

# ***Preliminary Resources for Doing Canonical Theology***

## ***Doing Theology/Preaching the Redemptive Narrative***

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### **Homiletics: Preaching the Redemptive Narrative**

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## Doing Canonical Theology in the Redemptive Narrative

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## Musings on the Use of *Redemptive Narrative*

### Description

The Spirit used a rich plethora of genre as he bore along the prophets and the apostles in the writing of the God breathed Word. The dominant genre (78%) of the canon is narrative. Most of the other genres interpret and apply the narrative or present material concerning the consummation of the narrative in the *eschaton*. One would expect this to be the case given the fact that God placed this word/deed revelation in history through gradual progress. The historical development of the revelation is an internal unfolding and thus an organic process. The closer the process comes to completion the shorter the time period for its introduction in history.

Canonical Biblical Theology is the exhibition of the organic progress of special verbal revelation in its historic continuity and multiform genre. All of the literature belonging to O.T. Biblical Theology and N.T. Biblical Theology is relevant and important to this understanding. The phrase, *Canonical Theology*, is an attempt to do away with the division of O.T and N.T. and look at the whole of the narrative from Genesis 1 through Revelation 22. Genesis chapters 1-4 and Revelation chapters 18-22 provide the bookends for the scope of the entire word/deed complex of the special verbal revelation of God.

This concept can be illustrated with the following literary diagram of the internal expansion and multiform continuity in word/deed revelation:

### ***The Overarching Chiasmus***

1. Creation/Perfection – Genesis 1 & 2
2. Sin/Judgment – Genesis 3 & 4
3. Old Covenant Redemptive Event
- 3.' New Covenant Redemptive Event
- 2.' Judgment/Removal of Sin – Rev. 18-20
- 1.' Consummation/Perfection – Rev. 21-22

### Two Caveats

(1) The choice of the nomenclature, *Redemptive Revelation*, is intended to help disassociate the concept from *Narrative Theology* (an east coast school of teaching that does not take a high view of scripture). It is also intended to avoid the use of *metanarrative* which has developed a very odious connotation in postmodern thought and practice.

(2) Alas, even the use of, *canonical*, has some associations that are not the best. Brevard Childs, an O.T. exegete and commentator, has developed the notion of *Canonical Theology* in his O. T. commentaries, especially the one on Exodus. Many of

his insights are in harmony with biblical teaching but it must be admitted that he does not hold a high view of scripture. One of the baffling things in this domain is that many scholars who reject a high view of inspiration pay more careful attention to the text than many scholars who do share a high view of inspiration. I know that I do not speak for everyone when I affirm that God, by his common grace, has given these men insight which can be integrated onto the foundation of truth for the advancement of our understanding of canonical theology.

It seems to me that Collins, Sailhammer and Wright are on a correct trajectory in thinking this through and actually doing theology in the redemptive narrative. Wright and Collins demonstrate the ability to combine narrative exegetical skills in doing theology without having to import theological ideas from non textual sources. Their way of approaching this task appears to be headed in the correct direction for the development of this kind of theology. Their works should be read with attention to process as well as content.

### **Implications for Preaching/Apologetics-Evangelism/Worldview**

Perhaps the core question is how should we approach preaching in this postmodern and post Christian age of paganism? Every culture and person is narrative based. Collectively our culture has a history which is added to each day. Each person's life is a narrative from birth to death and after. Nuanced preaching in the rational analytical style of the Enlightenment period is probably not the best way to address this present culture (those born after 1980).

Apologetics as a formal discipline and as the informal practice of every believer should also shift to a canonical approach. Peter affirmed that we are to be ready to give an answer to anyone who asks concerning the hope in our midst. A canonical theology of hope from Genesis to Revelation should be mastered in order to give such an answer. The tasks of apologetics include but are not limited to: (1) clearing away misrepresentations of the faith and answer objections, (2) presenting the core of our Christian worldview. (3) gently showing people the implications of their worldview (not destroying it and leaving them emotional wrecks), and (4) to persuade them to repent and believe in Christ as the only Savior of men.

Presentation of our worldview (another word with odious connotations to postmodern persons) would best be done by articulating the flow of redemptive history. Necessary skills in doing this will include showing the narrative is coherent and compelling on its own terms. For too long the church has used extra canonical standards to support its claim for the truth of the narrative. It is time to trust the gospel to be the power of God and affirm that it is a self-attesting word, the speech/act God breathed word.

The gospel is inclusive of Genesis 1 through Revelation 22. Every time we seek to reduce it to minimal core the reduction ends up being a distortion rather than a faithful representation of the whole. Apostolic presentations of the gospel in Acts shed some essential light on the task. If the audience is Gentile the presentations begins with

creation, presents the fall, offers the promises of the Old Covenant, shows how they are fulfilled in Christ, rehearses men's verdict on Christ in contrasts to God who raised him and seated him at his right hand and ends with the announcement that this Jesus will judge all men in the final judgment. If the audience is Jewish then the starting point is the promise of deliverance in Messiah, Jesus is the fulfillment of those promises, your verdict on him was crucify him, God's verdict was he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand and this Jesus will be the judge at the last day.

Since God has commanded all men everywhere to repent and believe in Jesus as the only Savior of men then the appropriate response to hearing the gospel is repent and believe and be baptized for the remission of sin and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. It appears obvious that preaching, evangelization, ministry, and the doing of theology in a postmodern age are well served by developing and implementing the redemptive narrative into every aspect of church life. The gospel should define every aspect of the life of the church as well as her ministry. If governance, budgets, ministry programs, outreach attempts are not grounded in the gospel then they are inappropriate and lead to small yet unneeded compromise. Every aspect of church ministry must be grounded in the *Mission of God* and thus in the redemptive narrative of God's acts and words including the urgency of the consummation.