



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.