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

A Thesis

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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, mission 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
TABLE OF CONTENTS

| ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION | ................................................................. | ii |
| KEY TERMS | ............................................................................. | iv |
| LIST OF FIGURES | ........................................................................ | xi |
| ACKNOWLEDGMENTS | ....................................................................... | xii |
| LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS | ......................................................................... | xiv |

CHAPTER ONE: Introduction: Thesis, Presuppositions and Methodology .... 16

1.1 Part I: Statement of the Problem and the Thesis ............................................. 16

1.1.1 The Background of the Problem ................................................................. 16

1.1.2 The Canonical Reader and Reader-Response Theory ................................. 20

1.1.2.1 Structuralism, Formalism, and New Criticism ...................................... 20

1.1.2.2 Reader-Response and Reception Theory .............................................. 22

1.1.2.3 Canonically Defined Reader-Response and Reception Theory .......... 24

1.1.2.4 The Canonically Defined Interpretive Community ............................... 29

1.1.2.5 The Cross, Reader-Response and Interpretive Community ............... 33

1.1.3 Statement of the Problem and the Resultant Thesis ................................ 35
1.2 Part II: Epistemological Presuppositions and Methodology

1.2.1 Preliminary Hermeneutical Matters

1.2.1.1 On Reading the Bible for Theology

1.2.1.2 Epistemological Presuppositions and Hermeneutical Humility

1.2.1.3 The Goal of Interpretation: Repentance and Transformation

1.2.2 Foundational Presuppositions and the Methodological Correlates

1.2.2.1 Biblical-Theological Presuppositions

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

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

1.2.2.4 Scripture Interprets Scripture

1.2.2.4.1 Literal Sense and Canon

1.2.2.4.2 Testimony or Witness as Epistemologically Basic

1.2.2.4.3 Point of View and Interpretation

1.2.3 Canonical Criticism and the Hermeneutical Implications for the Present Study

1.2.3.1 Introduction

1.2.3.2 The Canonical Criticism of James Sanders

1.2.3.3 The Canonical Approach of Brevard Childs

1.2.3.4 Canon and Authority

1.2.3.4.1 Childs and Sanders on Canon and Authority

1.2.3.4.2 Lee Martin MacDonald and Canon
1.2.3.4.3 Canon and the Presupposition of Divine Providence .............. 82
1.2.3.4.4 The Usefulness of the Canonical Approach Based Upon Supernaturalistic Presuppositions ......................... 83
1.2.3.5 The Canonical Approach and Its Application in the Present Study .... 88
1.2.3.6 Acts as Canonical Bridge ................................................................. 94

Chapter One Addendum ............................................................................. 98

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 ............................................................ 106

2.1 Recap and transition ............................................................................. 106
2.2 Introduction ............................................................................................ 110
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 ....................................................................................... 111

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

2.3.2.1 Authority and Revelation ............................................................... 116
2.3.2.2 Revelation and Mission ................................................................. 118
2.3.2.3 Authority and Mission ................................................................. 119
2.3.2.4 Brief Preliminary Application to the Opening Discourse of Acts .... 122

2.3.3 Jesus- the Primary Apostle and Delegated Authority of the Father .... 123
2.4 Part II: The Delegation of the Authority, Revelation and Mission of Jesus to the Disciples and the Holy Spirit ..................................................................... 127
2.4.1 Introduction ........................................................................................................... 127

2.4.2 The Joint Authorization and Mission of the Apostles and the ....................... 128
Holy Spirit

2.4.3 The Mission of the Apostles .................................................................................. 130

2.4.4 The Mission of the Spirit ....................................................................................... 132

2.4.5 Conclusion to Part II ............................................................................................. 135

2.5 Part III: The Theological, Historical Integration of the ..................................... 137
Narrative Discourses of Acts Chapters One and Two:
The Pre-Ascension ‘Theo-logic’ and Promises of Jesus Realized

CHAPTER THREE: The Theological and Historical Integration of the
Narrative Discourses of Acts 1-2: The Pre-Ascension Theology and
Promises of Jesus Realized ................................................................................................. 141

3.1 The John-Acts Connection: Acts Chapters One and Two .................................. 141

3.1.1 An Overview ......................................................................................................... 141

3.1.2 Implications for the Structure of the Opening Discourses of Acts ............... 146

3.1.3 Summary ............................................................................................................. 151

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 ................................. 152

3.2.1 Preliminary Comments on the Literary Art of Luke and Its ....................... 152
Relationship to His Historiography and Theology

3.2.2 Discourse Structure of Acts 1:1-11 ................................................................. 153

3.2.3 The Center of the Chiasm ............................................................................... 160

3.2.4 History, Theology, and Literary Artistry in Acts 1:1-26 ............................... 166

3.2.4.1 ‘Truth Claim’ and Luke’s Historiography .................................................. 168

3.2.4.2 ‘Truth Value’ and Luke’s Historiography .................................................. 169
3.2.4.2.1 The Correspondence Theory and Luke’s Historiography........... 170
3.2.4.2.2 The Coherence Theory and Luke’s Historiography.................. 173

3.3 SUMMARY .................................................................................. 178

CHAPTER FOUR: Act 1 (Acts 1:1-11) The Ascension of Jesus: The Transition In the Continuation of Jesus Ministry ........................................... 180

4.1 Chapter Objective ......................................................................... 180
4.2 The Ascension as Transition.............................................................. 182
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 ............................................................................. 186
4.3.2 The Canonical Context ................................................................. 190
4.3.3 Does All that Jesus Began to Do and Teach As Prophet, Priest and King Continue in Acts?

4.3.3.1 Introduction .......................................................................... 194
4.3.3.2 Jesus’ Role As a Servant-Prophet.............................................. 196
4.3.3.3 The Prophetic Role Continued In Acts ....................................... 197
4.3.3.4 Jesus’ Servant Role as Priest..................................................... 201
4.3.3.5 The Priestly Role Continued in Acts ......................................... 203
4.3.3.6 Jesus’ Servant Role as King...................................................... 207
4.3.3.7 The Kingly Role Continued in Acts ........................................... 209

4.4 Summary ...................................................................................... 212

CHAPTER FIVE: Summary and Conclusions ........................................... 216

5.1 Summary of the Dissertation........................................................... 216
5.1.1 Summary Overview ...........................................................................................................216
5.1.2 Chapter One ......................................................................................................................216
5.1.3 Chapter Two .......................................................................................................................219
5.1.4 Chapter Three ...................................................................................................................220
5.1.5 Chapter Four .....................................................................................................................221
5.2 Conclusion ..........................................................................................................................221

5.2.1 Acts 1:1 The Continuity of Jesus' Mission Post-Ascension ..............................................221
5.2.2 Hermeneutical Conclusions ..............................................................................................223

5.2.2.1 The New Testament Canon and Acts ...........................................................................223
5.2.2.2 The Canon and Biblical Theology ...............................................................................228
5.2.2.3 Conclusions Concerning the Function of Canon .........................................................230

WORKS CITED ..........................................................................................................................232
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 2.1 .............................................................................................................. 130
Figure 2.2 .............................................................................................................. 139
Figure 3.1 .............................................................................................................. 143
Figure 3.2 .............................................................................................................. 150
Figure 3.3 .............................................................................................................. 156
Figure 4.1 .............................................................................................................. 184
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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.

Above all, I thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ for the gifts of his Word and Holy Spirit. "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort" (2 Cor 1:3 NIV) who indeed, during the lonely, arduous, long hours throughout the seasons of dissertation-induced isolation, strengthened and comforted my heart.

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

ABD  The Anchor Bible Dictionary. Edited by D.N. Freedman. 6 vols.
ACNT Augsburg Commentaries on the New Testament
AUSTER Australasian Theological Review
BibliRes Biblical Research
BTB Biblical Theology Bulletin
BETI Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium
Bib Biblica
CBQ Catholic Biblical Quarterly
FRLANT Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
HTh Ho Theolgós
HBT Horizons in Biblical Theology
Int Interpretation
ITQ Irish Theological Quarterly
IVP InterVarsity Press
JETS Journal of Evangelical Theological Society
JBL Journal of Biblical Literature
JSNT Journal for the Study of the New Testament
JSNTSup Journal for the Study of the New Testament, Supplement Series
JSS Journal of Semitic Studies
JSOT Journal for the Study of the Old Testament
MT Modern Theology
NIBCNT New International Biblical Commentary on the New Testament
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NLH</td>
<td><em>New Literary History</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NTS</td>
<td><em>New Testament Studies</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>NovT</td>
<td><em>Novum Testamentum</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>PTMS</td>
<td>Princeton Theological Monograph Series</td>
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<td>PTR</td>
<td><em>The Princeton Theological Review</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>SP</td>
<td><em>Sacra Pagina</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>SBT</td>
<td><em>Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology</em></td>
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<td>Semeia</td>
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<tr>
<td>SBLDS</td>
<td>Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series</td>
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<td>SBLMS</td>
<td>Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series</td>
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<td>SNTSMS</td>
<td>Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series</td>
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<td>SJTh</td>
<td><em>Southwestern Journal of Theology</em></td>
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<td>StudBib</td>
<td><em>Studia Biblica et Theologica</em></td>
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<td>Themelios</td>
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<td>TrinJ</td>
<td><em>Trinity Journal</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>TynB</td>
<td><em>Tyndale Bulletin</em></td>
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<td>TZ</td>
<td><em>Theologische Zeitschrift</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>WTJ</td>
<td><em>Westminster Theological Journal</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>WUNT</td>
<td><em>Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament</em></td>
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<td>WBC</td>
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