

THE MOST SIMPLE AND COMPREHENSIVE SCRIPT FOR THE THEO-DRAMA OF SCRIPTURE: THREE ACTS OR FOUR?

DAVID H. WENKEL

1454 ASHLAND AVE, APT 302, DES PLAINES, IL, U.S.A. 60016
dwenkel@gmail.com

1. INTRODUCTION

Stephen begins his speech to the Sanhedrin by saying ‘the God of glory appeared to our father Abraham...’ (Acts 7:2). Stephen’s rhetorical recounting of salvation history reflects the significance of narrative power in the early church. Stephen’s speech cannot be reduced to mere history and it follows a pattern of using historical summaries as prophetic speech. David G. Peterson notes that potential parallels to Stephen’s speech include Joshua 24:1-18; Psalm 78; 106; Ezekiel 20; 1 Enoch 84-90, etc.¹ A tradition of biblical and extra-biblical materials clearly exists that supports the conclusion that God’s people should be able to summarize the story (or stories) of the mighty deeds of Yahweh.

With the close of the canon, the content of this Christ-centred theo-drama is now fixed as the prophetic words of Scripture. Yet it is not clear that the number of acts or scenes in the theo-drama of Scripture has been determined.² Correctly identifying the number of acts is particularly important because of the turn from the search for the Bible’s centre to the search for the Bible’s storyline.³ The overarching narrative plot of the

¹ David G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles* (PNTC; Grand Rapids/Nottingham: Eerdmans, 2009), p. 245.

² For an exposition of Christian ‘theo-drama’ see Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville: WJKP, 2008), p. 324 n. 50; Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory, Vol 1: Prolegomena* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), *passim*, esp. pp. 12, 66.

³ Daniel J. Brendsel, ‘Plots, Themes, and Responsibilities: The Search for a Center of Biblical Theology Reexamined’, *Themelios*, 35:3 (2010), 402. With respect to the turn toward plot and drama, I agree with Richard B. Gaffin Jr.’s argument that redemptive-historical approaches (narrative methods) can complement, rather than replace, more traditional systematic loci methods in ‘A New Paradigm in Theology?’, *Westminster Theological Journal*, 56:2 (1994), 380. David K. Clark comments that narrative theology is both trendy

Hebrew Scriptures and New Testament combined consists of distinct categories, movements, scenes, or acts. There are various ways of engaging the storyline of the Bible and they all reflect the perspective of the expositor. The number of acts in the story will depend on how much detail the expositor decides to include or exclude. In other words, communicating the storyline of Scripture requires one to ‘zoom-in’ or ‘zoom-out’ with respect to certain features.⁴ With respect to the most macro-level view of the drama of Scripture, one needs to ask this simple question: what happens next?

Despite slight variations, a very common organizing principle focuses on three acts: (1) creation, (2) fall, (3) redemption.⁵ However, there are those who include another act at the end: (4) consummation.⁶ Relatively

and hard to define in *To Know and Love God: Method for Theology* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2003), p. 46.

⁴ For a discussion about the ‘biblically determined turning points in the history of redemption’, see D. A. Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), p. 81.

⁵ Sean McDowell, *Apologetics for a New Generation* (Eugene, OR: 2009), p. 132; Michael W. Goheen and Craig G. Bartholomew, *Living at the Crossroads: An Introduction to Christian Worldview* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), p. 24; Kevin J. Vanhoozer, ‘What is Everyday Theology? How and Why Christians Should Read Culture’ in *Everyday Theology: How to Read Cultural Texts and Interpret Trends*, ed. by Kevin J. Vanhoozer, Charles A. Anderson, and Michael J. Sleasman (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), pp. 15-62, esp p. 27; Albert M. Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview*, 2nd edn (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), p. 12; W. Robert Godfrey, *An Unexpected Journey: Discovering Reformed Christianity* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2004), p. 95; Cornelius Plantinga Jr., *Engaging God’s World: A Christian Vision of Faith, Learning, and Living* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), p. 16; Clark M. Williamson, *Way of Blessing, Way of Life: A Christian Theology* (St. Louis: Chalice, 1999), p. 83; Douglas M. Jones III, *Why and What: Second Thoughts on the Christian Message* (Moscow: Canon Press, 1994), p.12; Gaffin, ‘A New Paradigm in Theology?’, p. 381; Brian J. Walsh, *The Transforming Vision: Shaping a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1984), p. 44.

⁶ Michael Lawrence, *Biblical Theology in the Life of the Church* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010), p. 95; David W. Hall, *Calvin and Culture: Exploring a Worldview* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2010), p.15; Ernst Käsemann, *On Being a Disciple of the Crucified Nazarene: Unpublished Lectures and Sermons*, ed. by R. Landau with W. Kraus; trans. by Roy A. Harrisville (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), p. 43; Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Worship: Letting the Gospel Shape Our Practice* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), p. 243; Matthew Eppinette, ‘Human 2.0: Transhumanism as a Cultural Trend’, in *Everyday Theology: How to Read Cultural Texts and Interpret Trends*, ed. by Kevin J. Vanhoozer, Charles A. Anderson, and Michael J. Sleasman (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), pp. 191-

few label this fourth act as 'judgment', 'restoration', 'fulfilment', or 'glorification'. Because this area lacks precision, historical figures, such as Irenaeus, are cited as holding to three acts and five acts.⁷ The literature that uncritically accepts three or four acts is vast and crosses many disciplines, including biblical theology, psychology, ethics, bioethics, apologetics, education, homiletics, and Christian worldview studies. Here I examine recent and influential literature that is generally evangelical. This interdisciplinary study takes up the question: how many acts/scenes does the theo-drama of Scripture have; *are there three acts or four?*

Before entering into the analysis, it will be helpful to create a thick description of what theologians are trying to achieve with three- and four-act theo-dramas. There are two concepts that are present in most of the uses of this narrative theology or salvation history (*Heilsgeschichte*). The first concept is that the theo-drama must be the most basic skeletal structure. The goal is to find the simplest outline of the script of the canon's storyline. There must not be any more reduction or contraction possible while the narrative pattern is preserved. Almost every use of the three- or four-act paradigm is described as 'basic' or is conceptually understood as such.⁸ The second concept present is that of comprehensiveness.⁹ The goal is to find the skeletal structure that encompasses the canon in a fully orbéd manner, where everything fits and reflects the singular authorship of God. Together, these two ideas qualify the critical question: *what is the most simple and comprehensive script for the theo-drama of Scripture?*

2. THE MATTER OF CANONICITY

It will be helpful to address the question that will naturally arise: why limit this study to three or four acts? After all, one could point to Wright

and Vanhoozer who both utilize five acts.¹⁰ Michael Goheen and Craig Bartholomew utilize six acts by adding the 'new creation' to Wright's schema.¹¹ So why not add these to the list? The simple answer is that the list may only contract so far because of the canon of Scripture.

First, I want to affirm the validity of schemes such as Vanhoozer's that utilize more than three or four acts. Again, there are various ways an expositor can develop the biblical storyline or script. For example, one may include or exclude events such as the Exodus, the Resurrection, or Pentecost. This explains why scripts that are more inclusive are valid and uncontroversial. It is well documented that the early Genesis narratives contain three acts: creation, fall, and redemption. Yet Sidney Greidanus approaches this fact from the discipline of homiletics and concludes that there is yet a fourth act (new creation) that lies beyond Genesis.¹² Carl Henry's appraisal of narrative theology acknowledges that the three-act motif does 'not fit all the biblical books'.¹³ The basis for a script of the canon cannot be reduced to using one book such as Genesis as its source because canonicity is the theological acknowledgment that God is the single author behind the whole.

Second, I want to affirm that we must base the script on the canon of Scripture.¹⁴ A canonical approach requires that a script that attends to at least the major turning points of the storyline. A canonical approach may be more inclusive but there is also a limit on what it may exclude. For example, no approach that excludes the act of creation can legitimately call itself canonical. It is probably not wise to say there is no maximum number of acts in the script, although it may be quite detailed. But there is indeed a minimum number of acts in the script that is canonical. Gene C. Fant Jr. argues in the same vein: 'any worldview that deletes one of the elements is not a fully functioning worldview'.¹⁵

208, esp. p.178; Michael S. Horton, *Introducing Covenant Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), p. 5; Gordon J. Spykman, *Reformational Theology: A New Paradigm for Doing Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), p. 135; John Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Challenge of Preaching Today* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), p. 170.

⁷ R. R. Reno cites Irenaeus as holding to 'creation-fall-redemption' in 'Sin, Doctrine of' in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Kevin Vanhoozer, et al. (London/Grand Rapids: SPCK/Baker, 2005), p. 749. For a discussion of Irenaeus' use of consummation see Eric Osborn, *Irenaeus of Lyons* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), *passim*.

⁸ Sidney Greidanus, 'Preaching Christ from the Narrative of the Fall,' *BibSac*, 161 (2004), 262.

⁹ For a further justification of the criterion of comprehensiveness see Brendsel, 'Plots, Themes, and Responsibilities', p. 409.

¹⁰ Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, p. 57; N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (London: SPCK, 1996), pp. 443, 467-72. Also note that Vanhoozer uses a three-act schema in his chapter 'What is Everyday Theology', pp. 27, 29, 34.

¹¹ Michael W. Goheen and Craig G. Bartholomew, *The Drama of Scripture: Finding our Place in the Biblical Story* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), p. 13. Also see their use of the three act script in their more recent work in Goheen and Bartholomew, *Living at the Crossroads*, p. 24.

¹² Greidanus, 'Preaching Christ from the Narrative of the Fall', p. 262.

¹³ Carl Henry, 'Narrative Theology: An Evangelical Appraisal,' *Trinity Journal*, 8 (1987), 9.

¹⁴ For a discussion of 'canonical scripts' see Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, p. 22.

¹⁵ Gene C. Fant Jr., *God as Author: A Biblical Approach to Narrative* (Nashville: B&H, 2010), p. 64.

The canon itself determines what may not be excluded from the most simple and comprehensive view of the storyline. This study specifically asks whether the act or scene of consummation may be excluded from a script that intends to be canonical. We must answer this question negatively; in order to be fully canonical, the script must not be so simple that it excludes the fourth and last act.

3. PRESUPPOSITIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Next, we must consider the origins of the three-act position. Some have suggested that the ‘creation-fall-redemption-consummation’ framework is ‘associated with the Reformed tradition’.¹⁶ But such a statement must be well qualified. There is no consensus amongst Reformed theologians as to whether the most macro-level summary of the script of the canon’s theo-drama requires three or four acts. Indeed, what seems to have gone unnoticed, despite the raucous debate on blogs in the Reformed community, is that there is a correlation between neo-Calvinism and three-act salvation history. Here I want to probe the implications of three- and four-act paradigms for the Reformed tradition and suggest implications for other traditions.

The rally cry of neo-Calvinism is the oft-quoted statement by Abraham Kuyper: ‘No single piece of our mental world is to be sealed off from the rest and there is not a square inch in the whole domain of human existence over which Christ, who is sovereign over all, does not cry: Mine!’¹⁷ What is not always clear from this seemingly uncontroversial statement is that it implies a particularly nuanced view of redemption. Specifically, it is associated with the neo-Calvinist view that all of creation is currently experiencing some level of redemption. Despite the popularity of this view throughout evangelicalism, this position has attracted strong opposition.¹⁸ Critics essentially assert that neo-Calvinism is over-realized

eschatology—positing attributes to the kingdom of this world that has not taken place yet. This leads many neo-Calvinists to focus on cultural endeavours so much that missionary and soteriological endeavours get set aside.¹⁹

In contrast to neo-Calvinism stands the ‘two kingdoms’ approach. The ‘two kingdoms’ approach argues that (1) God rules all things, and (2) the world is ruled in two fundamentally different ways. The first way is through the ‘common kingdom’ which is the fallen world. The second way is through the ‘redemptive kingdom’ that was established with Abraham (Genesis 15-17) and is only entered through faith. Thus, God is not redeeming culture or institutions of this world, as Van Drunen explains, God ‘is preserving them’ on the basis of the Noahaic covenant (Gen. 8:20-9:17).²⁰ In this model, there is a significant difference between preservation and redemption.

What appears to have escaped attention is the relationship between neo-Calvinism and three-act approaches to salvation history or theo-drama. This relationship is not one of causation. But two facts point to some type of relationship, albeit by way of correlation. First, several neo-Calvinist theologians stress the three-act model. This includes writers such as Wolters, Plantinga, Goheen, and Bartholomew.²¹ One notable exception is James K. A. Smith who has identified himself with *both* three and four-act scripts.²² Whatever the case may be, there is no doubt that Smith emphasizes the neo-Calvinist model of the present redemption of creation.

The intramural debate between Calvinists and neo-Calvinists points to broader implications. This is important because the neo-Calvinist model of the on-going redemption of culture is widely accepted by evangelicals of all stripes. The neo-Calvinistic approach to Christianity and culture lacks an emphasis on the antithesis between this world and the Kingdom of God. Negatively speaking, there is evidence that the use and popularity of the three-act model of theo-drama stems not from the pat-

¹⁶ Jeff VanDuzer, *Why Business Matters to God: And What Still Needs to be Fixed* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2010), p. 26.

¹⁷ See the use of this quote by James K. A. Smith in *Letters to a Young Calvinist: An Invitation to the Reformed Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2010), p. 99. J. Budziszewski suggests that Kuyper began with Calvin’s cosmological principle of God’s reign rather than Luther’s soteriological principle of justification by faith alone in *Evangelicals in the Public Square: Four Formative Voices on Political Thought and Action* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2006), p. 57 n. 61.

¹⁸ For a recent critique of neo-Calvinism and its view of redemption see David Vandrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms: A Study in the Development of Reformed Social Thought* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), *passim*, esp. pp. 348-85.

¹⁹ Joel R. Beeke, *Living for God’s Glory: An Introduction to Calvinism* (Harrisonburg, VA: R.R. Donnelley & Sons, 2009), p. 311.

²⁰ David Van Drunen, *Living in God’s Two Kingdoms: A Biblical Vision for Christianity and Culture* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010), p. 15.

²¹ Wolters, *Creation Regained*, 12; Plantinga, *Engaging God’s World*, 16; Goheen and Bartholomew, *Living at the Crossroads*, p. 24.

²² Smith takes a four-act position in: James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), p. 70; *idem*, *Who’s Afraid of Postmodernism? Taking Derrida, Lyotard, and Foucault to Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), p. 64. He takes a three-act position in: Smith, *Letters to a Young Calvinist*, p. 94.

tern of the canon itself but from the use of a theological paradigm, that presents a powerful vision of Christianity and culture (neo-Calvinism). Inevitably, the focus is on God's redemptive purposes to the exclusion of the world as the realm of sin(fulness). This is indicative of much of western Christianity and is of concern to all Christians, not just the Reformed community. It should be no surprise to find that theological agenda influences how one reads Scripture and how one puts the large pieces together. In sum, there is likely a connection between these Kyuperian neo-Calvinists and the three-act model of theo-drama because it suits their theological agenda.

4. INAUGURATED ESCHATOLOGY

A major goal of this study is to raise awareness about the on-going confusion or lack of precision about how many acts or scenes must be in the most macro-level script of the canon. The fact that one of clearest engagements with the topic in our study occurs in an extended book review is evidence of the need for more dialogue about three and four-act structured salvation history. Richard Gaffin Jr.'s review of Gordon Spykman's volume *Reformational Theology* only briefly probes Spykman's use of the four-fold 'creation-fall-redemption-consummation' structure.²³ The benefit of Gaffin's gracious review is that it points us toward the matter of inaugurated eschatology. Inaugurated eschatology is a term that refers to the already/ not yet paradigm: the Kingdom of God (and other fulfillments of promises) is both present and future.²⁴ Here I want to engage Gaffin's probe of Spykman and maintain that the four-act model remains superior.

First, Gaffin does not make any conclusions but he raises the key question: 'would not a better pattern be the triad creation-fall-redemption, subsuming consummation under the last and developing it under two major subdivisions: redemption present and redemption future (the proverbial "already-not yet")?' The first part of Gaffin's solution is to create a tiered or hierarchical script. It is without controversy that it is necessary to have more detailed data about the intricacies of the canonical theo-drama. We do not need to question the validity or plausibility of scripts that are more inclusive and expansive. The issue is the validity of the creation-fall-redemption pattern that excludes the fourth scene of consummation. *Adding another tier to the model is a highly plausible option but*

²³ Gaffin, 'A New Paradigm in Theology?', p. 381.

²⁴ For a classic presentation of this model see George Eldon Ladd, *The Gospel of the Kingdom: Scriptural Studies in the Kingdom of God* (1959 reprint; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), pp. 16-17.

the additional layer prevents this from being a viable alternative for those who are seeking the simplest form of the script.

Second, the suggestion that a three-act and two-tiered structure is necessary is evidence of the fact that a three-act script alone cannot reflect inaugurated eschatology (already/not yet).²⁵ If we assume that one's goals are simplicity and comprehensiveness, a three-act script cannot communicate the fact that there are continuities as well as radical changes that take place within the last act. Using one act (redemption) does not adequately summarize the continuities that characterize the already-ness of the kingdom of God. Likewise, one act cannot summarize the discontinuity between the cross/resurrection and the second coming of Christ (cf. Rev. 1:8). Inaugurated eschatology requires two poles to create tension in the middle. For this reason, a four-act model is superior. Gaffin essentially wants to ensure that it is clear that faith appropriates what will happen in the 'eschatological' future and brings it into reality in the present. As a consequence, Christians are aware that their existence 'in Christ' allows the future and final declaration of 'just' to be appropriated and made real in the present so that they are now justified yet a sinner. A four-act model provides a more suitable structure to communicating the tensions that flow through redemption and consummation. *The continuities and discontinuities of an inaugurated eschatology are not possible to communicate with a three-act script of the canon's theo-drama.*

Third, Gaffin's questions direct us to the heart of the controversy: the nature of 'redemption' and the nature of 'consummation'. These terms often go undefined. This may be intentional by some. The nature of a narrative is not to rely upon static propositions and definitions but to allow the ebb and flow of the narrative dynamics to establish definitions.²⁶ It is not clear that definitions will contribute much from a practical standpoint. Every skeletal structure of a plotline or narrative is only helpful if the narrative eventually has the background explained, characters developed, the crisis clarified, and the resolution flushed out. Here we are moving backwards, from the theo-drama to the skeletal structure. Because we already have a theo-drama in the canon, not any skeletal structure will do. *The theo-drama itself defines the structure of the script and the acts contained therein.*

²⁵ Russell Moore notes that 'evangelical theology has moved toward a Kingdom consensus around the concept of inaugurated eschatology' in *The Kingdom of Christ: The New Evangelical Perspective* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2004), p. 25.

²⁶ Vanhoozer argues forcefully that 'The narrative medium well illustrates the point that form makes a cognitive contribution in its own right' (*The Drama of Doctrine*, p. 282).

Fourth, Gaffin wants to subsume consummation under redemption because of the failure of traditional Reformed theology to integrate the 'eschatological dimension of the Christian life'.²⁷ This was addressed above as I demonstrated that the tensions of inaugurated eschatology are better explained in a four-act structure. Since 1994, both Reformed theology and Protestant theology in general have taken such a dramatic turn toward narrative that the traditional methods of systematic theology are now being questioned more than ever. Perhaps the pendulum has swung too far. Gaffin's concerns are helpful indeed because they point us to the integrative nature and complexity of the canon. *We cannot allow ecclesiological failures to determine the most simple and comprehensive script of the canon's theo-drama, we must relegate this to Scripture alone.*

In sum, we find that Gaffin's enquiry into Spykman's theological agenda has provided a fruitful avenue to probe the validity of the three-act theo-drama. We see that a three-act theo-drama is too simple to capture the complexities of the canon's content. Specifically, it does not adequately reflect the poles needed to support an inaugurated eschatology. In spite of the church's various failures to embody certain aspects of the canon's theo-drama, we must use the Scriptures alone to determine the structure of the script, as difficult as this may be. Gaffin's enquiry also correctly identified consummation as an area that needs to be looked at more closely; and to this we now turn.

5. THE CONSUMMATION OF CREATION AND REDEMPTION

The self-presentation of God in the canon, Graham Cole argues, is divisible into the two strands of creation and redemption.²⁸ Creation and redemption are distinguishable yet inseparable aspects of the overarching theo-drama of Scripture. With respect to the strands of creation and redemption, I want to do set forth two points. First, I want to acknowledge that the future of creation presents difficulties that may present support a three-act structure. Second, I want to highlight the Parousia as an event that requires a separate scene or act than redemption.

5.1 The Consummation of Creation. With respect to creation and consummation, several items are noteworthy. First, in spite of the fact that many (most?) Christian adults were taught in Sunday school that they would spend eternity with Jesus *in heaven*, there is a definite movement toward

²⁷ Gaffin, 'A New Paradigm in Theology?', p. 381.

²⁸ Graham Cole, *He Who Gives Life: The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2007), p. 25.

understanding the final location of the resurrection of God's People as the *new earth*.²⁹ The ultimate destiny of God's People is not to float around like disembodied apparitions. Now that the focus has shifted toward the 'new earth' rather than heaven, studies on eschatology have taken up the destiny of the earth. There is no doubt that the interest in environmentalism has spurred studies as well. Here I simply want to acknowledge a difficulty with the four-act view of the canon's theo-drama.

The difficulty that the strand of creation poses for a four-act view of the canon's theo-drama is that there is strong evidence that points toward a large degree of continuity between the earth as it is now and the new earth of eternity. For example, David Hegeman argues that the melting of the 'elements' with 'fervent heat' in 2 Peter 3:10-13 does not mean that the present earth will actually burn.³⁰ Likewise, Al Wolters makes a strong lexical argument that stresses 'the permanence of the created earth' in 2 Peter 3:10-13.³¹ Hegeman argues that if the cultural works of men and the natural elements burn up, then this makes it difficult to picture the deeds (*ergon*) that follow the saints.³² These interpretations suggest that the judgment of the earth (really the entire cosmos) and its cultural works will be judged ethically so that the new earth will contain many of the things we see now. The solution that Hegeman proposes is plausible: there is a parallelism between the way that the fire that descended upon and sanctified the tabernacle in Exodus 40 and the fire that will burn up the earth in 2 Peter 3:10-13.³³ This model is akin to the burning bush that was never consumed by the fire as Yahweh spoke to Moses (Exodus 3). Perhaps the earth will burn even as the bush did so as to produce the New Earth. The result of this exegesis is a stress on continuity: 'we conclude that there will be a real continuity between this world and the next'.³⁴

Hegeman's view is reflective of a current trend and theological issue that cannot be resolved by simply referring to inaugurated eschatology. I do not wish to attempt any solution to this matter. The point is to concede that such an emphasis on continuity lends itself toward a three-act model of creation-fall-redemption because the 'judgment' on creation at the 'end of time' is based largely on continuity with the present. However, there are

²⁹ N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (New York: HarperCollins, 2008), pp. 19-20.

³⁰ David B. Hegeman, *Plowing in Hope: Toward a Biblical Theology of Culture* (Moscow, ID: Canon, 2007), p. 88.

³¹ Al Wolters, 'Worldview and Textual Criticism in 2 Peter 3:10', *Westminster Theological Journal*, 49 (1987), 413.

³² Hegeman, *Plowing in Hope*, p. 88.

³³ Hegeman, *Plowing in Hope*, p. 89.

³⁴ Hegeman, *Plowing in Hope*, p. 90.

other reasons why this alone is insufficient to support a three-act model that excludes the act of consummation.

5.2 The Consummation of Redemption. Vanhoozer notes that the church finds itself within a ‘play’ or theo-drama, which is ‘three-dimensional’—referring to ‘creation, fall, and redemption’.³⁵ This is what sets the context of any culture, anywhere, at any place in time in its proper context (or, we might say co-text). With respect to redemption and consummation, I want to highlight the fact that the nature of the parousia demands a four-scene structure for the canon’s theo-drama. My point is that there are characteristics of redemption that require a separate act or scene of consummation.

The last scene of consummation achieves two things. First, in an inaugurated eschatological schema, the ‘end’ has already begun.³⁶ A fourth scene of consummation reflects the theology made clear in Hebrews 1:2, since the resurrection of Jesus we live in the ‘last days’. Possessing a saving faith in Jesus allows one to appropriate this resurrection as the Holy Spirit unites us with him in his death and resurrection life. Christians appropriate the end times into the present by faith so that the whole Christian life is lived *coram Deo* in light of the future. Second, in an inaugurated eschatological schema, the ‘end’ awaits us in the future. The final scene of consummation is the critical event in which believers receive the promise(s) of God, including their resurrection bodies.

An inaugurated eschatology must acknowledge that some aspects of God’s final and future judgment are already present or have already taken place. In addition, the declaration that a Christian is ‘just’ or completely righteous in Christ (being justified) has a future element that anticipates the final declaration. A three-act approach to the canon’s theo-drama emphasizes the ‘already’ to the exclusion of the ‘not yet’ in terms of its skeletal structure. It is possible to incorporate these elements into another tier in the three-act model, but the consummation scene is necessary in order to provide an outline of the script that does justice to the text.

Furthermore, the word ‘redemption’ is tied very closely to ‘salvation’ and the concept of deliverance.³⁷ This is significant for the case against a three-act model of theo-drama because the consummation is inclu-

³⁵ Vanhoozer, ‘What is Everyday Theology? How and Why Christians Should Read Culture’, p. 41.

³⁶ Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, p. 45.

³⁷ For example, Donald McKim connects the words and concepts for ‘salvation’ and ‘redemption’, *Introducing the Reformed Faith* (Louisville: WJKP, 2001), p. 89.

sive of God’s final judgment. God’s final judgment against sin and death has in some sense already occurred at the cross. And, in an inaugurated eschatology schema, we can see that elements of the final judgment have already taken place. For example, in John 3:19, the ‘judgment’ is that men preferred to love darkness rather than light. Likewise, in Romans 2:2 Paul speaks about God’s present judgment that now ‘rightly falls on those who practice such things’. God’s judgment is already present even as his salvation is already present. We must also say that God’s judgment is future even as his final salvation and final declaration of justification is future. The future judgment of Christ includes elements that are set in striking contrast with his pre-resurrection life. Jesus’ first entrance into Jerusalem was on a donkey (Zech. 9:9; Matt. 21:1-11; Mark 11:1-11; Luke 19:29-44; John 12:12-19) but his second entrance will be on a white horse (Revelation 19).

To be clear, the reason why a three-act approach cannot accurately portray the ‘not yet’ is because it cannot accurately portray both salvation and judgment as two distinct threads of God’s cosmic plan to glorify himself. Some people do not have and will never have the benefits of the atonement applied. Because the benefits of the atonement are never applied to those who will suffer God’s wrath and perfect justice for sin, they cannot be said to be ‘redeemed’ in any sense. Simply because the doctrine of eternal punishment restores justice to the cosmos does not mean that eternal punishment can be subsumed under the heading of ‘redemption’.

The four-act model is superior because it uses a broad term of ‘consummation’ which can include both the future saving and judging actions of God at the Second Coming of Christ. Because the three-act model has such a difficulty maintaining a clear model of eternal damnation for those outside of Christ, it also lacks an important dimension of doxology: God’s glory in justice. These facts about future judgment are so clear that any potential argument based on creation and the continuity between the present earth and the New Earth lose the weight needed to carry the argument for the three-act model. Only a four-act model reflects God’s variegated actions in consummation, namely, his salvation and his wrath through Christ for his glory.

6. CONCLUSION

There is a need for a simple and comprehensive script of the canon. The nature of this task is theological and is in some sense derivative and continually open to correction by the canon. At the same time, this task follows in the pattern of testifying to the mighty deeds of Jesus *in nuce*. The danger is reductionism whereby certain unique and important ele-

ments are collapsed into the same act or scene when they should remain separate. Both redemption and judgment redound to God's glory but we cannot totally subsume one into the other. The best way to capture both of these elements is four-act model that includes 'consummation'. Here we have argued that the theo-drama of Scripture must include four elements in its script in order to contain all of the key elements of the canon.

Offprint from:

SBET

Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology

VOLUME 30 NUMBER 1

SPRING 2012

Guest Editorial: Thirty Years On FERGUS MACDONALD	1-5
The Old Testament and the Unity of the People of God DAVID J. REIMER	6-20
You've Got to 'Accentuate the Positive': Thinking about Differences Biblically L. W. HURTADO	21-29
Unravelling Scottish Evangelicalism (Part One) MARTIN SPENCE	30-50
Evangelical Doctrine: Basis for Unity or Cause of Division? STEPHEN HOLMES	51-65
Reflections on a Centenary: Edinburgh 1910, Edinburgh 2010, and Lausanne III ROSEMARY DOWSETT	66-77
The Most Simple and Comprehensive Script for the Theo-Drama of Scripture: Three Acts or Four? DAVID H. WENKEL	78-90
BOOK REVIEWS	91-123