τις ἐν Χριστῷ, καινὴ κτίσις· τὰ ἀρχαῖα παρῆλθεν, ἰδοὺ γέγονεν καινά.) Vos argues that if the revelation in biblical narrative is not anchored in historical reality it “betrays a lamentably defective appreciation of the soteriological character of Christianity.”⁸⁰ He contends that one would be left with a natural religion that has no ontological bearing on sin and salvation. In addressing the issue of the historicity of Luke’s account in Acts, I. Howard Marshall concurs with Vos, stating,

Apart from those historical facts there can be no basis for faith. This does not mean that Christian faith is faith *in* certain events, or that faith is possible only if certain events can be *proved* to have taken place and to have been acts of God. It does mean that if the reality of the events is denied, then there is no basis for faith: ‘If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins’ (1 Cor 15:17).⁸¹

I now return to Dunn’s commentary on the prologue of Acts. Dunn holds that the decision to replace Judas was the result of confused thinking among the apostles. Yet this is self-contradictory, as he doesn’t believe the

⁸⁰“Christian Faith and the Truthfulness of Bible History” in *The Princeton Theological Review* (1906): 4:299.

⁸¹Marshall, *Acts*, 24.



episode is factually based. The only historical fact he allows is that Judas died.⁸² Yet Dunn proceeds to denigrate the ‘historical’ actions of the disciples when he says, “these were actions of bewildered men uncertain what to do”⁸³ when they chose to replace Judas. I question the criterion by which he pronounces judgment. Dunn believes the pericope is incoherent, unless one sees it as historical fiction placed by Luke in the narrative as “a matter of theological principle” because the early Christians needed to have an unbroken connection to ‘the twelve’ as a foundation to their faith and history.⁸⁴ It is externally consistent with Jesus’ teaching in the Fourth Gospel and Peter’s application of Psalms 69 and 109 is canonically consistent. Peter was well versed in the Psalms and recalled the earlier words of Jesus about returning to the Father and commissioning the twelve to carry on his mission. He would also have remembered Jesus’ promise that the disciples would sit on *twelve* thrones and judge the *twelve* tribes of Israel (Matt 19:28; Luke 22:30). The New Testament worldview would see Peter’s exegetical insights and actions as guided by the Holy Spirit. After all, Jesus had told his disciples, “But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come” (John 16:13); and, “But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will *remind you of everything I have said to you*” (John 14:26). But then the question arises, does one’s worldview allow for the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit?⁸⁵ John 20:21-22 indicates the disciples had

⁸²Dunn, *The Acts*, 4.

⁸³*Ibid.*, 4.

⁸⁴*Ibid.*, 5.

⁸⁵“Reading, says Ricoeur, is ‘first and foremost, a struggle with the text.’ But what kind of struggle: an honest struggle to understand a stranger, a ‘loving struggle’ between friends



received the Holy Spirit post-resurrection, as a regeneration experience: “Again Jesus said, ‘Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.’ And with that he breathed on them and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.’” According to Eph 3:4-5 and 2 Tim 3:16 that same Holy Spirit that indwelled the Apostles inspired the Scriptures: “In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God’s holy apostles and prophets;” “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.” If that same Spirit that inspired the writings of the Psalms now dwells in the Apostles, is not that same Spirit able to illuminate Peter’s mind to understand meaning and the significance of the Psalms he has read? ⁸⁶

who are trying to overcome their differences, or a violent struggle between two value systems and ways of viewing the world?” Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 407.

⁸⁶“The Spirit *illuminates* the letter by impressing its illocutionary force on the reader. Thanks to the illumination of the Spirit, we see and hear speech acts for what they are—warnings, promises, commands, assertion—together with their implicit claim on our minds and hearts. In so doing, the Spirit does not alter but *ministers* the meaning... The distinction between ‘letter’ and ‘spirit’ is precisely that between reading the words and grasping what one reads. Likewise, the difference between a ‘natural’ and an ‘illuminated’ understanding is that between holding an opinion and having a deep sense of its profundity... The Spirit’s illumination of our minds is therefore dependent on his prior transformation of our hearts.” *Ibid.*, 413.

Mier Sternberg perceives the implication of this: “...a reader unable or unwilling to postulate the articles of faith (from God down) will forfeit competence as a hopeless counterreader... Either we reconstruct the whole as best we can in the light of the writer’s presumed intention... or we fashion—in effect reinvent—everything as we please... Even to judge against the text’s grain, you must first judge with it: receptivity before resistance, competent reading before liberated counterreading, poetics before politics.” Mier Sternberg, “Biblical Poetics and Sexual Politics: From Reading to Counterreading,” *JBL* 111 (1992): 473.



3.3 SUMMARY

I have argued for the theological coherence of the first three opening ‘events’ of Acts (the ascension, the completion of the twelve, and the sending of the Spirit). These events are intrinsic to the history and theology prescribed by Jesus in the Fourth Gospel and artfully narrated (‘poetics’) in the opening discourse of Acts. Meir Sternberg argues that poetic competence requires that one be attuned to the “ideology” (theology) of the text.⁸⁷ That is what I have attempted to do in reference to the opening narrative discourses of Acts. I have argued that being attuned to the poetics of the text in order to access theology requires more than an awareness of the original historical and literary context of a given text. **It demands an appreciation of the immediate canonical context as well as an awareness of canonical history and theology.** Acknowledging the Bible as “canon” entails recognizing a unity of a higher order (i.e., not merely of *parole* [Saussure’s term for the way that language was used on a particular occasion] or genre, but of *Scripture*). If one reads the opening acts of the book of Acts not merely in the light of Luke’s Gospel, but in the light of the other Gospels, in the light of the New Testament, and in the light of the entire canon, one might reasonably conclude that the disciples are perplexed in these post-ascension days, dazed and confused as Dunn observes, but that there is a larger theology built into the canonical history of the events. Poetic competence requires that one be attuned to the theology of the text of the whole canon.⁸⁸

⁸⁷Sternberg, “Biblical Poetics,” 463-88.

⁸⁸Vanhoozer adroitly addresses the issue under discussion. “Hermeneutic rationality—the quest for literary knowledge—may perhaps be best viewed as a form of inference to the best explanation (abduction), rather than a species of deduction or induction. The interpreter seeks literary knowledge, and explanation as to how and why a text is the way it is and what it is about. One does this by imputing intentions to the author that account for the way the text is, in its parts and in its wholeness. Critical interpretation proceeds by making conjectures or hypotheses about what the author was doing in tending to his or her words. On this view, one does not validate interpretation by “proving” the existence of the author’s intention; one rather shows its explanatory power and fruitfulness by asking questions about the text to which certain



I have offered my explanation for the opening of the first three events or discourses of Acts. Dunn offers his explanations. My contention has been that the text itself comprises the most appropriate context for interpretation, provided that readers/interpreters attend to the text on the level of the literary and canonical level. There is a tendency in postmodern literary criticism to view skepticism like Dunn's as a virtue.⁸⁹ Interpretations may be useful for this or that purpose, for this or that interpretive community, but they can no longer be said to be "true," but are useful fictions.⁹⁰ I would contend that this is Dunn's perspective.

descriptions of the literary act represent possible answers. Most serious interpretations cannot usually be falsified or dismissed simply by appealing to the lexical evidence. Interpretive conflicts generally pit one interpretive scheme against another, each of which claims best to account for the same data. The successful interpretation is the one that provides the best account as to why a text is the way it is rather than another way." *Is There Meaning*, 333f.

⁸⁹But do not mistake that I abandon criticism. I consider myself to be a critical or moderate realist, believing that the world is there, independent and determinate, yet it is indescribable apart from interpretive schemes and only partially accessible to any one scheme. I wish to stand in a middle position between epistemological absolutism (which might be labeled a fundamentalist hermeneutic in which "there is only one correct interpretive scheme") and epistemological relativism (in which "every interpretive scheme is as good as any other").

⁹⁰Canadian critic, Northrop Frye is an example of the type of literary criticism that has infiltrated and influenced both biblical studies and theology. He has written that "questions of fact or truth are subordinated to the primary literary aim of producing a structure of words for its own sake." *The Anatomy of Criticism* (New York: Atheneum, 1967), 74. He holds that Scripture's "use of objective and descriptive language is incidental throughout." (*The Great Code: The Bible and Literature* [London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982], 29). Frank Lentricchia labels this a poetics of "aesthetic humanism." *After the New Criticism* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1981), 20. Wherein aesthetics "releases mankind from all the shackles of circumstance and frees him from everything that may be called constraint, whether physical or moral." *Ibid.*, 18. Frye affords the Bible a special place in his literary universe because the biblical images and narratives constitute the imaginative, mythological universe within which all subsequent Western literature has lived, moved and had its being. Frye can still call the Bible "revelation," but this is not to be understood as the "conveying of information from an objective divine source to a subjective human receptor," (*Great Code*, 91) because this would make Scripture a "descriptive" text. Frye holds to the new criticism tenant that the primary aspect of verbal structure is its self-referring, "centripetal" aspect. The Bible means literally what it says, but it can only so mean by *not* referring to some extratextual matter. For example Frye says: "When Jesus says (Jn 10:9), 'I am the door,' the statement means literally just what it says, but there are no doors outside the verse in John to be pointed to" *Ibid.*, 91. In other words, the 'door' metaphor has no extra-text reference whatsoever. For Frye, what makes a descriptive text true is its correspondence to an external reference; but a work of literature has another criterion for truth: inner verbal consistency (*Ibid.*, 62). This whole discussion drives one back to the question of genre assigned to Acts.



CHAPTER FOUR

ACT 1 (ACTS 1:1-11) THE ASCENSION OF JESUS: THE TRANSITION IN THE CONTINUATION OF JESUS' MINISTRY

4.1 Chapter Objective

In this chapter I will further examine the historical and theological coherence of Luke's narrative, moving beyond the immediate preceding context of the Fourth Gospel to the broader context of the canon. I will attempt to demonstrate the unbroken continuity between the ministry of Jesus in the Gospels and the continued ministry of Jesus in Acts.¹ Directly engaging my

¹Contra. A.W. Zwiep, who states, "Since the ascension Jesus seems to have been put on the sidetrack as it were, waiting for his glorious comeback at the parousia (cf. 1 Thess 1:10)." *The Ascension of the Messiah in Lukan Christology* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 182. I will be arguing that the "absentee Christology" of Acts espoused by C.F.D. Moule, et. al. is an inadequate explanation of the Christology of Acts, "The Christology of Acts," in *Studies in Luke-Acts; Essays Presented in Honor of Paul Schubert*, ed. Leander E. Keck, J. Louis Martyn (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1966), 159-185. At Paul's conversion when Jesus speaks to Paul he invokes a corporate concept of his presence in the world stating, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting" (9:5; 22:8; 26:15). In Luke 10:16a Jesus says, "He who listens to you listens to me; he who rejects you rejects me." The Fourth Gospel points to the new mode of Jesus' presence in the world post-ascension: John 14:17-20 "...the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. *I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you;*" John 15:3-4 "You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me." I am not arguing for a mere vicarious authority and presence of Jesus to his followers, but for an ontological presence by the Spirit in the new covenant people of God (promised in Ezek 36:26-27). William H. Willimon agrees: "Those who accuse Luke of an 'absentee Christology' should be reminded of Luke's assertion that the church (for better or worse!) is the presence which Christ has chosen to take in the world." ("Eyewitnesses and Ministers of the Word' Preaching in Acts," *Interpretation*, 42 no 2 Ap [1988]:167.)



thesis, I will argue that Luke's choice of narrative conventions in telling the stories (*poetics*) in Acts are guided by the *theology* inherent in the *history* he records. I will propose that the three servant roles of Christ (as King, Prophet and Priest)² continue in and through his new mode of presence in the Body of Christ,³ the

²Berkouwer makes the case for Christ's offices of prophet, priest and king as a useful tool of Christological inquiry when applied with the necessary caveats. See G.C. Berkouwer, *The Work of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965) 58–88.

³Though Luke does not use this Pauline metaphor, I use it in this chapter to emphasize the continuity between the existence of Christ in the flesh and his continued ministry in and through the Church. As Paul's favorite metaphor for the Church, the body image particularly illuminates the grand Pauline theme of Christ's *union* or *communion* with his Church. Important works with this view are Paul S. Minear, *Images of the Church in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960); Ernst Best, *One Body in Christ: A Study in the Relationship of the Church to Christ in the Epistles of the Apostle Paul* (London: SPCK, 1955); Markus Barth, "A Chapter on the Church—The Body of Christ," *Int* 12 (1958): 131-156; C.F.D. Moule, *The Origin of Christology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977) 70; Geddes MacGregor, *Corpus Christi: The Nature of the Church According to the Reformed Tradition* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1958). Mark Saucy argues that "Protestants have taken the body image to be a metaphor not unlike the other images the NT uses to discuss the nature and function of the Church. Catholics and Orthodox, by contrast, view 1 Cor 12:27 as more than mere metaphor and particularly as a simple statement of reality proving that the relationship of the Church and Christ is to be seen more in terms of *identity*. This interpretation is illustrated by appeal in these traditions to Chalcedonian Christology whereby the Church, like the God-man, is the mysterious union of the divine and human natures in the eternal person of Christ. Taken to this extent, the incarnation as an analogy of the church is acceptable to Protestants; there is a divine and human component in the Church's gatherings. But Catholics and Orthodox raise the stakes in their use of incarnation theology to make the claim that the union of divine and human in the Church actually makes a new single acting subject: *one person* with two natures. The immanence of Christ with his people through the Holy Spirit is the mechanism for this claim as Christ's spirit is literally fashioned as the soul of the body, the Church. Through the Spirit, Christ is organically united to his body, the Church, so that he is with her *totus Christus, caput et mambra*, ('the whole Christ, head and members')." ("Evangelicals, Catholics, and Orthodox Together: Is the Church the Extension of the Incarnation?," *JETS* 43/2 [June 2000]: 193-212.) Because "Christ, the head, cannot be separated from his body, the Church," Richard Neuhaus identifies the "Catholic difference" with Protestants in the statement: "For the Catholic, faith in Christ and faith in the Church are one act of faith." As the "single subject with Christ: in the *totus Christus*, the Church derives her equal authority with Christ to share with him in actually dispensing faith and so extend his saving mission on earth as the 'continued incarnation of the heavenly Lord.'" ("The Catholic Difference," in *Evangelicals and Catholics Together Toward a Common Mission*, ed. by Charles Colson and Richard John Neuhaus [Dallas: Word, 1995], 216). My view is commensurate with the Protestant understanding. The divergent views of ecclesiology have great bearing upon the respective soteriologies and is therefore a divisive issue in the twentieth and twenty-first century ecumenical movements, where it yields the root question as to whether the work of grace (justification) comes from God alone (reformation), or is it from God and from the church



Church as inaugurated at the ascension. I will demonstrate that these three intertwined, continuing roles of the ministry of the Church constitute the central interconnections between the various narrative plots and primary themes of Acts. I will argue that the tripartite ministry is the core underlying *theology* that ‘controls’ the *history* Luke *narrates* in a highly selective manner (poetics).⁴ If Acts 1:1-11 is read in the light of the literary context of the canon (both OT and NT) the significance of what is set in motion with God’s exalting of his Son “to his own right hand as Prince and Savior” (Acts 5:31; Phil 2:9; Heb 7:26) is greatly increased.

4.2 The Ascension as Transition

Only Luke narrates the ascension as an observable, historical transfer from earth to heaven.⁵ Since the ascension is described in both the conclusion of Luke (24:44-53) and in the beginning of Acts (1:1-11), the ascension forms the

(Catholic/Orthodox)? See Robert W. Jenson *Unbaptized God: The Basic Flaw in Ecumenical Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg—Fortress Press, 1992), 4, 90-94.

⁴One of the major narrative literary conventions that Luke employs is the element of ‘selectivity.’ I will argue that Luke is highly selective in the stories he records and that that selectivity is theologically guided and artfully told. I use that term in the manner Leland Ryken defines it: “...storytellers embody their point of view in their very *selectivity and arrangement* of details. There is, of course, always more than one way to tell a story. The story as it finally stands has been consciously assembled by the author for a calculated effect on the audience. In other words, storytellers control what we see and don’t see, how we see it, and when we see it.” *Words of Delight: A Literary Introduction to the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), 85. Flannery O’Conner says, “The novelist makes his statements by selection, and if he is any good, he selects every word for a reason, every detail for a reason, every incident for a reason, and arranges them in a certain time-sequence for a reason. He demonstrates something that cannot possibly be demonstrated any other way than with a whole novel.” *Mystery and Manners: Occasional Prose* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1969), 57.

⁵The longer ending of Mark 16:9-20 does, of course, narrate the ascension of Jesus; but this text is generally considered to be a later addition to the Gospel, which likely drew from the Lukan account. Some NT passages assume the heavenly exaltation of Christ without direct mention of the ascension (e.g., Rom 8:34, 10:6; Eph 1:20-21; Col 3:1), while others refer to the ascension as a theological reality without reference to its temporal or corporeal aspects (e.g., John. 6:62; 20:17; Eph 4:8-10; 1Tim 3:16). See E.J. Epp, “The Ascension in the Textual Tradition of Luke-Acts,” in *New Testament Textual Criticism: Its Significance for Exegesis*, ed. E.J. Epp and G.D. Fee (Oxford: University Press, 1983), 131-34.



link between his two volumes and indicates its significance for a proper understanding of his theology and purpose.⁶ Furthermore, the ascension functions as a bridge event of both continuity and discontinuity between the Gospels and Acts.⁷ What precedes is the historical record of Jesus' ministry in the flesh (mode 1) in the four Gospels, and what begins in Acts and continues in the letters records Jesus' continued ministry in the Body of Christ by the Spirit (mode 2). Thus, the ascension appears to be the historical, theological and ontological transition event⁸ in the New Testament canon (Fig. 4).⁹ The continuity is found in the continuation of Jesus ministry, while the discontinuity lies in the mode of his presence on earth.¹⁰

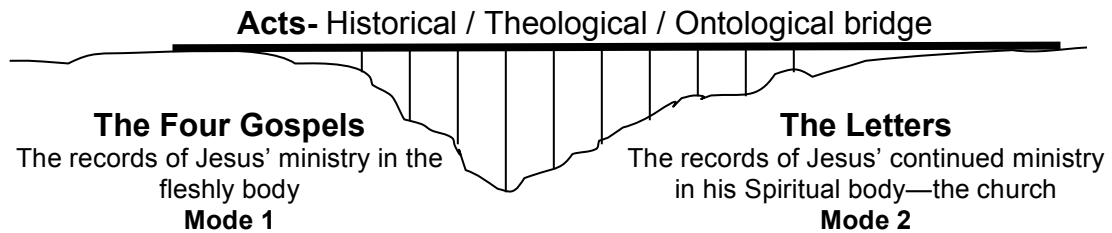
⁶"Theologically and empirically the Ascension of Jesus Christ is at the very heart of the New Testament." Brian K. Donne, *Christ Ascended* (Exteter: Paternoster, 1983), 67.

⁷Marshall, *Acts*, 56. "...the ascension is both the conclusion of the earthly ministry of Jesus and the beginning of the work of the church." Or as Maddox described it: "The ascension is the major bridge from volume one to volume two: it is the necessary climax of the one and starting-point of the other." Robert Maddox, *The Purpose of Luke-Acts* FRLANT, 126 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprect, 1982): 10.

⁸"The New Testament order, on the other hand, emphasizes the four Gospels' witness to the Christ event. It places Acts as a bridge between Gospels and Epistles, for which it provides a context." *Out of Egypt*, ed. C. Bartholomew, M. Healy, K. Möller and R. Parry (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 46.

⁹Peterson says, "The paragraph as a whole implies that the risen Christ will continue to act and to teach through the promised Holy Spirit." Cf. Peterson, *The Acts*, 101. I agree with Krodel against the NRSV that the proper translation of verse 1 is "all that Jesus began to do and teach" rather than "all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning." Gerhard A. Krodel, *Acts*, ACNT (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1986), 54. The former reading helps the reader to recognize that what the apostles do and teach is a continuation of the ministry of Jesus in and through the Apostles and the Holy Spirit. This reading also signals discontinuity, for following the ascension the "doing and teaching" of Jesus is no longer accomplished directly, but through the mediation of the apostles and the Spirit. It is ministry done in the name of Jesus (Acts 2:38; 3:6; 3:16; 4:9; 4:10; 4:18; 5:40; 8:12; 9:27; 10:48; 16:18; 19:13, 26).

¹⁰Continuity: this was the clear teaching of Jesus to his disciples and Jesus' self-understanding of his mission and its continuation post death and resurrection, as was traced in the second half of the Gospel of John in chapter two of this monograph. Discontinuity: this has implications for a broad view of New Testament literary genre. Karl Möler states: "The New Testament order, on the other hand, emphasizes the four Gospels' witness to the Christ event. It places Acts as a bridge between the Gospels and Epistles, for which it provides a context." ("The

Figure 4.1

Mikeal Parson points out that the ascension marks both an ending and a beginning event in the ministry of Jesus.¹¹ That it is a closing event is confirmed by the angelic messengers' words in Acts 1:10-11 indicating an "air of finality"¹² in the post-resurrection appearances.¹³ The narrative of Acts does not record that the disciples see the bodily resurrected Jesus again.

As an opening event of Jesus' new mode of ministry on earth,¹⁴ the fourfold repetition of the phrase "into heaven" in 1:10-11 is clear evidence of the reality of Christ's Lordship.¹⁵ Eric Franklin quite rightly states that "the ascension

Nature and Genre of Biblical Theology", *Out of Egypt: Biblical Theology and Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Craig Bartholomew, Mary Healy, Karl Möller, Robin Parry [Grand Rapids: Zondervan], 46).

¹¹Mikeal Parson, *The Departure of Jesus in Luke-Acts: The Ascension Narratives in Context*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 21 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987): 194: "The ascension story in Luke functions in its narrative context as an ending which brings closure to the Gospel, while the ascension account in Acts serves in its context as a narrative beginning. The differences in detail between these accounts may be accounted for largely by the role of each in its respective narrative context." Cf. I.H. Marshall, *Acts*, 56.

¹²John F. Maile defined the ascension as a "confirmation of the exaltation of Christ and his present Lordship." "The Ascension in Luke-Acts," *TynB* 37 (1986): 57.

¹³See Eric Franklin, "The Ascension and the Eschatology of Luke-Acts," *SJTh* 23 (1970): 191-200.

¹⁴P.A. van Stempvoort described the ascension as "hard and realistic, leading into the future, but at the same time into the history of the Church, beginning from Jerusalem." ("The Interpretation of the Ascension in Luke and Acts," *NTS* 5 [1958/59]: 39).

¹⁵Maile defined the ascension as a confirmation of the exaltation of Christ and his present Lordship. "The Ascension," 55.



is the visible and concrete expression of Jesus' status."¹⁶ In Luke 24:34 and from the beginning of Acts onwards, the disciples are represented as freely applying the term 'Lord' to Jesus.¹⁷ The Ascension was God's decisive eschatological act in Jewish history, the moment of Jesus' entry into his full authority.¹⁸ Luke records that he entered "his glory" (Luke 24:26) at his exaltation. God made him "both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:33-36) and fulfilled the prophecy of Psalm 110:1 (Acts 2:34). He is now "Lord of all" (Acts 10:36). The parousia will only reveal what is already a reality in heaven. With the exaltation of Jesus, the completion of the twelve and the outpouring of the Spirit are not random events, but the acts of the newly enthroned King restoring the kingdom to Israel.¹⁹ Thus, the event of the ascension is the primary, non-verbal response to the disciples' question in Acts 1:6, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" The essential answer is given to the disciples in visible, not auditory form.

1:9 After he said this, *he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.* 10 They were *looking intently up into the sky as he was going*, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. 11 "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here *looking into the sky?* This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way *you have seen him go into heaven.*"

¹⁶Eric Franklin, *Christ the Lord: A Study in the Purpose and Theology of Luke-Acts* (London: SPCK, 1975) 9-47. "Numerically, Luke's favorite title is *kyrios*, 'Lord', used of both God and Jesus." Jacob Jervell, *The Theology of Acts*, 29. Cf. C.F.D. Moule, *Christ the Lord: A Study in the Purpose and Theology of Luke-Acts* (London: SPCK, 1975), 35.

¹⁷C.F.D. Moule, "Christology of Acts."

¹⁸E.A. Laverdiere, "The Ascension of the Risen Lord," *BiTod* 95 (1978): 1553-1559.

¹⁹Neither Matthew nor John records directly the ascension in their Gospels. Mark alludes to it, at least in the questionable ending to his Gospel, 16:19. But a fuller account is given by Luke, 24:50-53; Acts 1:9-11. There are, however, references understanding it to be the inauguration of his kingship reported from the beginning of the apostolic preaching post-ascension (Acts 2:32f; 5:30f). The epistles make clear connection between the ascension and his enthronement (Phil 2:6-9; 3:20; Eph 4:8-10; 1 Tim 3:16; 1 Pet 3:22; Heb 2:9, 12:2; cf. also Rom 8:34; Col 3:1; 1 Pet 1:21).



What the disciples witness at the ascension is the concrete expression in time and space of the exaltation of Christ to royal position and power.²⁰ The ascension becomes the capstone event of the first advent of Christ that triggers the inauguration of the fulfillment of the OT promises regarding the enthronement of the promised Messiah—specifically the promises of the restoration of the judges (Isa 1:26) and the pouring out of the Spirit (Joel 2:28). But these are first fruits that will anticipate the completion of the harvest at the parousia.

4.3 The Continuation of Jesus’ Prophetic, Priestly, and Kingly Servant Roles in Acts in the new “Body of Christ,” the Church

4.3.1 Introduction

The opening paragraph of Acts “as a whole implies that the risen Christ will continue to act and to teach through the promised Holy Spirit.”²¹ What I will demonstrate in the following pages is that the continuity of Jesus’ ministry in Acts is best understood in terms of his person and work as described in the Gospels. Darrell Bock notes that the “key” to the continuity is Jesus’ “role and function,” but he does not proceed to develop and define that continuity.²² He states: “Another major subtheme here is how what started out as the natural extension and realization of Judaism came to develop its own structure, the church. *Key to all of this is Jesus’ role and function.* Whereas Luke’s Gospel

²⁰C.H. Talbert attributed the ascension narratives for the most part to the artistic hand of Luke and circumscribed the ascension as a guarantee device to ascertain the corporeality of the ascension and the continuity of the dying and rising one with the ascending one, against a docetic tendency which advocated a spiritual ascension. *Literary Patterns, Theological Themes, and the Genre of Luke-Acts*, SBL.MS 20; (Missoula, MT: Scholar, 1974), 58-65; 112-116.

²¹Peterson, *The Acts*, 101.

²²Similarly, Ben Witherington says that “this account is about the passing on of the power and authority to Jesus’ witnesses so that they might continue the kingdom work he had begun.” *The Acts*, 112. But Witherington also does not unpack the nature of the continuity of the ministry between Jesus and the Church.



outlines his ministry, the book of Acts shows how the risen Lord continued to be active...²³ I propose that the tripartite servant Christology of the Gospels is the underlying theology inherent in the poetics and historiography of Luke in Acts and provides specifics to Bock's general observation that the key to how the risen Lord continues to be active post-ascension is in "Jesus' role and function."²⁴ I will postulate that in Acts the servant roles continue in a derivative and contrapuntal relation to the heavenly ministry of Christ as Prophet, Priest and King, in such a way that the Church does not draw attention to itself.²⁵ The patterns of life and work of the Church on earth have their significance entirely and only in directing the world to the risen and ascended Lord himself. The same Kingly, Prophetic and Priestly ministry that began with Jesus at his first advent

²³Darrell Bock, *Acts* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 7. Italics mine.

²⁴See Donald L. Jones, "The Title 'Servant' in Luke-Acts," in C.H. Talbert (ed.) *Luke-Acts: New Perspectives from the Society of Biblical Literature Seminar* (New York: Crossroad, 1984), 148-65.

²⁵While I have stressed the continuity of Christ's ministry in the flesh with that of the Church, I also want to highlight the discontinuity. The Church of Acts never proclaims its message in the same 'self-reflective' manner as does the incarnate Jesus. In the prophetic office, while Jesus preaches God's truth, he also declares that he *is* the "way and the truth" (John 14:16). Likewise, while he preaches God's abundant life, he also preaches that he himself *is* that life. While he preaches the Kingdom of God, he *is* the *basileus* of the Kingdom. This is not the case with the Church. While the Church continues the tripartite servant-ministry of Christ, it never proclaims itself. The Church is Christocentric and theocentric, but never ecclesiocentric. The Church "proclaims" (Acts 8:5), "preaches" (Acts 5:43), "testifies" (Acts 18:5), "convinces others" (Acts 28:23), "shows" (Acts 18:28) and "teaches" (Acts 28:31), but the Church is never the object of such activity or the subject of her own proclaimed message. The only objects of *pisteuō* (with *eis, epi, or en*) and its cognates in its 60+ occurrences in the NT are "God," "Jesus," "the Lord Jesus Christ," "the Lord," "the Light," "his name," "the Son of God," "him who raised Jesus from the dead," and the apostolic "witness." The apparent object of the *pistis eis* as *pantas tous hagious* in Philemon 5 ("because I hear about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints") is not favored by the grammarians. See Peter T. O'Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, WBC (Dallas: Word, 1982), 278-79. [Conversely, the Church is never the object of rejection that determines one's damnation, but rather it is rejection of the Holy Spirit that may not be pardoned (Mark 3:29 par.)].



continues in Acts in and through the Church.²⁶ Jesus identifies himself in Acts as the church when he addresses Saul on the road to Damascus (“Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” [9:4]). The continuation of the tripartite ministry of Jesus and the church will be consummated at his second advent when “the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever” (Rev 11:15). That an inaugurated eschatological view of the history of Jesus is an underpinning of Luke’s historiography and theology is forthrightly set forth at the opening of his second volume and is inherent in and programmatic for the history narrated by Luke.

The following brief overviews of Christ’s three servant roles as prophet, priest and king portrayed in the Gospels, typologically rooted in the OT and further developed in the NT, will provide the backdrop for my examination of the tripartite ministry roles continuing in Acts in a paradigmatic sense. These snapshots are intended only to exemplify the continuity between the two modes of the ministry of Christ, and are not intended to be an exhaustive study.²⁷ The goal of this exercise in biblical theology is to gain a deeper understanding of the interrelationship of the theological, historical, and literary aspects of Luke’s

²⁶“If the Church is based in Christ, the understanding of his office will also be of increasing help in its understanding of itself and its work. This means that just as the three roles of the Old Testament are fulfilled in Christ, so they continue to be expressed in the life of the Church.” David T. Williams, *The Office of Christ and Its Expression in the Church: Prophet, Priest, King* (Lewiston: Mellen Biblical Press, 1997), i.

²⁷A much more in-depth examination of the comparisons of the three aspects of Jesus’ ministry between the OT, the NT, the Gospels and Acts would require a separate monograph. A significant part of that study would be an in-depth examination of typology. See David L. Baker, *Two Testaments, One Bible: The Theological Relationship Between the Old and New Testaments* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2010); Patrick Fairbairn, *The Typology of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Pub., 1989); Christopher R. Seitz, *Figured Out: Typology and Providence in Christian Scripture* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001); Norman L. Geisler, *Christ: The Theme of the Bible* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1968); G.K. Beale, ed., *The Right Doctrine From the Wrong Texts: Essays On the Use of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994); Leonhard Goppelt, *Typos, the Typological Interpretation of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982); Edmund P. Clowney, *The Unfolding Mystery: Discovering Christ in the Old Testament* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1988).



writing in Acts. If, as I have argued, access to the divine authorial intention (theology) imbedded in Luke's writing of history is 'through' the literary text and its conventions, then one must pay attention to the literary 'contexts'²⁸ of Acts, including the broader levels of canonical context. Such an approach would yield what some critics call a "thick description" of the meaning of a text, rather than a "thin description."²⁹ Vanhoozer describes what is meant by these phrases in reference to interpretation:

...only when we consider the text as a literary act requiring a number of levels of description can we give an account of what the author is doing in the text; and *only when we give an account of what the author is doing can we give a sufficiently 'thick description' of the literal sense*. How do we know when a description of what the author is doing is sufficiently thick? I believe that the text itself usually provides sufficient evidence. Indeed, one of my aims in this chapter is to reclaim a Reformation insight: "The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is Scripture itself." This statement of what we might call the "hermeneutical sufficiency" of Scripture implies

²⁸It is useful for the purpose of analogy in describing the canonical hermeneutical approach to refer to the derivation of the term 'context': from Latin *contextus*, from *con-* 'together' + *texere* 'to weave'. The syllables are intentionally separated here for emphasis purposes: there are other canonical "text" levels that should be considered with Acts in order to "weave together" what is described above as a "thick description" of meaning. Again, the literary-canonical approach is fruitful only if the premise of divine authorship of the Bible is accurate. That hermeneutical approach may be validated by showing evidence of a unified, coherent mind behind the canon, in relating the parts to the whole, which is what I am attempting to accomplish in the present chapter.

²⁹See "Thinking and Reflecting," *Royal Institute of Philosophy Lectures* (1968), 1:210-226. For Ryle, a thin description of, say, a wink would be one that offered a minimal account only ("rapidly contracting his right eyelid"). The description is thin because it omits the broader context of the event that alone enables it to appear as an intended action. In consequence, thin descriptions suffer from a poverty of meaning. As an example of a thick description, Ryle imagines a boy who parodies another boy's wink. The movement is the same, but the action is altogether different—neither blinking nor winking, but mocking—and the context that forms the background for this description is altogether more complex. The point is that interpretation—whether in cultural anthropology, history, or literary criticism—is a matter of offering "thick" descriptions of what people are doing. Clifford Geertz coined the phrase "thick description" in the field of cultural anthropology, but it has been borrowed by historical and literary critics. *The Interpretation of Cultures* (London: Fontana, 1993), 3-13.



that the text itself contains those contexts necessary for determining the literal sense.³⁰

The threefold servant-role Christology is developed in ever increasing concentric circles of canonical contexts to Acts: the Gospels, more broadly in the NT, and expanding to the OT where the three are typologically pervasive. I will argue that the continuation of these ministry roles in and through the Church are the central theological realities at the heart of the history narrated by Luke and which influence his poetic choices in communicating that history.

4.3.2 The Canonical Context

Setting the traditional *munus triplex Christi*,³¹ the tripartite servant roles of prophet, priest and king, in the broadest canonical context, I suggest that they were in operation from the beginning in Adam and will continue post-parousia in the glorified saints throughout eternity.³² Pre-fall Adam possessed and spoke truth about God and his creation to Eve, and would have taught accurate knowledge of God to his progeny absent the fall. Thus, he functioned as

³⁰Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 305. Vanhoozer argues that the literary context for every text is ultimately, in the mind of the divine author, the canon. In order for the ideal implied reader to have the 'thickest' or 'fullest' possible understanding of a text, he or she must be a reader of the whole canon, providentially provided by the author.

³¹"The threefold Office, the *Munus triplex*, was first introduced into dogmatics by Calvin (*Institution*, II, 15), yet it was not unknown to Luther. (Cf. the chapter on *Das dreifache Amt Christi* in Th. Harnack's book, *Luther's Theologie*, Chapter 16.) Yet although Luther taught that Christ was Prophet, Priest and King, he never spoke of a 'threefold office.' It was Calvin's interest in the connexion between the Old and the New Covenant, as well as his way of thought which was permeated with the idea of saving history (*Heilsgeschichte*) which led him to present the Work of Christ under this threefold aspect." Emil Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption, Dogmatics: Vol. II*, trans. Olive Wyon (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1954), 314.

³²For this understanding I am indebted to Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994), 629f.



a 'prophet' of God.³³ He functioned as 'priest' in that he offered prayer and praise to God. And though there was no necessity for sacrifice for sin, pre-fall, Adam and Eve offered their lives in service to God as a living sacrifice, "holy and pleasing to God," as a spiritual act of worship (Rom 12:1). As assigned by God, they performed the work of tending to the garden with thanksgiving, as a sacrifice of praise (Heb 13:15). Adam and Eve also functioned in a subordinate 'kingly' role. They were given to "rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground" as vice-regents of God (Gen 1:26, 28).

Following the entrance and proliferation of sin into the world God began a move to restore the tripartite roles with the call of Abraham (Gen 12:1-3), leading to the institution of the three offices of prophet, priest and king in the nation of Israel. Through Abraham and his progeny God intended to bless all the peoples on earth. A highlight of Abraham's role as servant of Yahweh is in the intercession for Sodom in Genesis 18. But the ensuing history of Israel all too often reveals false prophets, corrupt priests, and ungodly kings. Nevertheless, God sovereignly uses a select number of men in these offices to become types pointing toward a future fulfillment and restoration.

There are numerous hints in the OT that the entire nation of Israel was intended to act as prophet, priest and king for the world. This follows from the initial call of Abraham, on which the nation of Israel bases its existence. The account does not only promise that God "will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing," but also that "all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." Israel is separated from the nations to that end. Israel is called the firstborn son of God, and because of that it has the role of priest for the other nations (Exod 19:6; Isa 61:6). Israel's king is to have rule even over other nations. The kingly rule of the future king, like

³³In the simplest of terms, the biblical prophet was the Spirit-inspired spokesman of God, who made known God's truth.



David's, will extend over other distant and alien nations. Both the psalmist and the prophet have a vision of a universal empire:³⁴

“He will rule from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth” (Ps 72:8).

“He will proclaim peace to the nations. His rule will extend from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth” (Zech 9:10).

The prophetic is also present in reference to corporate Israel. Following the Spirit's resting upon the seventy elders, Moses expresses the longing for Israel when he says “I wish that all the LORD'S people were prophets and that the LORD would put his Spirit on them” (Num 11:29)! The many examples of direct prophetic oracles delivered to the nations further ratifies the distinctive prophet role of Israel among the nations (cf. Amos, Ezekiel).³⁵

With the coming of Christ, both the purity of the tripartite servant roles of Israel are restored and the tripartite mission in the world reaches its culmination.³⁶ He, as the Messiah, was ‘anointed’³⁷ to be the fulfillment of the

³⁴Sigmund Mowinckel, *He That Cometh*, trans. G.W. Anderson (New York: Abingdon Press, 1959), 160-85.

³⁵Byron E. Shafer, “The Root *bhr* and Pre-Exilic Concepts of Chosenness in the Hebrew Bible,” *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 89 (1977): 20-42. Not only the various offices that existed in Israel reached their culmination in Jesus, but Israel itself. Christ did not only come as a Jew, an Israelite, and to live perfectly as God intended that an Israelite should, but more than that, he may be seen as the fulfillment of Israel itself. While the second part of Isaiah (40f) can sum up the nation and its purposes in one individual, the servant, the identification of the servant with Christ is natural for a Christian. Christ is the true Israel. It is in this way that figures such as the servant or son of man are seen to have both a collective and individual reference. On the one hand they are Israel as a whole, or perhaps better, the ideal Israel, but on the other hand they are an individual, who therefore represents Israel as a whole. See John Gordon Davies, “Priesthood,” in Alan Richardson, *A Dictionary of Christian Theology* (London: SCM, 1969), 274.

³⁶“Jesus incomparably fulfilled and consummately enacted these three offices as: ‘prophet like Moses whom God has raised up from among his own people’ (Acts 3:22); ‘a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek’ (Heb 7:17); and ‘King of kings’ (Rev 17:14).” Thomas C. Oden, *Systematic Theology: The Word of Life*, Volume 2 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2008), 280.



tripartite roles, because “to his manhood were imparted without measure all the gifts of the Holy Ghost; and so he possessed in the highest degree the *knowledge* of a prophet, the *holiness* of a high-priest, and the *power* of a king.”³⁸ As prophet he not only speaks the words of truth, but also is the Word of God become flesh (John 1:14). As prophet, he is the supreme *revealer* of truth and the will of God, bringing light to the blind. He is the perfect high priest who is the supreme *reconciler* and sacrificial lamb, bringing forgiveness to the guilty and bringing people near to God. As king he is the supreme *Lord*, bringing peace and order to the rebellious, reigning forever with a scepter of righteousness over the new heavens and new earth. It is in Jesus that the original Abrahamic calling of Israel to serve as a blessing to the nations comes into fulfillment. Simeon’s song applies the servant songs of Isaiah to Jesus, seeing in him the fulfillment of Israel’s mission to be a “light for revelation to the Gentiles” (Luke 2:32, referring to Isa 42:3; 49:6, etc.).

As will be demonstrated in more detail in the sections to follow, the Church, as described in Acts, functions in each of these roles, though in a subordinate way. Believers, as Spirit empowered witnesses, fulfill the ‘prophetic’ function of proclaiming the truth of the gospel to a lost world (Matt 28:19-20; Acts 1:8). They are also “a royal priesthood” (1 Pet 2:9), exhorted to be built into a spiritual temple, “to be a holy priesthood” and “to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Pet 2:5). The writer of Hebrews views believers as priests who are able to “have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus” and who are exhorted to “continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess his name” (Heb 10:19, 22; 13:15). Beginning in the church in Acts, believers function in the role of vice regents for they are seated with Christ “in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus” (Eph 2:6).

³⁷Anointing oil was the principle OT symbol of consecration to office (1Kgs 19:16; Lev 8:30; 1Sam 16:13).

³⁸*Ibid.*, 283.



Thus, the church exercises his authority over evil spiritual forces that are arrayed against it (Eph. 6:10-18; James 4:7; 1 Pet 5:9; 1 John 4:4).

At the return of Christ, the believers' knowledge of God will then be perfect for they will know even as they are known (1 Cor 13:12). Thus they will only speak the truth about God and about his world, fulfilling the original "prophetic" purpose intended by God for Adam. Post-resurrection believers will be restored also to the original intention of the priesthood role, for they will worship and offer prayer to God and serve in his presence eternally (Rev 22:3-4). They will continually offer themselves as living sacrifices in all that they are and do. And thirdly, believers will also "reign with him forever and ever" (Rev 22:5), sharing in ruling over the new heavens and new earth. As Paul declared, "Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if you are to judge the world, are you not competent to judge trivial cases? Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more the things of this life" (1 Cor 6:2-3)!

4.3.3 Does All that Jesus Began to Do and Teach As Prophet, Priest and King³⁹ Continue in Acts?

4.3.3.1 Introduction

At the Ascension Jesus completes his *prophetic* ministry in the flesh (Matt 12:18; Luke 4:18; 8:1; John 1:1,14; 3:34; 6:33,68; 17:4,8). With the exaltation of Jesus, the completion and goal of Jesus *priestly* ministry is fulfilled--having "entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption" (Heb 9:12), he was then able to take his glorified body into the presence of the Father, making it possible for other sons and daughters to follow (Heb 2:10). With the ascension his *kingly* ministry is properly

³⁹Robert Letham, *The Work of Christ: Contours of Christian Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993); G.C. Berkouwer, *The Work of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965); Oscar Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1959); T.F. Torrance, *Theology of Reconciliation* (London: Chapman, 1975), 215-266.



inaugurated (Eph 4:8-13; Phil 2:6-11; Heb 1:3-13).⁴⁰ The three missionary, servant roles of Jesus⁴¹ that were inaugurated with the incarnation and fulfilled at the ascension will now transition to the Church (mode 2 of his ministry, the Body of Christ) and continue until consummation of all things at Christ's second advent.⁴²

⁴⁰It is noteworthy that the vision of Jesus in Revelation chapter one is a collage picture of him with all three ministry roles portrayed in the description.

⁴¹"In the doctrine of the Three 'Offices' of Christ we are again reminded of the truth that we know Jesus through God's action in Him; this had already been suggested in the various titles given to Jesus in the Primitive Church, all of which have a 'functional' character and suggest His Work rather than his person." Emil Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption*, Vol. II (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1952), 273.

⁴²The principle of transfer by relationship to Christ should not be a surprise, as this was already the case typologically in the Old Testament. Priests could fulfill their role simply on the basis of their genealogy; because they were in the priestly line they were able to act as priests, but nobody else was able to. Likewise, the dynastic principle applied to the Davidic monarchy. The line of David was appointed as kingly, and only those in it could rule. There is, even just a hint that in some ways the prophetic role could be transferred by blood relationship, although here the direct call of God was determinative. It can even be suggested that the role of Aaron as spokesman (the word is "prophet" in Exodus 7:1) was given to him by virtue of his being Moses' brother. Under the New Covenant it is striking that by virtue of the relationship that is enacted between Christ and the believer, they can be called "brethren" (and of course "sisters") of Christ (Heb 2:11). The union with Christ results in the adoption as children of God (Rom 8:15, Gal 4:5). Christians are baptized into Christ, and thus share in his nature and work as prophet, priest and king. This naturally gives a powerful unity to the Church, and gives a basis for the Church to share in his office because it shares in his nature. Joseph H. Crehan even sees these roles as the basic qualities or privileges of the Church. "Priesthood, Kingship and Prophecy," *Theological Studies* 42 (1981): 216-31. Incidentally, although the essence of the Church is its relationship to Christ, the Church is not the extension of the incarnation. The distinction between Christians and the Church is not blurred by the relationship; the Church is not infallible. See G.B. Cairns, "Christ, the Church His Body and Its Members," in T.H.L. Parker, ed. *Essays on Christology for Karl Barth* (London: Lutterworth, 1956), 224.



4.3.3.2 Jesus' Role As a Servant-Prophet⁴³

Jesus was the fulfillment of the prophet promised to come in the OT who would be like Moses (Deut 18:15, 18) and Elijah (Mal 4:5-6). When Jesus commenced his ministry in the Gospels, people declared, "Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world" (John 6:14; 7:40). Dale Allison, Jr. insightfully unpacks Jesus' fulfillment of the Moses-like prophet in Matthew's Gospel, identifying multiple parallels (i.e., the massacre of the innocents under Pharaoh/Herod; Moses/Jesus called from Egypt; the giving of the Torah on Sinai/the new Moses delivering the Sermon on the Mount; the ten mighty works of the exodus story/ paralleling ten miracles of Matt 8-9; etc.).⁴⁴ Though Jesus is like the prophet Moses, the NT expresses that he radically supersedes him. In the Synoptic Gospels Jesus delivered the prophetic message on the Mount of Olives (Matt 24:3-25:46; Mark 13:3-37; Luke 21:5-36). In John he is the Word become flesh (John 1:17). In Hebrews he is the final, consummate prophetic word delivered to humanity in his faithful Son (Heb 1:1f; 3:1-6). In Revelation 1, the Apostle John, while on the island of Patmos, saw a vision of the post-ascension Jesus with a double-edged sword coming out of his mouth—a vivid Scriptural analogy for the Word of God (Eph 6:17; Heb 4:12). In the following two chapters of the Apocalypse Jesus prophetically wields that sword, speaking powerful words of commendation and judgment to the seven churches.

As argued in the previous chapters, Jesus carefully planned for the continuation of his prophetic ministry after his ascension by commissioning the apostles (Matt. 10:1f; Mark 3:13-19; Luke 6:12-16) and promising to send the

⁴³On Jesus as prophet in the NT see, for example, Berkouwer, *The Work of Christ*, 66-69; Gerard F. Hawthorne, *The Presence & the Power: The Significance of the Holy Spirit in the Life and Ministry of Jesus* (Dallas: Word, 1991), esp. 160-168; Marinus de Jonge, *Christology in Context: The Earliest Christian Response to Jesus* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1988), 154-165.

⁴⁴Dale C. Allison, Jr., *The New Moses: A Matthean Typology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993).



Holy Spirit to remind them of everything he said to them (John 14:25). If there had been no reliable account of his prophetic words and deeds, the church would have no secure foundation for its faith. Jesus commissioned the apostles to continue his prophetic ministry, giving them authority (ἔδωκεν αὐτοῖς ἐξουσίαν) to cast out demons, to heal the sick and to preach the good news of the kingdom of God. Their authority was derived from him and their function a continuation of his servant role. As Jesus' representative or ambassadors their function is parallel to the שליח (*šālīah*) of rabbinic Judaism.⁴⁵ Jesus tells them, "He who listens to you listens to me; he who rejects you rejects me; but he who rejects me rejects him who sent me" (Luke 10:16; Matt 10:40; Mark 9:37).

The question for the present study is, does the prophetic ministry of Jesus continue post-ascension in Acts? If so, is there evidence that it is a major theme in the narrative, providing a major strand of theology inherent in Luke's historiography and revealed through his literary artistry?

4.3.3.3 The Prophetic Role Continued In Acts

In Acts the exalted kingly head of his newly formed body, the church, works in and through Spirit empowered prophetic witnesses to proclaim the good news of the resurrected and ascended Lord with the goal of establishing his rule, extending his kingdom to the ends of the earth.⁴⁶ Peterson notes that "Jesus'

⁴⁵TDNT, 1, 414-420.

⁴⁶"When they [apostles] preach, he [Christ] preaches; when they are heard, he is heard." R.F. O'Toole, "Activity of the Risen Jesus in Luke-Acts," *Biblica* 62 (1981): 498. "Jesus' ascension is essentially the context in which there is a transfer of prophetic responsibility to the apostles, with the promise of enabling power to come." D. Petersen, *Acts*, 101; M. Sleeman, "The Ascension and the Heavenly Ministry of Christ," in S. Clark (ed.), *The Forgotten Christ: Exploring the Majesty and Mystery of God Incarnate* (Nottingham: Apollos, 2007), 140-90.



ascension is essentially the context in which there is a transfer of prophetic responsibility to the apostles, with the promise of enabling power to come.”⁴⁷

Immediately following the events of the day of Pentecost, the church is described as devoted to the apostles’ teaching (Acts 2:42). From the witness of the apostles and those devoted to the apostles’ teaching emerged the authoritative NT witness to Jesus. The authoritative teaching of the apostles is affirmed by the fact that God instructs Paul through a revelation to set before *the apostles* the gospel that he preached among the Gentiles for their evaluation (Gal 2:1-10). We know of no other Jesus than the one that emerged from this apostolic base. The witness of the apostles constitutes the lens through which the multifarious NT interpretations of Jesus were filtered. That witness becomes the bedrock for the church for all future understanding, significance and application of the good news proclaimed by Jesus. It is not surprising that Paul states that God’s household is “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone” (Eph 2:19).

This dynamic is pervasively in action in Acts. In particular, the proclamation of the events of the resurrection is always substantiated by the witness of the apostles (Acts 2:32; 3:15; 5:32; 10:39-42; 13:30-31; cf. 22:14-15; 26:15-16). On one occasion Peter reports how the resurrection witnesses were specially chosen by God:

We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a tree, but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen. He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen—by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. (Acts 10:39-41)

The preaching and teaching of both Peter and Paul rehearse the details of the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus. Following the lead of

⁴⁷Peterson, *The Acts*, 101.



Jesus, each claim they made was supported by reference to Scripture. Peter launched his Pentecost message from Joel 2:28, interpreting the events of the day as fulfillment of that passage. Peter's sermon following the healing of the lame man argues that what the crowd has just witnessed is a fulfillment of what God "had foretold through all the prophets," and then proceeds to quote Moses' prophecy of a prophet like him that is to come (Acts 3:11-26). When confronted by the Sanhedrin after the miraculous healing, Peter responded by declaring that Jesus is the Christ by applying the prophecy concerning "the stone you builders rejected, which has become the capstone" to Christ (Psalm 118:22; Acts 4:11). The church's response to the Sanhedrin's prohibition after Peter and John's release shows they viewed Psalm 2 as applying to the apostolic church. This pattern continues in Acts. Philip continues the prophetic ministry of Christ, proclaiming the good news, casting out demons and healing many paralytics and cripples (Acts 8:5-8). He leads the Eunuch to faith by preaching Jesus from the prophecy of Isaiah (Acts 8:31-38). Stephen's wily defense concludes with a powerful prophetic indictment of the Sanhedrin: "You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit" (Acts 7:51)!

Paul customarily reasoned from the Scriptures proving that Jesus was the Christ (Acts 17:2, 11; 18:28, 31). In Ephesus (Acts 18) Paul identifies his preaching directly as that of Jesus: "He [Christ] came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near" (Eph 2:17). Christ had never been to Ephesus. It is remarkable that Paul equates his own preaching to Christ's. Paul tells the Thessalonian church (Acts 17) that the gospel he proclaimed to them was in reality "the word of God, which is at work in you who believe" (1Thess 2:13). Thus, the written and oral testimony of the apostles bore Christ's full authority. The apostolic witness in Acts is seen not only to be in continuity with that of Jesus, but also with OT prophetic witness, with the former in a fulfillment relationship with the latter.



It is broadly acknowledged that the growth and increase of the word of God is a central theme in Acts in accomplishing this goal (1:8). I. Howard Marshall notes, “The main storyline of Acts is concerned with the spread of the message.”⁴⁸ Brian S. Rosner agrees, saying, “Virtually every commentator recognizes and gives prominence to Luke’s concern with the spread of the gospel message, ‘the word of God (the Lord)’ to use a Lukan phrase, in Acts...Not only explicitly but in a wide variety of subtle and indirect ways Acts portrays the prodigious progress of the word.”⁴⁹ F.F. Bruce concurs, saying that it is not one important theme among others, but “The extension of the good news in the power of the Spirit is the theme of Acts.” François Bovon states that the episodes in Acts “narrate the diffusion of the Word.”⁵⁰ Jerome Kodell highlights the *ecclesiological* aspects of the three summary statements on the growth of the word.⁵¹

Acts 6:7 So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.

Acts 12:24 But the word of God continued to increase and spread.

Acts 19:20 In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power.

⁴⁸Marshall, *Acts*, 26. F.F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 30.

⁴⁹“The Progress of the Word” in *Witness to the Gospel*, ed. I. Howard Marshall and David Peterson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 229-33.

⁵⁰François Bovon, *Luke the Theologian: Thirty-Three Years of Research (1950-1983)*, trans. K. McKinney, Princeton Theological Monograph Series 12 (Allison Park, PA: Pickwick, 1987), 238.

⁵¹Jerome Kodell, “‘The Word of God Grew’: The Ecclesial Tendency of *logos* in Acts 6:7; 12:24; 19:20,” *Bib* 55 (1974): 505-19.



That the word of God is central in Acts is indisputable. Peterson observes that “the word is the real ‘hero’ of Luke’s narrative.”⁵² Viewed from a broader, canonical context—in particular the Gospels—it is the church (mode two—the Body of Christ) in Acts that is continuing the prophetic role of Christ, proclaiming the Gospel of the Kingdom of God. Permeating the narratives throughout Acts, it is the Word that is the powerful force that is able to conquer the world (it *grew in power* Acts 19:20). Acts narrates the journey of the powerful Word from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth.⁵³ Luke’s literary artistic choices in narrating that history reveal the intrinsic theological nature of that history as the continuation of the person and work of Jesus as Prophet.

4.3.3.4 Jesus' Servant Role as Priest

Jesus was also the fulfillment of the future priest whose coming was anticipated in the OT (Zech 3:8; 4:11-14; cf. Gen 18:22-24; Exod 32:11-14). Christ’s priesthood was prefigured in the OT in Melchizedek (Heb 7:1,3,11,15) and he was called to be a priest like Aaron (Heb 5:4). Jesus’ entire life is the self-giving of his life for sinful humanity, culminating in his death on the cross. “The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Matt 20:28). All that Jesus did and taught was directed toward accomplishing the redemption and reconciliation of humanity. In the episode of the feet-washing, John showed that the life and the death of Jesus are one: condescending to serve sinful, lost humanity (John 13:5-14). Washing was a priestly activity and cleansing was the result of priestly ministry in the OT and typologically fulfilled by Christ (Exod 29:4; Lev 1:9; 13:6, 34; 2 Chr 4:6; Heb

⁵²David Peterson, “Luke’s Theological Enterprise,” in *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts*, ed. I. Howard Marshall and David Peterson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 541.

⁵³Joel B. Green, “Salvation to the End of the Earth (Acts 13:47): God as Savior in the Acts of the Apostles,” in I.H. Marshall and D. Peterson (eds.), *The Book of Acts and Its Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995).



10:19-20). The parable of the good shepherd perhaps summarily describes with incomparable power the priestly work of Christ when it portrays the shepherd going out into the wilderness to find his lost sheep (Luke 15:3-6). The poverty of Jesus, his renunciation of the trappings of success and human fame springs from his whole life's mediatorial aim to lift people who are "down there" upwards into communion with God (Phil 2). And because of this counter-cultural worldview and lifestyle, Jesus was barraged with constant opposition from self-righteous Pharisaism.

In the Gospels Christ endured persecution and suffering as part of his unique *priestly* ministry as both priest and atoning sacrifice. As the High Priest of our faith, his experiences enabled him to sympathize with our weaknesses (Heb. 4:14,15), qualifying him in every way to be our priestly representative before the Father. Through his incarnational solidarity with sinners he bore our sins and cleansed us from guilt, enabling believers to enter uncondemned into the presence of the Father (1 Pet 2:24). He is the eternal leader of our prayer and intercession. He teaches his disciples to pray for his kingdom to come; through John's 'ear-witness' record we overhear his intercession at the Last Supper in John 17; we overhear his prayer in Gethsemane, and from the Cross—the prayer of his whole life. He is ever before the Father making intercession (Rom 8:34; Heb 7:25).

His *priestly* ministry is associated mostly with his passion in which, as High Priest, he offered himself in sacrifice for our sins and holy oblation to the Father (Heb 2:17; 3:1; 5:5, 6, 10; 6:20; 9:25). The ascension of Christ is his exaltation to power and glory, but *through the Cross*. His exaltation from humiliation to royal majesty is through crucifixion and sacrifice, for the power and glory of the Royal Priest are bound up with his self-offering in death and resurrection. At the ascension we not only have a King exalted to the throne but we also have "a high priest, who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven" (Heb 8:1; cf. 10:12). Again, the question for the present study is (from the perspective of a canonical reading): Does the priestly ministry of



Jesus continue post-ascension and pre-parousia in the apostolic ministry narrated in Acts? If so, does it appear as a major theme in the narrative, providing a second major interwoven strand of theology inherent in Luke's historiography and revealed through his literary artistry?

4.3.3.5 The Priestly Role Continued in Acts

Interlinked with the plot line of the prophetic mission of witness to the Word are the ever-present realities of persecution⁵⁴ and consequent suffering as the Church in Acts undertakes a 'ministry of reconciliation' (2 Cor 5:18).⁵⁵ These two interwoven themes are ubiquitous in the narrative of Acts.⁵⁶ In his first volume, Luke narrated the connection between mission and persecution for both Jesus and his disciples. The implied violent rejection encountered by the Twelve and the Seventy-two foreshadow what they will experience as they continue to

⁵⁴C.H. Talbert, *Learning Through Suffering: The Educational Value of Suffering in the New Testament and in Its Milieu*, *Zacchaeus Studies: New Testament* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991); J.B. Tyson, "Conflict as a Literary Theme in the Gospel of Luke," in W.R. Farmer (ed.) *New Synoptic Studies* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1983), 303-27; J.J. Kilgallen, "Persecution in the Acts of the Apostles," in G. O'Collins and G. Marconi (eds.), *Luke and Acts*, trans. M.J. O'Connell (New York: Paulist Press, 1991), 143-150, 245-50.

⁵⁵Paul R. House, "Suffering and the Purpose of Acts", *JETS* 33 (1990): 317-30. See also Scott Cunningham, *Through Many Tribulations: The Theology of Persecution in Luke-Acts* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997). Again, the Church's role as priests is distinguished from that of Christ's as it never "redeems" or "propitiates" anyone. The Church's sufferings is distinctly its own and not a repetition or re-presentation of the cross of Christ. They point to Christ. It is within this uniquely Christological and not ecclesiological focus to suffering in the NT that we are to understand Christ's merciful identification with his Church (Acts 9:4; 22:7; 26:14). As Marcus Barth states, "it is and remains *his* glory, of and in which the church lives. That the risen Christ identifies himself with the persecuted church is one thing; in his mercy he can and will proclaim his presence in the church that appears so helpless. That the church extols herself to almost divine rank by considering herself identical with Christ is another thing." ("A Chapter on the Church—The Body of Christ," *Int* 12 [1958]: 145).

⁵⁶David Peterson notes this connection: "Opposition from unbelievers normally follows gospel ministry in Luke's narrative, where the focus is on God's use of such situations to further his purposes...Suffering regularly provides the opportunity for more ministry and is intimately connected with the growth of 'the word.'" ("Luke's Theological Enterprise: Integration and Intent, in Marshall – Peterson (eds.), *Witness to the Gospel* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998], 541).



proclaim the kingdom of God and do the works that Jesus began to do (Matt 5:11; 10:22; 24:9; Luke 9:4; 10:1-9; 21:12; John 15:20).⁵⁷ The persecution of Jesus in the Gospels increased in intensity until it climaxed in his death. In Acts the persecution and suffering of his witnesses begins quickly, is frequent and maintains a high level of intensity. Of the main characters in Acts (Peter, John, Stephen, Barnabas, Silas, Paul; and the apostles and disciples as groups) only Philip appears exempt from this common experience. The consistent element of persecution in the Acts narratives is manifested in the imprisonments, trials, beatings, conspiracies, riots, forced expulsions, mocking, stoning and martyrdom (as Jesus predicted—Luke 21:16). Peterson notes the connection in Acts between the prophet role and the priestly role of Jesus and of the Church:

Luke's pastoral aim was achieved by the way he structured his narrative, juxtaposing various accounts of suffering with assurances about the triumph of 'the word.' Persecution, hardships, trouble, martyrdom, and disputes between Christians and non-Christians (sometimes even between Christians and Christians) provide the theological and literary framework for Acts...Suffering regularly provides the opportunity for more ministry and is intimately connected with growth of the word.⁵⁸

Just as one of the chief bases of Christianity is the suffering of Christ, so a main characteristic of the early church is its own suffering. The prominence of Jesus' suffering in the Gospel and the extension of that suffering to his representatives in Acts provide a profound link between the two volumes of Luke's work.⁵⁹

George W. MacRae speaks also of the connection of Jesus' suffering with that of the Church: "It is precisely the journey motif as a structural principle of both Luke's Gospel and Acts that reveals how deep-rooted in Luke's Christology was

⁵⁷F.W. Beare, "The Mission of the Disciples and the Mission Charge: Matthew 10 and Parallels *JBL* 89 (1970): 1-13.

⁵⁸Petersen, "Luke's Theological Enterprise," 541.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, 544.



the concept of Christ's presence to his church in the sufferings of his witnesses."⁶⁰ Acts narrates the stories of what Paul expresses in principle in Col 1:24, "Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which, is the church."⁶¹ In other words, Paul declares that as a member of the body of Christ, the Church, that what he suffers in his ministry, as narrated in Acts, is a continuation of Christ's sufferings on behalf of the salvation of the world and the furtherance of the Gospel.⁶² Paul informs the disciples of Lyconia (Acts 14:22) that "we must (*dei*) go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God."⁶³ Barth's comment is insightful in relating the Church's sufferings to those of Christ.

The cross of Jesus is His own cross, carried and suffered *for* many, but *by* Him alone and not by many. He suffers this rejection not merely as a rejection by men but, fulfilled by men, as a rejection by God—the rejection which all others deserved and ought to have suffered, but which He bore in order that it should no more fall on them. Their cross does not mean that they have still to suffer God's rejection. They exist only—and this is quite enough—in the echo of his sentence, the shadow of his judgment, the after-pains of his rejection. In their cross they have only a small subsequent taste of what the world and they themselves deserved at the hand of God,

⁶⁰George W. MacRae, S.J., "Whom Heaven Must Receive Until the Time: Reflections on the Christology of Acts," *Interpretation* 27 no 2 Ap (1973): 165.

⁶¹D.P. Moessner, "'The Christ Must Suffer' The Church Must Suffer: Rethinking the Theology of the Cross in Luke-Acts," in D.J. Jull (ed.), *Society of Biblical Literature 1990 Seminar Papers* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1990): 165-95.

⁶²Cf. also Paul's desire to join with the fellowship of Messiah's sufferings in Phil 3:10. The Colossians passage is of particular significance, as it is the one instance where the atonement formula *hyper humōn* is of someone other than Christ. See Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1958), IV/2, 601.

⁶³The exact phrase *dei pathein* is used only of Jesus and Paul in prophecies of their suffering (Luke 9:22; 17:25; 24:26; Acts 9:16). But what is true of Jesus and Paul in a special way is true of all disciples generally.



and Jesus endured in all its frightfulness as their Head in their place.⁶⁴

Suffering hardship and persecution is within the divine plan for God's people.⁶⁵ The Body of Christ, post-ascension, continues to suffer on behalf of the world in order to establish his Lordship in the hearts of men and women through the Spirit-empowered, prophetic proclamation of the Word of God (cf. Peter's response in the midst of persecution in Acts 4:8-12). Ironically, persecution serves to accelerate the prophetic mission of Christ and his Church. The consequent diffusion of his witnesses yields the further spread of the Word of God (Acts 8:1; 11:19-21). In Acts the Word of God is invincible and persecution is a catalyst for its advance.⁶⁶

The disciples in Acts are intercessors, people of prayer, as was their Lord. It was their first spiritual instinct. Immediately after the ascension "they all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers" (1:14). In response, God pours out his Spirit. The first instance they are faced with a decision, they pray for guidance. Following the outpouring, prayer is an integral part of their corporate life: "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer" (2:42). From that point forward for the first several chapters a cyclical pattern initiated by prayer is followed by an act of God, which results in an opportunity to proclaim the Word of God, which brings about a response

⁶⁴Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV/2, 600, 604

⁶⁵Contra. R.I. Pervo who concludes, "Persecution is for Luke a literary opportunity and a literary device." And commenting on the persecution episodes he says, "There is little theology here, but lots of excitement." *Profit With Delight: The Literary Genre of the Acts of the Apostles* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 28. See D.P. Moessner, "The Christ Must Suffer": New Light on the Jesus-Peter, Stephen, Paul Parallels in Luke-Acts," *NovT* 28 (1986): 220-56.

⁶⁶Acts records three prison deliverances (5:19; 12:6-17; 16:25-34). The Word of God cannot be physically restrained no matter what security measures are taken as illustrated in Peter's imprisonment. When Peter reports the events to the church he "described how the Lord had brought him out of prison" (12:11, 17).



(persecution or repentance), and then the narrative again records the church praying. In the first instance of persecution the Church responds in corporate prayer for boldness in their witness (Acts 4:21-31).⁶⁷ Prayer is specifically mentioned thirty-eight times in Acts.⁶⁸ Jesus exemplifies his own plea to his disciples to “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Matt 5:44). Jesus prays for the forgiveness of the sin of those who crucified him: “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34). Stephen continues the same ministry of intercession: “Then he fell on his knees and cried out, ‘Lord, do not hold this sin against them.’ When he had said this, he fell asleep” (Acts 7:60). The prayers of the saints in Acts are joined with those of all the saints, are described in priestly-temple terms in Rev 8:3f.- “Another angel, who had a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense to offer, with the prayers of all the saints, on the golden altar before the throne. The smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of the saints, went up before God from the angel’s hand.” The Church in Acts is in continuity with the priestly ministry of Jesus in its intercession and prayer until he returns.

4.3.3.6 Jesus’ Servant Role as King

Jesus was the fulfillment of the OT prophecies of a Davidic king who would come in the line of David (Gen 17:3-6; 2 Sam 7:12-13; Isa 9:6-7; 11:1-9; Mic 5:2-4; Zech 9:9-10). Jesus’ role as king pervades his ministry from beginning to end in the Gospels. At the opening of the NT Jesus was born to be King (Matt 1; 2:1f). He was consumed with the divine imperative to proclaim the Kingdom of God: “I *must (dei)* preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other

⁶⁷U.C. von Wahlde, “Theological Assessment of the First Christian Persecution: The Apostles’ Prayer and Its Consequences in Acts 4:24-31,” *Bib* 76 (1995): 523-31.

⁶⁸David M. Crump, *Jesus the Intercessor: Prayer and Christology in Luke-Acts* WUNT, 2.49 (Tübingen: J. C. B, Mohr, 1992). See also S.F. Plymale, *The Prayer Texts of Luke-Acts* AUSTR, 118 (New York: Peter Lang, 1991).



towns also, because that is why I was sent” (Luke 4:43; cf. Matt 4:23; Mark 1:14-15). And as he entered his public ministry he stepped forth as the King of the kingdom he proclaimed by exercising his authority, by forming a new community, in teaching, healing, and casting out demons. And in the end, ironically, he is crowned with thorns and mocked with the title ‘King of the Jews.’⁶⁹ The resurrection and ascension events affirm his exaltation to the Father’s right hand with full regal authority in his domain.⁷⁰

The message of Jesus is the proclamation of the coming Kingdom of God. He comes with the cry, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near” (Matt 3:2; 4:17; Mark 1:15). One of the chief desires Jesus teaches his disciples to pray is “thy Kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven.” Thus, Jesus ratifies the foundation laid in the OT, for everywhere in the message of the OT prophets this is their main concern—the rule of God (i.e., Dan 4:3; 5:21; 6:26; 7:14, 18, 27; 1 Kgs 22:19; Isa 6:1; 24:23 66:1; Obad 1:21). The content of Jesus’ discourses is dominated by one conviction—the coming of the Kingdom of God, the new age, and its contrast to the present age. Thus, in many of his parables the subject is a king, or the master of a household. The Apocalypse confirms that this is the goal toward which all history is moving. The will of the King will be done and at the end of the age he will have an obedient people, with every knee bowing and confessing him as Lord (Rev 12:10; Rom 14:11; Phil 2:11). It is then that a loud

⁶⁹It is the path through the cross that undercuts at its very core postmodernism’s fear of the all pervasive corrupting nature of all grand narratives, whether religious or philosophical, that attempt to capture human devotion. The ascended King Jesus is one who had been the recipient of the abuse of authority at every turn in his life, ministry, and death. This crucified, resurrected and ascended King knows more than any other human being what it is like to be abused by power, and therefore will exercise his power and authority in justice and righteousness. This is what is unique about the NT *kerygma*. This is what the OT constantly called for and looked for in the kings of Israel, but never previously experienced.

⁷⁰More than any other, the regal context of Ps 110 (vv 1 and 4) informed NT writers’ reflection on the state and function of the ascended Christ. There are more citations and allusions to this Psalm in the NT than to any other OT passage (five direct citations: Matt 22:44//Luke 22:69; Mark 16:19; Acts 7:55-56; Rom 8:34; 1Cor 15:25; Eph 1:20; Col 3:1; Heb 1:3, 8:1, 10:12; 12:2, 1Pet 3:22).



voice in heaven will declare, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever” (Rev 11:15).

4.3.3.7 The Kingly Role Continued in Acts

While the Church cannot yet lay claim to a present ‘reign’ (1 Cor 4:8),⁷¹ there still is a correspondence with Christ’s authority as the Church have been given the “keys to the Kingdom” by its Lord (Matt 16:19). Whatever it forgives on earth will be forgiven in heaven, whatever it retains on earth will be retained in heaven (Matt 18:18). In Acts, just as the incarnate divine King gathered a nucleus of twelve disciples around him at the inauguration of the kingdom in the Gospels, he ‘reconstitutes’ the twelve upon his ascension so that they may be his ‘vice-regents,’ and through whom he will extend reign over the twelve tribes of the restored Israel, his new Body, just as he promised:

Matt 19:28 Jesus said to them, “I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”

Luke 22:30 so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

In Acts chapter two, Peter stands with the eleven, as authorized judges of restored Israel, to restore order the first time confusion occurs post-

⁷¹“Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! You have become kings—and that without us! How I wish that you really had become kings so that we might be kings with you!” While there is a correspondence in role, in terms of authority, theocentricity and Christocentricity, not ecclesiocentricity, is the posture of the NT. Christ and God, not the *ekklēsia* are “king.” The kingdom is “God’s” and “Christ’s,” and never the Church’s. Christ, not the Church, is “master,” “Lord,” “head of every man,” “cornerstone” and “foundation.” The Church is subject to Christ’s supreme authority and is to obey him.



ascension.⁷² As an authorized vice-regent Peter issues judgment that what had just taken place at the temple gate was not a manifestation of drunkenness, but the fulfillment of the prophecy of Joel. At the conclusion of his speech, Peter declares that God has made this Jesus, whom they crucified, both Lord and Christ, and that it is the newly enthroned King who, as a second post-ascension act, pours out the Spirit on all flesh. In Acts 2:36 Peter declares that something epochal has transpired in the history of Israel: “Therefore *let all Israel be assured of this*: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.” Their long awaited King has assumed his full authority granted only through the cross, resurrection and exaltation.⁷³

This is the decisive, defining moment in Acts.⁷⁴ Jesus has been endowed with universal power as ruler and judge. As the exalted King, Jesus is able to extend the blessings of his Kingdom to all who call upon his name: primarily repentance and release from sins and the reception of the Spirit. Tannehill states, “The ruling power of Jesus is saving power. The presentation of

⁷²To further broaden the canonical context, it should be noted that in the OT when Yahweh was Israel's only King, he instituted prophets, priests, and *judges* (vice-regents) as the earthly, sanctioned manifestations of his rulership.

⁷³The glorification of Christ as King and High Priest begins not with his actual ascension or resurrection, but with his crucifixion and indeed with his *ascent* to Jerusalem and Calvary for sacrifice. Thus he fulfills his own words, “For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted” (Lk 14:11; Mt 23:12). Using mixed metaphors, John describes Jesus in the *Apocalypse* as a lion who is a lamb, capturing the paradox of humiliation and exaltation (Rev 5:1-14). Even in the ascension the power of Christ is exercised through his sacrifice, through his atoning expiation of sin and guilt. It is in this connection that we are to understand the ascension of the *son of man* as representative human in whom all humanity is gathered up and made participant in his self-offering by their being ‘in Christ,’ so that in his ascension Christ is installed as head of the new humanity (second Adam, 1 Cor 15:22, 45), the prince of the new creation, the King of the kingdom, about which the Apostles were inquiring in Acts 1:6f. However, it is with his exaltation to the throne of God and his sitting at the right hand of the Father that his kingly ministry properly was inaugurated.

⁷⁴George W. MacRae, S.J., “Whom Heaven Must Receive Until the Time: Reflections on the Christology of Acts,” *Interpretation* 27 no 2 Ap (1973): 156. “For example, while in Acts 13:33 it is the resurrection which is decisive for Jesus’ status of divine sonship, in 2:32-36, although the resurrection is the key event in the kerygma, it is the exaltation of Jesus—in Lukan thought distinct from the resurrection—which is decisive.”



this in the Acts speeches suggests continuity with the saving work of Jesus during his previous ministry, for the beneficial power that Jesus then showed to the limited number of people who encountered him will now be offered to all.”⁷⁵

The disciples continued the work of the King “in the name of Jesus” and in the power of the Spirit of Jesus (cf. 16:7). Jesus is “both Lord and Christ.” Hans Conzelmann noted, “The acts performed by virtue of the name are in conformity with what is recorded of the ministry of the historical Jesus, for it was this that set the pattern for the future.”⁷⁶ All the accounts that follow Acts 2 have to do with the continuation of those activities of “doing” and “teaching” and their effects, whether positive or negative. The exercise of power and authority in the name of the King either yields salvation and healing, and/or persecution and suffering. These core plot elements are interwoven throughout the narrative of Acts, with only the names and places changing.

In Acts 3, Peter and John continue to exercise their delegated authority in the healing of the lame man in the name of the King. As authorized judges of the King, the Spirit-empowered Apostles continue to establish the Kingdom of God. Other examples of the vice-regency of the Apostles in extending the Kingly rule of Jesus are the appointment of the seven deacons in chapter 6, or their exercise of judgment at the Jerusalem council in chapter 15.⁷⁷ But the Lordship Jesus exercises in and through the Church in Acts is not perfect, it only gradually comes into being. The members of the Church are also

⁷⁵Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts A Literary Interpretation*, Vol. 2 *The Acts of the Apostles* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 39.

⁷⁶*The Theology of St. Luke*, trans. Geoffrey Buswell (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982).

⁷⁷I do not intend to pursue an in depth study on the continuation of these three roles of the ministry of Jesus in Acts, but introduce this topic to some extent at this point because it is the ascension in Acts that inaugurates the continued ministry of Jesus in ‘mode 2,’ the Body of Christ in Acts, and I believe that those continued roles of Christ in Acts are not peripheral, but core to the narratives. This perhaps should be the subject of a separate monograph. I have not yet become aware of such a work, specifically viewing Acts from this perspective.



human beings “in the flesh,” in whom the claim of Jesus Christ to rule over them is constantly tested by the claims of ‘self’ and of the world. Examples of this in Acts are the narratives of Ananias and Sapphira (5:1-11), the widow controversy (6:1-7) and Peter’s struggle to come to the realization of the inclusion of the Gentiles via the rooftop vision (10:9-43). The Church of Acts waits for and works toward the perfect Lordship of Christ, not only in the world to which it is sent, but also in the Church itself.

4.4 Summary

I argued – from the perspective of a canonical reading – that the story of “all that Jesus began to do and to teach” narrated in the Gospels, describes his person and work as the hypostatic fulfillment of the three OT servant roles of Prophet, Priest and King (Heb 3:1f.). Jesus is the prophetic Word of God come down into our flesh (1:14) and as our great High Priest he is the perfect response of humankind to that Word in his obedient self-offering in life and death. He is Prophet in a unique sense, for he is in himself the Word he proclaims just as he is himself the King of the Kingdom and the Priest who is identical with the Offering he makes. It is this one who has ascended to the throne and entered into the holy of holies, as our ἀρχηγός, our πρόδρομος and our λειτουργός (Heb 2:10; 6:20; 8:2).

Just as Jesus acted as prophet, priest and king, so did his church. Indeed, this is what I have argued is characteristic of the Acts church.⁷⁸ The

⁷⁸David Chilton, *Productive Christians in an Age of Guilt-Manipulators: A Biblical Response to Ronald J. Sider* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1981), 152. Thomas.D. Hanks notes that Paul’s explanation of his ministry (Acts 26:17-18) is a remarkable parallel to Jubilee theology in Luke 4, even including the word *aphesis*. *God So Loved the Third World: The Biblical Vocabulary of Oppression* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1983), 57. I. Howard Marshall argues that the church should be involved in the bestowing of sight, both literally and metaphorically, in the release of captives and particularly action for the poor, very much a Lucan emphasis (Luke 14:13). *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1978), 184. As with the work of Jesus, this had immediate results, not like Qumran, simply seeing everything in an eschatological light and so withdrawing to wait without acting to



Church of Acts was called to continue Christ's prophetic witness (Acts 1:8) in order to further the Kingdom of God to the ends of the earth.⁷⁹ It is significant that Luke brackets his second volume by employing the literary device of *inclusion* to highlight the importance of the Kingdom of God to the theology and history of Acts. As A.W. Zwiép notes, "In the book of Acts the narrative plot is developed through *circularity* (the prominent position of the Kingdom of God in the beginning and ending of Acts: Acts 1:3,6; 28:23,31; the connection between the command of world wide mission, Acts 1:8; 28:31)." ⁸⁰

The Church has been "made to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God" and "will reign on earth" (Rev 1:6; 5:10) and in glory (2 Tim 2:12). These ministry roles, to be consummated at the parousia, have been active in the Body of Christ, the Church, from its inception and throughout Acts. The core continuity in history between the Gospels and Acts is that they both narrate the ministry of Jesus, albeit in two different modes, with the ascension being the moment of transition. While there is ontological discontinuity in the manifestation of the presence of Christ between the Gospels (mode 1- in the flesh) and Acts (mode 2- by the Spirit in the Body of Christ, the Church), there is functional continuity. I argued that the Prophetic, Priestly and Kingly ministry of Jesus in the Gospels continues in Acts so that "all that Jesus began to do and teach" (1:1) continues until he comes "back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven" (1:11).

achieve in the present, Cf. James A. Sanders, "From Isaiah 61 to Luke 4," in Heusner, J. *Christianity, Judaism and Other Greco-Roman Cults: Studies for Morton Smith at Sixty*, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1975), 94. As the church of Acts was faithful to this program, it found, as Jesus experienced, that it too encountered rejection and persecution. See Robert L. Brawley, *Luke-Acts and the Jews: Conflict, Apology and Conciliation* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987), 24.

⁷⁹There is no contradiction in the early Christian proclamation of the crucified and resurrected Christ and Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom of God as was supposed by earlier NT critics. In Acts, the Church did not betray her Lord's forty days of instruction on the Kingdom by immediately preaching something else. As summary statements in Acts reveal, preaching Jesus as the Christ was preaching the Kingdom (cf. Acts 8:5, 12; 28:23, 31). This is particularly evident in Acts 20:24-25 where Paul's "testifying to the gospel of God's grace" (vr. 24) is parallel to his "preaching the kingdom" (vr. 25).

⁸⁰*The Ascension*, 30.



C.K. Barrett stated, “It makes good sense to give *ērxato* its full natural force. Acts contains an account of the continuing work of Jesus (through the Holy Spirit, through the church); the earlier volume contains therefore only the beginning of his work.”⁸¹

Viewed from the functional perspective it is the same Jesus one meets in Acts. There is no “absentee Christ” as some would hold.⁸² In Acts there is only a change in the form of Jesus’ presence. Jesus’ previous words recorded in John 14:18, “I will not leave you as orphans; *I will come to you,*” must certainly have been enigmatic to disciples at the time of their utterance. But Jesus was anticipating his indwelling them by the Spirit (John 14:15f; cf. Col 1:27; 1 Pet 1:11; Matt 18:20). In this light, it appears to lend support to those who interpret the opening verse of Acts as programmatic for the book. From this perspective a comparative reading of the narratives of the history of the ministry of the Body of Christ, the Church, in Acts, with the narratives of the history of the ministry Christ recorded in the Gospels, while present in the flesh, yields greater insight into the authorial intention interconnecting the diverse narrative discourses in Acts. What

⁸¹A *Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994), 66f. See also I. Howard Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles: An Introduction and Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 56f. “...the use of the word *began* in relation to the earthly ministry of Jesus...is deliberately used here, so that Luke is associating what Jesus began to do during his ministry with (implicitly) what he continued to do after his ascension; the ministry of Jesus was the beginning of Christianity.” Also, Petersen, *Acts*, 101, “The paragraph [Acts 1:1-5] as a whole implies that the risen Christ will continue to act and to teach through the promised Holy Spirit.” Contra. Ben Witherington who argues the phrase should be translated “all that Jesus did and taught,” *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 10. My assessment does not rest solely upon this single word, nor upon the support of other writers, but upon the broader argument of my monograph in earlier comments on the Fourth Gospel and from the following comments on Acts—in particular upon my assessment of the ascension in the following pages.

⁸²“Some scholars see very little role for the ascended Christ in the outworking of Luke’s narrative. Yet the risen Lord acts and is present to the whole life of his church in Acts. He gives his followers their mission and directs them in various ways throughout the narrative.” David G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), p. 100; Cf. G. W. MacRae, “Whom Heaven Must Receive Until the Time”, *Int* 27 (1973): 160-65; J.D.G. Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament: An Inquiry into the Character of Earliest Christianity* (London: SCM, 1977), 19, is representative of those who argue for an ‘absentee Christology.’ See fn. 1.



has been at issue again, hermeneutically, is viewing the text in the light of the larger literary, canonical contexts. Read from a canonical perspective, the demonstration of continuity and coherence evidences my beginning presupposition of a single divine author whose intentionality superintends the various human authors, inspiring a unified literary whole, namely the canon. This being so, one must attend to what the divine author is attending to; and to what the Spirit is superintending over in the unified and coherent parts of the canon. The question is, “Does the text of Acts evidence this unity with the Gospel narrative of Jesus?” My answer is, yes. And the divine intentionality or theology is what is intrinsic to the history recorded by Luke and his poetics or literary artistry.



CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

5.1 Summary of the Dissertation

5.1.1 Summary Overview

Employing a canonical approach, the aim of the present dissertation has been to explore the interrelationship of theology, history, and literary artistry in the opening discourses of Acts and the book of Acts at large. Following the hermeneutical guidance of the church Fathers in their canonical decision to juxtapose the Gospel of John and Acts, it was proposed that the theology inherent in the history recorded in the latter half of the Fourth Gospel affords significant insight into the theology, history and literary artistry of the opening discourses of Acts. The canonical approach undertaken in this study concludes that the thesis is valid.

5.1.2 Chapter One

Chapter one presented the foundational presuppositions for the study: the divine authorship of the entire canon and the logical correlation of the unity of Scripture. I maintained that the acceptance of these presuppositions logically implies and warrants a literary-canonical approach to interpreting Scripture.¹ It

¹Richard Schultz believes that “a canonical approach that takes the literary contours of the Bible seriously as the vehicle through which God has communicated his authoritative Word will better arm the church for the theological and moral conflicts that confront it in an increasingly pluralistic and relativistic society.” (“What Is ‘Canonical’ About a Canonical Biblical Theology” in *Biblical Theology: Retrospect & Prospect*, ed. Scott J. Hafemann [Downers Grove: InterVarsity,



was asserted that the canon, God’s metanarrative,² definitively circumscribes³ the meaning of any sublevel of canonical discourse.⁴ The books within the biblical canon form what Kermode calls a “separate cognitive zone” and are “interrelated like the parts of a single book.”⁵ Thus, the canon encourages an interaction of meaning—a play of meaning, as it were—but only within its carefully prescribed boundaries.⁶

It was further argued in chapter one that the canon not only describes God’s metanarrative but also that its arrangement provides hermeneutical insight into specific texts and exhibits an intentional rhetorical pattern. In this respect I concur with Brevard Childs’ belief that the ‘canonical context’ of the biblical

2002], 99). For a foundational text in this regard, see Graeme Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture: The Application of Biblical Theology to Expository Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000).

²“Fragmentation and suspicion of ‘grand narrative’ are hallmarks of postmodern thought. At one level theological interpretation and theological construction become impossible without some notion of biblical canon as serving to mark out the circumference of acceptable diversity.” Anthony C. Thiselton, “Canon, Community and Theological Construction” in *Canon and Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Craig G. Bartholomew (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 1.

³James Dunn argues that at one level theological interpretation and theological construction become impossible without some notion of biblical canon as serving “to mark out the circumference of acceptable diversity.” *Unity and Diversity*, 376.

⁴Intertextuality both sanctions and challenges the traditional idea of canon. “Canon” (Gk. κανών, measuring rod) denotes a list of recommended or authoritative books. The canon of the Old and New Testaments, as well as that of the Bible as a whole encloses a space within which authoritative texts interact and inform one another. For example, New Testament texts refer directly and indirectly to certain Old Testament texts; the meaning of the Synoptic Gospels is in part a function of their differences from one another. Later texts are permeated with the vocabulary and themes of earlier texts. See Frank Kermode, “The Canon,” in *The Literary Guide to the Bible*, ed. Robert Altar and Frank Kermode (Harvard: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1990).

⁵*Ibid.*, 605-6.

⁶Significant to that ‘play of meaning’ is the acknowledgment of the rich diversity of biblical genre, each contributing to a form of thinking “adapted to conceptualizing some aspects of reality better than others.” Caryl Emerson and Gary Morson, *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 276. Each of the many forms of biblical discourse mediate revelation in irreducible ways, such that if we abandon the form, as in demythologizing, we lose the content.



books, which he defines as not only the final form of the biblical books but also their positions in relation to one another in Scripture, is the most important index of their meaning. He maintains that “the ordering of the tradition for this new [canonical] function involved a profoundly hermeneutical activity, the effects of which are now built into the structure of the canonical text.”⁷

The examination of the church fathers and the early church lists of canonical books evidenced that the majority separate Luke’s Gospel from Acts. Joel Green has joined Parsons and Pervo in noting that scholarship in general has not addressed the possible hermeneutical motivations of the Fathers for the canonical separation of Luke’s works.

Since Cadbury, the Gospel of Luke has been read in relation to the Acts of the Apostles (Luke-Acts), an approach that takes seriously the ‘unity’ of Luke and Acts, while allocating little if any attention to the plain reality that Luke and Acts do not appear side-by-side in the biblical canon. Not without good reason, then, Mikeal Parsons and Richard Pervo complained about imprecision in claims regarding the unity of Luke-Acts.⁸

Other than the broad suggestions offered by Robert Wall, little work has been done toward exploring a possible John-Acts historical-theological unity suggested by the canon. The present study has attempted to provide a start toward hermeneutical support for Robert Wall’s observation that “if Acts is read in its current canonical placement rather than as the second volume of Luke-Acts, then the reader will naturally reflect upon its narrative as continuing the story of Jesus

⁷Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament As Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 60.

⁸Joel B. Green, “Interpretation, Reflection, Formation: Unfinished Business” in *Reading Luke: Interpretation, Reflection, Formation*, ed. Craig G. Bartholomew, Joel B. Green and Anthony C. Thiselton (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 440; Mikeal Parsons and Richard Pervo, *Rethinking the Unity of Luke and Acts* (Fortress Press, 1993).



presented by the four Gospels.”⁹ Arguing from a canonical perspective Wall insisted that Acts should be read and understood as an historical and theological bridge between the fourfold gospel and the epistolary collection. The present work has further suggested that not only are Luke and Acts separated,¹⁰ but also the Fourth Gospel is placed as last in the Gospel canon as if the early church Fathers were indicating that it is to be read after the Synoptics and before Acts and the Letters. Both the placement of the documents and the early church’s assigning titles may provide significant initial hermeneutical guidance to readers. That being true, Acts may be considered to rhetorically function as a theological and historical bridge document between the Gospels and the Letters. If read from a canonical perspective, the present study has concluded that, of the four Gospels, John provides the most developed pneumatology and proleptic ecclesiology and therefore rhetorically and hermeneutically provides the best context for reading Acts—particularly the opening discourses of Acts.

5.1.3 Chapter Two

Chapter two provides the hermeneutical groundwork in the Fourth Gospel for support of Wall’s assertion that Acts provides a sequel better suited to the Gospel of John than to the Gospel of Luke. He stresses “the importance of retaining the final shape of the NT rather than combining Luke and Acts as a

⁹Robert W. Wall, "The Acts of the Apostles: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections" in *The New Interpreter's Bible*, edited by Leander E. Keck et al., vol. 10 (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002), 29.

¹⁰In his chapter on “The Preface to Acts and the Historians,” Loveday C.A. Alexander concludes his study on comparing Luke-Acts with ancient literature: “Comparison with the conventional code governing the use of recapitulations thus establishes clearly that two works linked as Acts is to Luke’s Gospel need not necessarily have been conceived from the start as a single work. The comparison cannot, however, of itself establish that they were *not* so conceived: the preface to Acts leaves both possibilities open.” In *History, Literature, and Society in The Book of Acts*, ed. Ben Witherington, III (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 81.



single narrative.”¹¹ Assuming with early Fathers the divine authorship and the unity of the Bible and the Bible as canon, I tested those assumptions by attempting to show the intertextuality of history and theology at work between the two human authors, John and Luke, canonically-literarily juxtaposed by the early church. The literary-canonical approach was tested in chapters two and three by examining the exegetical fruitfulness of using the latter half of the Gospel of John—the immediate canonical context—as an hermeneutical key for understanding the opening discourses of Acts. In order to demonstrate the fruitfulness of the canonical approach, this chapter centered on interpreting Jesus’ generic statement in John 13:20, as explicated by Jesus himself in the ensuing narratives in the second half of the Fourth Gospel. This task was undertaken in anticipation of unpacking in the following chapter the theological and historical implications for reading the opening narratives of Acts.

5.1.4 Chapter Three

In chapter three I attempted to demonstrate that the theology, history and literary structure of the opening three narrative discourses of Acts (1:1-11; 1:12-26; 2:1-4) are theologically elucidated by the hermeneutics of the Fourth Gospel undertaken in the previous chapter. Thus, my study has attempted to address a gap in research indicated by Joel Green:

The theological issues at stake on this issue [canonical placement of Acts] should not be minimized. Thirty-five years ago, James Dunn complained that Pentecostals based their presumption of a second experience of the Spirit, subsequent to and distinct from the new birth, on a problematic hermeneutic, one which reads Acts 2 as the ‘second experience’ following the ‘first’ in John 20:22 (and in light of additional Johannine material in John 13-16). ‘This appeal to John’s Gospel raises a basic methodological issue: Are we to approach the NT material as systematic theologians or as biblical

¹¹Wall, “The Acts of the Apostles,” 29. A decision in favor of reading John and Acts in unity certainly does not ignore the obvious significant contributions that Luke-Acts studies have contributed to the church’s life, nor does it close the door on other canonical readings.



theologians and exegetes?'...Clearly, here is an area in which more investigation is necessary.¹²

I have argued that the theological coherence of the first three units of discourse of Acts is best explained by their connection to the theology and pneumatology of the latter half of the Gospel of John – when read from a post first century canonical perspective.

5.1.5 Chapter Four

In chapter four the method was further tested on a macro-scale by examining the history recorded in the narratives of Acts in relationship to the wider literary-canonical context of the mission and work of Christ in the four Gospels in terms of his fulfillment of the Old Testament offices of Prophet, Priest and King. In that chapter it was argued that this messianic theology of the Gospels, with its Old Testament underpinnings, drives both the history (generic plot lines) and the literary artistry employed in Luke's writing of history in Acts.

5.2 Conclusions

5.2.1 Acts 1:1 The Continuity of Jesus' Mission Post-Ascension

The application of the canonical approach to interpretation undertaken in the preceding chapters leads to an important hermeneutical conclusion that provides a focal point for summarizing the details of my hermeneutics. If read in the broader literary-canonical context, the verb ἤρξατο, in the clause ὧν ἤρξατο ὁ Ἰησοῦς ποιεῖν τε καὶ διδάσκειν in the opening verse of Acts, should be correctly translated as an ingressive or inceptive imperfect (*began to do and*

¹²“Interpretation, Reflection, Formation,” 440-441. Green's inclination is that the priority in approaches should be the latter—as biblical theologians and exegetes.



teach), implying that Jesus' 'doing' and 'teaching' will continue in Acts.¹³ Daniel Wallace explains that the difference between the ingressive imperfect and the ingressive aorist is that "the imperfect stresses beginning, but implies that the action *continues*, while the aorist stresses beginning, but does not imply that the action continues. Thus, the translation for the inceptive imperfect ought to be 'began *doing*' while the inceptive aorist ought to be translated 'began *to do*.'"¹⁴ He further states that the ingressive imperfect is "especially used in narrative literature when a change in activity is noted."¹⁵ The literary-canonical approach employed in the present study has demonstrated that, while there is a *discontinuity* in the form of Christ's ministry that occurs at his ascension, there is an unbroken *continuity* in the activity of Christ's mission on earth in and through his missionaries or 'vice-regents,' the Apostles and the Holy Spirit.¹⁶ The discontinuity comes with the end of his earthly work in a body of flesh at the ascension (Luke 24:50), nevertheless, the one and same event transitions to the beginning of his continued ministry on earth in the body of Christ, the church (Acts 1:1-11). The nature of Jesus' continuing ministry through his church is best

¹³The commentators are divided on the translation of ἤρξατο. Newman and Nida speak for a number of commentators when they express an opposite conclusion from mine: "It is thought by a few that the word 'began' is emphatic and therefore should be translated; but most translators and commentators understand the phrase 'began both to do and to teach' as simply an equivalent of 'to do and teach,' with no particular stress on the word 'began.'" Barclay M. Newman and Eugene A. Nida, *The Acts of the Apostles* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1972), 13. My opposite conclusion has obviously been based on a broad canonical approach to exegesis. It is my hope that an additional fruit of my study has been to make a contribution to clarifying the translation and interpretation of the opening verse of Acts.

¹⁴*Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 544.

¹⁵*Ibid.*

¹⁶"It does not seem to me possible to recognize the claim of any historical religion to be final and ultimate, unless it includes within itself a principle of development." Hastings Rashdall, *Philosophy and Religion: Six Lectures Delivered at Cambridge* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1909), 165.



understood by following the hermeneutical clues suggested by a canonical approach to interpretation. Here lies the crux of the hermeneutical aspect of the present thesis. I have argued that the interpretation and meaning of the opening verse of Acts, of the opening three discourses of Acts, and more broadly of the further discourses in the book of Acts is best accomplished by reading Acts in light of its ever-expanded canonical contexts.

I conclude from my study that the *theology* intrinsic to the *history* Luke records and which intimately informs the *literary artistry* he employed in Acts in narrating Jesus' continued post-ascension mission and ministry through his apostles (jointly the twelve and the Holy Spirit) and his followers is best grasped by an ever-expanded post first century canonical reading:

- (1) The opening discourses of Acts should be read in light of the hermeneutical insights provided by the church Fathers' placement of John immediately before Acts (Chapters two and three of the present work).
- (2) The reading of the entirety of Acts in light of the fourfold Gospel record of Jesus' person and work as the hypostatic fulfillment of the mission of Israel as prophet, priest and king (Chapter four).
- (3) The understanding of the significance and important function of those roles from a broad reading of the Old Testament canon (Chapter four).

5.2.2 Hermeneutical Conclusions

5.2.2.1 The New Testament Canon and Acts

For many who think the task of achieving an integrated view of NT theology, along with its OT underpinnings, still worth pursuing, an RIH [revelation in history] emphasis may continue to prove fruitful.¹⁷

¹⁷Robert Yarbrough, "James Barr and the Future of Revelation in History in New Testament Theology," *BBR*, 14 no 1 (2004): 105-126.



The outcome of the present study has evidenced to the present writer the fruitfulness of a post first century canonical reading for New Testament studies. Old Testament scholars appear to have taken the lead in the canonical approach, but few New Testament scholars have followed their lead. As a result of the present study, I have been convinced to pursue further work under this approach. I conclude that the placement of a text (in this case Acts) into the New and Old Testament canons informs how it should be read, in addition to its original historical and literary context.¹⁸ Anthony Thiselton emphasizes the importance of this when he observes: “Issues regularly debated in the philosophy of language suggest that the impact of changing contexts decisively re-shapes meaning. To reject this may entail retreat to the era before Schleiermacher when ‘philologists’ restricted ‘meaning’ to its semantic dimension alone.”¹⁹ The canon adds new levels of what J.L. Austin labels illocution—form and structure. In the case of Acts, it is juxtaposed with the Fourth Gospel and with the four Gospels as a unit, and is situated within the New and Old Testaments as a whole.²⁰ The

¹⁸“The Anthology (the Bible) itself, which abounds in intertextual references, provides most of the literary context with which its contents may be understood. There is not a book within the whole collection that can be interpreted satisfactorily in isolation from the rest. Each book contributes something special to the meta-story and, in turn, the meta-story offers a framework within which each book may be best interpreted. In this regard, the long standing principle of interpreting Scripture by Scripture makes considerable practical sense.” T. Desmond Alexander, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem: An Introduction to Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2008), 10.

¹⁹Anthony C. Thiselton, “Canon, Community and Theological Construction”, 20. Thiselton underlines the critical importance of employing the canonical approach when he states that “if some claim that theological construction cannot be undertaken without reference to larger stretches of the biblical writings than individual traditions or textual units, and some even try to insist that a canonical approach allegedly violates ‘the rules of sound scholarship’, we must either grasp the nettle of canonical approaches or give up the enterprise of seeking to build Christian theology upon biblical foundations.” *Ibid.*, 3.

²⁰Charles H.H. Scobie attests that “studies of individual books of the Bible or of biblical authors (the Deuteronomist, Second Isaiah, Paul, John and so on) are often regarded as studies in ‘biblical theology’. Such studies are not really ‘biblical’ unless the study of the book or



arrangement and order of the books of the canon by the early Church Fathers affects how a particular book, and by implication, a passage within a book is interpreted.²¹ Old Testament scholar John Sailhamer asserts that “a canonical order ensures that the books of the OT are read in a predetermined context,” and this means that, “a particular sequence suggests hermeneutical significance.”²²

Thus, the true description of Luke’s literary act is not limited only to his historical situation, but is informed by what the divine author is doing throughout the canon he inspires—beyond the first century New Testament era. The illocutionary acts at the level of the whole—the canon—places the parts within an overall unity that serves a meaningful purpose—to guide future generations in the way of God. In the case of Acts 1:1 it is not enough to know the lexical possibilities of the word ἤρξατο or the clause ὧν ἤρξατο ὁ Ἰησοῦς ποιεῖν τε καὶ διδάσκειν; one must have some sense of the ever-widened illocutionary acts of canonical genre: Acts, Gospels,²³ New Testament, Old Testament and Bible as Word of God. To appeal to the notion of genre is to acknowledge an implicit agreement not only on how a text should be written but also on how it should be read. Rolf Rendtorff agrees, saying,

author concerned is related to the total biblical context; in practice this is rarely the case.” *The Ways of Our God: An Approach to Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 79.

²¹I would contend that this would be true regardless of what order or another for which one might argue. Even if one were to argue that one order is not necessarily more hermeneutically important than another, any order adopted would have hermeneutical impact on the exegesis of a text.

²²John Sailhamer, *Introduction to Old Testament Theology: A Canonical Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), 252.

²³There is a long-standing dispute about the genre of the Gospels. The issue is whether they represent a distinctive and unique literary form—that they are *sui generis*, a genre to themselves—because something distinctive and unique had to be said. See C.H. Talbert, *What Is a Gospel? The Genre of the Canonical Gospels* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982); P.I. Shuler, *A Genre for the Gospels: The Biographical Character of Matthew* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982); David Aune, *The New Testament in Its Literary Environment* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1987).



Enquiries into the purpose and significance of the canon must go beyond the consideration of individual books and consider the collection as a whole and the relationship between its individual components. ... It was not mere chance which led to the present form of the canon. Rather, the form of the canon is to be understood as an expression of particular religious and theological developments and decisions.²⁴

In applying the canonical approach to the New Testament in the present study, I believe that I have followed the lead pioneered primarily by Old Testament scholars such as James Sanders who explicitly points out that “the true shape of the Bible as canon consists of its unrecorded hermeneutics which lie between the lines of most of its literature.”²⁵ Stephen Dempster prefers the phrase ‘canon-consciousness,’ rather than canonical approach. He contends that “there is mounting evidence that points in the direction of a canon-consciousness of the biblical authors/editors, that is, an awareness that the individual books of the Bible belonged to a larger whole.”²⁶ The possibility of deliberate ordering of the canonical books suggests that the interpreter consider that arrangement in his or her exegesis. Dempster defines ‘intertextuality’ as the ‘awareness’ of the fact that the various books of the canon are together a unified whole. He maintains that there is intentional interconnectedness between the various books through what he calls a ‘conscious echo’ of “events, concepts, and language found in earlier books.”²⁷

²⁴Rolf Rendtorff, *The Old Testament: An Introduction* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 290.

²⁵James Sanders, *Torah and Canon* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2005), 46.

²⁶Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Biblical Theology of the Hebrew Bible* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2003), 28.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 32. This is the very thing I argued for from the exegesis presented in the previous chapters—the connection of history and concepts (theology) between the Fourth Gospel, the Gospels, the Old Testament and the opening discourses of Acts and the book of Acts as a whole.



Sailhamer prefers the term ‘con-textuality,’ which he defines as “the notion of the effect on meaning of the relative position of a biblical book within a prescribed order of read.”²⁸ He specifically understands con-textuality as a specific ordering that affects how a book is read in light of the books preceding and following it. Rendtorff contends that “the shaping of the biblical books in their present form is usually not the result of chance or of thoughtless and uncomprehending redaction, as was often supposed by earlier historical-critical exegesis, but that quite deliberate forces of shaping were at work which were often guided by a specific and often very pointed theological purpose.”²⁹ Sailhamer asserts that even if an interpreter is uncomfortable with Dempster and Rendtorff’s positions concerning the intentionality of order, the arrangements of the books will, by the very nature of what is read, provide an interpretive scheme for the particular book one is reading. At the very least, it is an observation concerning how people read literature. Sailhamer proceeds to say that his recognition of the effect of ordering is analogous to the idea of ‘montage’ in the film industry.³⁰ Just as the order of film slides in a movie affects how one understands what precedes and what follows a particular frame, the ordering of the books of the canon may also provide an interpretive context in which one should work. He argues that if the ordering is changed, no matter what order one is using, the interpretive perspective shifts. The affect of ordering is inescapable.

Childs asserts that canonical interpretation is just as descriptive as its historical counterpart. What is being described by the canon, in the view of this writer, is the way the early church structured the text in order to give hermeneutical guidance and to function authoritatively for future generations. In contrast, for the historical critic, the object of description is the text in its original

²⁸Sailhamer, *Introduction to Old Testament Theology*, 213.

²⁹Rendtorff, *The Old Testament*, 290.

³⁰*Ibid.*, 214.



situation.³¹ But manifestly, this is not a description of canon. While the historical critic works to analyze how the text came to be, the canonical critic attempts to describe the text as it was meant to be, i.e., the history of the text as Scripture. Francis Watson insists that “description always presupposes a prior construction of the object in terms of a given interpretive paradigm.”³²

The ‘interpretive paradigm’ of canon did not establish the ‘immediate’ nexus of Luke-Acts, and thus has performed an additional illocutionary act.³³ The hermeneutical aspect of my thesis proposed that if one acknowledges the illocutionary act of canonization as an interpretive insight, it may open the text to ‘fuller’ meanings and understandings intended by the divine author. Indeed, the present work has argued for reading Acts in the canonical context of the Fourth Gospel and the Four Gospels as a unit, as deeply rooted in the theology of the Old Testament. Informed by a canonical approach, the previous chapters attempted to demonstrate exegetical evidence for the fruitfulness of its application to the opening discourses of Acts and for the book of Acts as a whole. The outcome of this study has convinced me to pursue further New Testament hermeneutics and theology, and in particular with regard to the book of Acts, employing a canonical approach.

5.2.2.2 The Canon and Biblical Theology

Geerhardus Vos defines biblical theology as “that branch of exegetical theology which deals with the process of the self-revelation of God deposited in

³¹I earlier argued for not neglecting or devaluing historical critical attention to the *Sitz im Leben*, but that the *Sitz im Kanon* incorporates and supersedes it.

³²*Text, Church and World: Biblical Interpretation in Theological Perspective* (London: T & T Clark, 1994), 33.

³³See note 154, chapter one for Austin and Searle’s definition of ‘illocution.’



the Bible.³⁴ Gerhard Ebeling offers his definition: “Its task would accordingly be divided thus: In “biblical theology, the theologian who devotes himself specially to studying the connection between the Old and New Testaments has to give an account of his understanding of the Bible as a whole, i.e., above all of the theological problems that come of inquiring into the inner unity of the manifold testimony of the Bible.”³⁵ As defined by Vos, Ebeling and others, biblical theology is therefore essentially a canonical approach.³⁶ As A.B. duToit states, “It has nevertheless become axiomatic that all texts, whether literary or non-literary, form part of a socially and culturally determined network of traditions and textual relations, and that meaning is generated by moving between a specific text and all the others to which it relates.”³⁷ If the canon is a coherent whole

³⁴Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948), 13.

³⁵Gerhard Ebeling, “The Meaning of ‘Biblical Theology,’” in *Word and Faith* (London: SCM Press, 1963), 96.

³⁶In his recent work Scott J. Hafemann offers the following definition: “Biblical theology attempts to ascertain the inner points of coherence and development within the biblical narrative and exposition. It does its work inductively from within the Bible in an attempt to bring out the Bible’s own message.” *Biblical Theology: Retrospect and Prospect* (Downer’s Grove: InterVarsity, 2002) p. 16. Craig G. Bartholomew says: “Biblical theology is, in my opinion, the attempt to grasp Scripture in its totality according to its own, rather than imposed, categories.” *Out of Egypt: Biblical Theology and Biblical Interpretation* (Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 2004), 1. Elmer A. Marten defines it as “...that approach to Scripture which attempts to see Biblical material holistically and to describe this wholeness or synthesis in biblical categories. Biblical theology attempts to embrace the message of the Bible and to arrive at an intelligible coherence of the whole despite the great diversity of the parts. Or, put another way: Biblical theology investigates the themes presented in Scripture and defines their inter-relationships. Biblical theology is an attempt to get to the theological heart of the Bible.” (“Tackling Old Testament Theology”, *JETS* 20 [1977]: 123). Graeme Goldsworthy states that “Biblical theology is, in effect, the study of the unity of the message of the Bible...Biblical theology is a means of looking at one particular event in relation to the total picture....Biblical theology examines the development of the biblical story from the Old Testament to the New, and seeks to uncover the interrelationships between the two parts....Biblical theology is a verbal map of the overall message of the Bible.” *According to Plan: the Unfolding Revelation of God in the Bible* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1991), 20, 21, 23.

³⁷“Exploring Textual Structure: Discourse Analysis,” in *Focusing on the Message: New Testament Hermeneutics, Exegesis and Methods*, ed. A.B. du Toit (Pretoria: Protea Book House, 2009), 221.



behind which lays an ultimate, sovereign author, then the work of biblical theology is an important sub-discipline of exegetical theology.

The present work has been an exercise in biblical theology toward understanding the meaning and significance of the events of the opening discourses of Acts in particular, and more broadly of the discourses of Acts as a whole. These were examined first in the light of the immediately preceding canonical context of the Gospel of John, second from the perspective of the four Gospels and finally in reference to the wider context of the Old Testament. In chapters two through four the process of the transference of ministry roles and authority of Jesus necessitated by his ascension were traced from that which was pre-planned and determined by Christ in the Gospel of John to that which is actuated in the events of Acts. This transference was necessary in order to facilitate continuity and continuation of his ministry in and through the church.

As pointed out at the beginning of the present study, in taking the macro or canonical approach of biblical theology, I have expanded A.B. du Toit's understanding of discourse analysis to its logical ends—the ever-increasing canonical contexts, and ultimately the divine discourse of the entire canon:

It is a well-known axiom that, in studying texts one should work from the larger units downwards as well as from the smaller units upwards. This reciprocal movement is necessary to open up the text. Naturally, this is also true of discourse analysis. However, the critical issue in this process is that of vantage point. Should one's vantage point be the individual sentences that constitute a unit, or the larger unit in its totality? If the first component of the term "*discourse analysis*" is taken seriously, the answer should be self-evident.³⁸

5.2.2.3 Conclusion Concerning the Function of Canon

The postmodernist, motivated by concerns that "canons" are too easily wielded as ideological tools—products of a corrupt corporate will to

³⁸Ibid., 221.



power—object that they are manipulative instruments of an interpretive community functioning to undergird and legitimate the authority of their community opinion. But this may not necessarily be universally true. The Reformation would present an historical example to the contrary—with its cry of *Sola Scriptura*. In that case the canon proved to be an effective check against the domination of human institutions and traditions. The Scripture canon significantly functions as an instrument of ideology critique, continuously calling into question the finality of human formulations (creeds) and institutions.

For the canonical reader, within the believing community, to read the Bible as Scripture, as the supreme authority for life and thought, is to allow its perlocutionary³⁹ intent to function to lead the hearer to Christ and to the righteousness of God. No doubt, one may read the Bible ‘like any other book,’ but the begging question to the reader is: How should a reader respond if it is indeed the Word of God? Without the hermeneutical, interpretive virtue of faith—an openness to transcendence, to the voice and communicative intention of the author—the reader/hearer would never find something in the text that is not of his or her own creation—ones own postmodern reflection. For a disciple to acknowledge the promises, exhortations and warnings of the Bible as Scripture does not make them other than promises, exhortations and warnings, but it is to recognize an additional illocutionary act at the canonical level, reorienting them to the larger purpose of “making wise unto salvation” (2 Tim 3:15).⁴⁰

³⁹J.L. Austin’s term for ‘what an author intends to bring about by an act of communication—a purpose.’

⁴⁰Charles Wood, *Formation of Christian Understanding: An Essay in Theological Hermeneutics* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1981), 30.



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