

ANDERSON UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

NARRATIVE THEOLOGY AND THE PRACTICE OF MINISTRY

**A PROFESSIONAL PROJECT SUBMITTED TO
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**BY
JAMES TODD FAULKNER**

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Abstract

Which narrative will frame our lives? Will our decisions be determined by the radio ads that fill the airwaves and the billboards that punctuate our morning and evening commutes? Will we be driven by the drive to success and wealth and health at all costs? Or will we, as the people of God, intentionally choose to be shaped by the narrative of God's presence and powerful ways among us? Will God's redeeming story be the unfolding narrative that frames our formation and hones our habits? Will the story that God has long been and is still writing be the script by which we learn how to speak and act and respond as God's people in this broken world that God loves? Will we, as God's church, be God's story-formed community?

The question of formation is one that needs to be addressed in our time. Postmodernity has demanded that the Western Church be holistic in the expression of its faith. Faith-formulas can no longer be credibly peddled. Even systematic theologies—if divorced from their natural narrative contexts—do not supply adequate summaries and present sufficient presentations of the Christian faith. How can they, when the Christian faith is far more than a collection of well-organized proof texts, logically reasoned and conclusive arguments, and well-crafted creedal statements? The Christian faith is a life—a way of following and forming and reforming—a narrative into which all of us have been invited to “live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28).

The thesis of this Dissertation/Project is that Christian faith is most faithfully and fully formed in the context of a narrative community. That is, the more the Church seeks to be an engaged and engaging community in the great narrative of God's redemptive

ways among us and for the sake of this world, the more the Church will make disciples of Jesus who embody “the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints” (Jude 3).

In chapter one, Narrative Theology, I make a case for the practice of Christian faith and ministry that is formed by a narrative theology of Christianity as opposed to one that is formed by a solely systematic theology of the Faith. In chapter two, Narrative Theology and the Passover/Exodus Story, I examine this central biblical narrative of redemption that has shaped (and continues to shape) both the text and the textual community of God’s people for generations. In chapter three, Narrative Theology and the Practice of the Lord’s Supper, I explore a particular practice of biblical faith in the wider context of its narrative framework as well as its narrative potential for forming and reforming the people of God. In chapter four, Practical Component: “A Meal to Remember,” I offer an example of how narrative theology can inform and enhance the practice of Christian ministry. Finally, before offering some suggestions for further study and some conclusions drawn from this work, I offer—in chapter five, Narrative Communities Today—three examples of how three very different narrative communities of Christian faith and formation embody Christianity in the Postmodern West of the twenty-first century.