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Review Article on Ben Witherington III, The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary

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each other. He convincingly shows that Peter's denial is not an interlude in the narrative, but a crucial component of it. Insights into the character of Jesus and his disciples accumulate as the narrative unfolds and do seem to reach a 'crescendo' in Jesus' trial and Peter's denial. Moreover, Borrell's narrative analysis of the Markan account of Peter's denial provides a basis for speculating about the rhetorical function of that episode and the gospel as a whole. However, narrational analysis can limit rhetorical analysis by imposing a conceptual grid of literary categories which are inadequate for interpreting the social and cultural texture of discourse. For example, B. Malina and R. Rohrbaugh argue that Jesus' appearance before the Sanhedrin is not a real 'trial,' but is a 'status degradation ritual,' which along with the crucifixion is an attempt to humiliate (shame) Jesus and discredit his followers (B. Malina – R. Rohrbaugh, *Social-Scientific Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels* [Minneapolis, MN 1992] 271-274). By analogy, Peter's behavior represents a failed attempt to escape his own status degradation when he is identified as a Galilean and an associate of Jesus. Considering how Mediterranean values of honor and shame are encoded in the text, Peter's remembrance of Jesus' prediction comes as he realizes the futility of defending his status (honor), and his weeping represents the shame he feels. The paradox is that Peter's defense of his honor before the attendants of the high priest leads to his feeling of shame before Jesus. Borrell is correct that Mark's narrative represents Peter as *not* completely distant from Jesus either spatially or spiritually. The text does invite readers to identify with Peter's thought and feeling at that moment, as Borrell argues, but the rhetorical thrust is a warning about the futility of following Jesus and hoping to maintain social status in the process. In conclusion, Borrell's narrative analysis offers cogent insights into the rhetorical function of Peter's Denial, but a thorough rhetorical analysis involves more than narrative analysis.

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Ben WITHERINGTON III, *The Acts of the Apostles. A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*. Grand Rapids, MI, W.B. Eerdmans – Carlisle, UK, The Paternoster Press, 1998. xlviii-874 p. 16 x 23,5. \$50.00

This impressive commentary on the Acts of the Apostles exemplifies Professor Witherington's usual close and cautious reading of the biblical text with careful research in and response to relevant secondary literature. Overall, it is thorough, thoughtful, and balanced, though grounded without apology in his Christian faith perspective on the issues raised by the text. W.'s 102-page introduction addresses the following: genre; rhetoric; authorship, date, and audience; text; structure, theology, and purpose; Acts chronology; Pauline chronology and Galatian data; and hermeneutics. One striking shortcoming is W.'s use of Greek in lower case but without accents or breathing marks –

even if W. had limitations in his word processor, the absence of Greek accents and breathing marks seems peculiar and unacceptable in an otherwise scholarly commentary. Witherington's commentary claims a special focus on (1) rhetorical dimensions of Acts as meant for oral reading, and (2) the similarity of Acts to Hellenistic historiographical works. The second, historiographical, emphasis is more obvious and frequently addressed. Thus, W.'s explanation of the order of Acts accounts by the historiographical tendency to ethnographic and regional ordering of narratives is helpful (e.g., 439). Although W. repeatedly refers also to rhetoric and analyzes the rhetorical structure of speeches, I do not recall much stress on explicitly oral dynamics after his discussion in the introduction (41-42, but note his insistence on rhetorical form in the Stephen speech, 260). In fact, my overall impression is less of a distinctly 'socio-rhetorical commentary' promised by the subtitle than of a standard detailed scholarly commentary that dialogues verse by verse with secondary literature, with about 27 excursus pertaining to particular passages. Thus, W. presents "A Closer Look – Luke's Use of the OT" (123-124) after treating Acts 1,16. Other 'closer looks' deal with issues like 'multiple Pentecosts' (denies, 134-135), salvation, Christology, summaries, sources, eschatology, social levels, miracles and magic, Josephus, synagogues, women, 'God-fearers', romance, Paul in Acts and the letters (letters not always more accurate, 430-438), chronology of letters and Acts (445-449), 'we' passages, *religio licita* (denies relevance, 444), travels, and Roman citizenship. Two appendices deal respectively with internal clues to the earliness of Galatians, and salvation and health in the first century. Because this is a commentary with multiple excursus rather than a monograph with a unified thesis, it is not an easy book to engage in discussion, and this review will tend to relate to diverse issues and passages. In general, however, besides engaging most Western-language approaches to Acts, W. gives more than usual serious attention to traditional patristic theories about Luke and Acts, such as to Eusebius's supposition of a favorable conclusion to Paul's Roman trial at the end of Acts (792-793), and to patristic attributions of authorship to 'Luke the beloved physician', but in a nuanced scenario somewhat like that provided by A.D. Nock (59, cf. also Joseph Fitzmyer below), which limits the author's claimed presence to the later journeys of Paul as signaled by the 'we' passages. The first-century analogy perhaps closest to this might be in *The Jewish War*, in which Josephus through the first person (usually 'I') signals his limited presence as an eyewitness to some of the later episodes of his account. Witherington makes heavy use of S. Praeder's criticisms of the notion that there was a convention of using 'we' in narrating sea voyages (480-486). He rightly notes how anomalous was the use of 'we' in Acts only in the plural, never in the singular, perhaps to remain unobtrusive. He points to the earliest evidence of how 'we' in Acts was understood by second-century Christians in Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* 3.14.1, as indicating an 'inseparable' companion, an overstatement to which W. prefers the more moderate phrase, 'Paul's sometime companion,' with Fitzmyer (*Luke I-IX*, 48,51; *Luke the Theologian*, 22). While sympathetic to this reserved explanation for the claim to participation made by the 'we' passages, I find the frequent references to the possibility that Luke may have been the team's sometime doctor as jarring as Irenaeus's exaggerated 'inseparable companion' (485; cf. 490, 175, n. 44).

To W.'s conclusion that the combination of 'we' passages and open-ended conclusion of Acts suggest that Luke sees his own time as continuing that period covered in Acts 1-28 (62), I would like to append my further suggestion that this open-ended ending of Acts explicitly prepares Luke and Acts for canonical appropriation and application by later readers (W. Kurz, "The Open-Ended Nature of Luke and Acts as Inviting Canonical Actualization", *Neotestamentica* 31 [1997] 289-308.). Witherington makes the problematic argument that the author was a native Greek speaker who does not know Aramaic, because he avoids Aramaic expressions from Mark (52). W.'s justification overlooks the widely acknowledged Lukan Hellenistic stylistic preference for avoiding barbarisms, which are what Markan Aramaic expressions would appear to Greek readers to be. Nor does W. agree with the common description of Luke and Acts as a 'continuation of the biblical history' (37). On the one hand, W. acknowledges the impressive similarities between the LXX and Acts, the author's deep indebtedness to especially prophetic portions of scripture, and shared vision with biblical and other Jewish historians about God and a chosen people guided by a holy book, etc. However, W. insists that 'the sort of history Luke chooses to write about is different in crucial respects from the sort found in the OT, or in the Maccabean literature, or in the Hellenistic Jewish historians. OT and early Jewish historiography is, like ancient Greek historiography, about battles, political intrigue, and the like, though of course God is a or even *the* major player in such dramas' (37). If one accepts this perhaps overstated contention about OT historiography, one might accept W.'s distinction of Luke and Acts as a different kind of *salvation* history achieved more through preaching than political or military means (37). 'This is about theological intrusion, not mere historical development' (38). However, such a dichotomy seems overdrawn for my reading of God's intrusive saving actions also in the Jewish scriptures. W. also argues that the Lukan view of the people of God is more inclusive (of gentiles) than the normal ethnographic OT and Jewish sense. I also find W.'s simple identification of audience with Theophilus problematic (63). Even if one grants that Theophilus was the patron for Luke and Acts, perhaps even the promoter (or 'publisher'?) of the two volumes, a patron is not coextensive with the normally more numerous audience. Even if Luke was addressing Theophilus, he surely intended his work to be read by many. (Even Paul's letter to Philemon was meant to be heard by the entire church that met at his house [Phlm 1-3].) Witherington is plainly more sympathetic toward traditional views on 'introduction' questions like the authorship and genre and historicity of Acts (e.g., 235-240), than toward more reductionist, historicist, or deconstructionist attitudes which are suspicious of the historicity of Acts or which consider it (à la Richard Pervo) more as a romance (376-381). Some of his main 'opponents' in interpretation tend to be those who lean toward a minimalist evaluation of the historical genre or historicity of Acts, such as post-Bultmannians or G. Lüdemann (e.g. 328, n. 3), or those whose literary approaches tend toward post-structuralist deconstruction. For example, with a certain exasperation, W. remarks that the old Baur hypothesis of thesis-antithesis-synthesis should be laid to rest for good (96). Against the 'early Catholic' hypothesis, he claims the untidiness of Acts about the Spirit and baptism suggest a time before institutionalization (290, n. 41). However, W.

exhibits more tendencies to harmonize data than I am comfortable with (e.g., what Paul and companions saw and heard in the three conversion accounts, 313). W.'s implication that the writer Luke may have heard the Acts 26 version (303, n. 6) cannot be drawn even from the 'we' accounts, since the 'we' accompany Paul on his journeys to his trials but do not appear at his trials (as the Twelve were with Jesus on his journey to Jerusalem, but not at his trials). On several occasions, W. denies, with C.W. Fornara (*The Nature of History in Ancient Greece and Rome* [Berkeley 1983]), that there was any convention of inventing speeches for ancient histories, even though some bad historians did so (e.g., 33, 40; cf. W.'s discussion in *History, Literature, and Society in the Book of Acts* [ed. B. Witherington III] [Cambridge 1996] 23-32). Witherington's comparison of miracles and magic in antiquity and Acts (577-579) is an insightful reflection on Lukan narrative dynamics (despite an anachronistic reference to magic as conjuring tricks, 397). Unlike postmodern hermeneutics of suspicion in which *miracle* characterizes deeds done by 'our group' and *magic* deeds done by 'other religions', W. uses insights of authors like Yamouchi and Meier to resist reductionism and insist that ancients distinguished not only miracles from mundane events but also perceived 'something of a sliding scale' from pure miracle to pure magic (577). From W.'s Christian perspective, 'What characterizes magic is the attempt through various sorts of rituals and words of power to manipulate some deity or supernatural power into doing the will of the supplicant' (577). Observation by W. of the social significance of the Acts miracles and magic narratives relates his treatment more closely to contemporary approaches to this issue. W. notes how especially Acts 19 portrays Christianity as 'an alternative to 'popular' religion of magic and mysteries and astrology and fate. Acts 19 clearly distinguishes miracle from magical manipulation (578); yet Acts maintains the thaumaturgic dimension of Christianity, in which health is a subordinate but significant aspect of salvation (579).

Witherington makes a significant departure from the majority view on the relationship between Gal 2 and Acts 15 (he relates it more to Acts 11) and the related question of the chronology (and location) of the Pauline Galatian controversy (90-97, 440-449, esp. 444, n. 361; cf. 81-86, Appendix 1, 817-820). I believe that his careful arguments and evidence should be taken seriously and might perhaps be able to at least soften the perceived impasse between Pauline and Lukan approaches to the Jew-gentile issues addressed respectively in Gal 2 and Acts 11 and 15.

Especially intriguing (and I believe promising) is W.'s interpretation of the Apostolic Decree as reported in Acts 15 (460-470). W. argues against the fairly widespread 'kosher' interpretation of the items of the decree (cf. 434). He points out that in the decree, the word εἰδωλόθυτον is actually a Jewish Christian term which according to *TLG* (which mentions the exceptions only of 2 Macc 5,2 and *Sib. Or.* 2,96, which in turn may well be Christian interpolations) refers primarily not to the meat eaten but to the venue of temple feasts, in which are likely to take place all the four activities or elements forbidden in the decree – idolatry, πορνεία (as in temple prostitution), and strangling and blood, which occur in pagan sacrifices (460-470).

In other words, W. relates the apostolic decree of Acts 15 more closely to the problems Paul addressed in 1 Cor 8-10 and 1 Thess 4,1-9, than to Jewish-

gentile table fellowship or community problems in Christian churches (466). And W. proposes that the Pauline critique of idols at Athens recounted in Acts 17 accords with this decree, although I find problematic his suggestion that the Acts 17 speech may be Pauline (466, n. 435-436).

These are just a few of many questions or discussions I would have with specific points made in this learned commentary. For those seeking a recent commentary on Acts that engages intelligently most of the scholarly issues and tends to give a reasoned and reasonable presentation of more traditional stances on introduction and historical issues and approaches to Acts, I recommend this work.

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Giorgio GIURISATO, *Struttura e teologia della prima lettera di Giovanni*. Analisi letteraria e retorica, contenuto teologico (AnBib 138). Roma, Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1998. 720 p. 17 x 24. Lit. 98.000 – \$66.00

Le prime ricerche di Giorgio Giurisato sulla prima Lettera di Giovanni risalgono a una ventina di anni fa («Struttura della prima lettera di Giovanni», *RivBib* 21 [1973] 361-382). Il presente lavoro è la pubblicazione della sua tesi di dottorato presentata nel 1997 alla Facoltà teologica della Pontificia Università Gregoriana di Roma, sotto la direzione del prof. Ugo Vanni. A conclusione della sua dettagliata analisi del testo della prima Lettera di Giovanni, preceduta da un ampio *status quaestionis* di carattere storico, il Giurisato afferma di «aver trovato la soluzione del "puzzle"», per usare l'immagine di J.C. O'Neil" (1966), dimostrando che la Lettera «è fatta di pietre preziose ben lavorate, non allo stato grezzo, e che è una collana, non un mucchio di perle, brillanti, ma sciolte» (669). La chiave della soluzione del puzzle della 1 Gv per G. si trova nell'applicazione del genere letterario della «cria» — greco *χρεία*, latino *usus* — che, secondo i trattati di retorica classica — Ermogene di Tarso, tradotto in latino da Prisciano, e Teone di Alessandria e altri — comprende tre elementi: la citazione di una sentenza, attribuita ad un autore, l'elaborazione della cria mediante varie forme argomentative, e infine un'esortazione applicativa. Nella presentazione del suo approccio metodologico il G. conclude dice che la 1 Gv «è una ordinata raccolta di sette crie, racchiuse da un prologo e un epilogo» (287).

Questa conclusione è il frutto di un'ampia indagine che si sviluppa in due parti. Nella prima — quattro capitoli (250 pagine) — il G. ricostruisce la storia delle varie proposte di divisione e strutturazione della Lettera a partire dall'epoca antica (padri della chiesa) fino ai commentatori moderni e contemporanei. Anche se la documentazione sugli autori dell'ottocento e novecento è molto ampia e dettagliata (36 autori dell'ottocento e 84 tra commenti e studi del novecento) l'apporto più notevole della ricerca storica