

Book Review



Hornik, H., and Parsons, M. (2017) *The Acts of the Apostles Through the Centuries*. West Sussex: Wiley Blackwell. 368 pp, MSRP \$125.00, ISBN: 978-1119304067

The Acts of the Apostles Through the Centuries attempts to fill a gap created by biblical scholarship, which has sought to explicate what Acts “meant” in its original context, and what it now “means” in contemporary terms by highlighting what it “has meant” during the intervening period of the last two thousand years at various critical moments in history. To accomplish the task, Hornik and Parsons examine not only the history of the exegesis of Acts, but how Acts has influenced art, literature, music, liturgy, theology, church creeds, and film.

In the introduction, Hornik and Parsons provide an outline of Acts alerting readers to the range of concerns spanning the centuries. They list key interpreters, lectionaries, creeds, and the influence of Acts in art and literature. In Acts 1, Jesus' ascension was significant to early creeds and hermeneutical debates. In Acts 2, the authors highlight connections between Pentecost and Sinai, Pentecost and Babel, and Creation and Consummation, while also highlighting how others have debated the miracle of tongues. Pentecostal reception history and various themes identified by contemporary Pentecostal voices are also discussed. Baptism, wealth and possessions, communal living, and creeds focusing on ecclesiology were interpretive concerns in the latter part of Acts 2.

In Acts 3-5, the authors note the wide range of hermeneutical methods employed over the centuries. Artwork reinforced papal authority, the importance of catechesis, and contrasted almsgiving and greed. The numerous interpretations of Acts 5:29 suggest that the text was applied to issues that concerned the interpreters. Acts 6-8 was instrumental for church reorganization, Stephen's speech of significance to the Reformers, and his martyrdom the subject of both art and literature. Numerous aspects of Paul's conversion/call have been debated. Regarding Tabitha, traditional and feminist interpretations of Luke's views of women in ministry are discussed.

Early interpreters of Acts 10-12 debated tensions in Cornelius' life. Others who reflected on Peter's vision found a God who is unprejudiced; a picture captured by Fetti's *Saint Peter's Vision of Unclean Beasts*. On Acts 12, the authors note the acceptance and rejection of angels, as well as James' execution and Peter's liberation in paintings.

Paul's commissioning and missionary journeys served as paradigms for missionaries and for selecting church leaders. Acts 14:23 was also a scriptural basis for congregational polity and ordaining church offices. Artistic works depicted the *Conversion of the Proconsul*, the *Life of Paul*, the *Sacrifice of Lystra*, and *The Stoning of Paul*.

In the reception of Acts 15, themes such as conflict resolution, cultural adaptation, gender inclusion, believer's baptism, missions, the authority of Scripture, God's providence, the gay marriage debate, and the conflict between Paul and Barnabas have received much attention. In Acts 16-17, Paul's circumcision of Timothy found ecclesiastical and social applications; the Macedonian vision theological reflection on divine guidance and sovereignty, and the church's obligation to the Great Commission. Paul's Areopagus speech was significant for patristic writers developing systematic theology; a basis for natural theology for others, whereas others still focused on final judgment, cross-cultural applications, and God as Creator.



For the reception of Acts 18-19, the authors note interpreters commenting on the hospitality extended to Paul, Priscilla as a religious authority, arguments opposing infant baptism, and the role of relics in healing. Visual interpretations depict Paul before Gallio, and his miracle at Ephesus which shows Paul identifying with the poor and as a miracle worker. Interpretations and debates surrounding Sabbath observance, Eutychus' fall, church leadership, local church autonomy, and the translation of Acts 20:28b are all concerns of Acts 20. Interestingly, Acts 20:35 played a role in American political rhetoric. Related to the prophesying of Philip's daughters in Acts 21, Luke has been criticized for his lack of focus on women in leadership. Acts 22:16 received much attention from interpreters concerning the salvific efficacy of water baptism.

In Paul's defence before Agrippa, interpreters have focused on Paul's conversion account while others have explored the image of Paul in chains. In Acts 27 to 28, the authors alert the reader to a unique and fascinating use of allegory and symbolism by Prudentius applied to Acts 27:14-44. Early and modern commentators have focused on the providence of God in the shipwreck of Paul with artwork vindicating Paul as God's agent. Finally, interpreters have debated the ending of Acts.

Consistent throughout, Hornik and Parsons identify the diversity of interpretive methods used by commentators spanning the centuries. Students of biblical hermeneutics would be able to detect allegorical, typological, symbolism, literal, historical-critical, and feminist approaches. Interpretations of Acts was not accomplished in a void, as later commentators often adopted or built on the reflections of those before them, while others engaged in debate. A lesson gleaned from this commentary is that since the history of interpretation reveals a vast range of views informed by one's political, social, and religious context, we must humbly come to the text cognizant of our own historical context and theological concerns.

Another contribution of a commentary of this nature is how the history of the interpretation of Acts demonstrates that historical narrative, contra to the axioms of Evangelical hermeneutics of the past, served as a significant source for normative theology. From the outset, Acts was used in the formulation of creeds and confessions, in the development of Christology, in debates surrounding water baptism, in developing ecclesiastical polity and leadership, in discerning the role of the Holy Spirit, in doctrine of God, and in navigating the social and political issues of the day. It is possible to denote that Hornik and Parsons' commentary serves as an example of the triumph of narrative theology, a fact that Pentecostals will well appreciate.

In their comments on the visual and literary reception and interpretation, it was insightful to see how artists and authors took liberties beyond the text when developing their interpretation. Whether paintings depicted Mary at the centre of a Lukan narrative, a picture of Paul out of his historical context, casting Peter in the likeness of the Pope, or depicting a ship as the church, artistic license shaped the theology of those who viewed them, serving as influential didactic media for the illiterate.

In the same way as a systematic theology text catalogues the theological views of major theologians spanning the centuries, Hornik and Parsons have provided a unique and enriching commentary that will be sure to serve the academy for years to come. The various comments and excerpts dealing with theological, social, and political issues will serve as a template for commentaries on other biblical books as the biblical text continues to intersect with an increasingly complex world.

Reviewed By:

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