

Kurz, William S. S.J. *Reading Luke-Acts: Dynamics of Biblical Narrative*. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993. x + 261 pp.

庫茲著。《讀路加福音——使徒行傳：聖經敘事體的變化》。x + 261 頁。

This book by William Kurz, a professor at Marquette University (Milwaukee, WI), belongs to an increasingly well-established current within biblical studies to employ literary-critical methods to study scripture. This wave stems largely from a growing discontent on the inability of the historical-critical methodology to overcome the bifurcation of exegeting the Bible either as historical source or as scripture. Kurz attempts in this book to use a combination of literary and canonical approaches to move the understanding of Luke-Acts beyond that offered by the historical-critical paradigm, without jettisoning the entire historical-critical enterprise itself. For example, historical criticism seems to have virtually exhausted all the plausible solutions to the identity of the actual author and readers of Luke-Acts. Yet these solutions remain no more than educated guesses. The use of narrative-critical categories like implied authors and readers, however, allows the scholar to "skirt these impasses." Instead of attempting to discover the actual author of the two-volume work, which is a historical task, Kurz uses these literary categories to ask "what kind of author with what point of view is implied by the intentionality of the text itself...and what the text's assorted perspectives can indicate about the kinds of readers for whom the narrative was envisaged (9)." However, Kurz does not intend his book to serve merely as yet another exercise to bring about the paradigm change from historical criticism to literary criticism. He makes it very clear that he is reading Luke-Acts as scripture, as authoritative of "belief, life, and practice in the Christian churches." Thus not every tool and concept developed from the literary studies of contemporary narratives will be brought to bear in the processing of understanding Luke-Acts. In fact, Kurz will criticize severely some of the scholarly tendencies in applying the categories of modern literary criticism indiscriminately.

After a brief introduction of the motivation for the book, Kurz divides his exposition into four sections. The first section (chs. 2-3) deals with the characteristics, methods, and questions appropriate to narrative in general. The concepts of "implied authors" and "implied readers" (as opposed to "actual") are explained and used in chapter 2 to indicate that Luke-Acts is intended primarily for Christian readers.

This conclusion is then expanded to take into account of the canonical context of Luke-Acts, arguing that the points of view of the text both in its original setting and its later context as part of the Christian Bible are grounded in and express the Christian faith. Thus reading Luke-Acts as biblical requires "a strong imaginative empathy for the Christian faith (15)." Chapter three introduces the concepts of

"plotting" and "gapping." Here Kurz investigates how Luke plots his narrative, especially as Luke expresses it in the prologue of the Gospel. Kurz then proceeds to test this stated plot by observing the beginning, sampling from the middle of the Gospel, and the end of both Luke and Acts. He also demonstrates how "gaps" left in the plot are meant to be filled by readers as they respond to the text.

The longest section in the book (chs. 4-8) is devoted to applying methods of narrative analysis to the predominant figure of the narrator, showing his influence throughout the prologues, the Gospel, and Acts. The narrator is simply the persona a given author chooses to reveal. Kurz argues that it is through the narrator that readers have access to the narrative's plot, characters, theology, ideology, and so on. He identifies four different kinds of narrators in Luke-Acts: (1) the "I" of the prologues who presents himself as a serious writer of historical narratives (called a *histor* by Kurz); (2) an unobtrusive, omniscient third-person narrator who recounts most of the storyline; (3) the "we" narrator in sections of Acts after 16:10 who is really a marginal observer and who claims participation in the events observed; and (4) the character narrators of stories within the story who are primarily speech-makers (e.g. Paul's recounting his call in Acts 22 & 26). After examining the varying uses of Lukan narrators throughout the Gospel (ch. 5) and Acts (ch. 6), Kurz probes further the special narrator "we" in chapter seven and examines its function within the Acts narrative. Chapter eight focuses on the speeches in Acts which betray a narrator who participates in the story telling an imbedded story within the story. This is illustrated by the repeated narratives of Paul's call in Acts 9, 22, and 26. The reason of "narrator" approach is to get around the interpretive cruxes that have frustrated historical critics for generations. Kurz pays special attention to the following problems: (1) the function of the travel narrative (Lk 9:51-19:44) in the Gospel; (2) tensions in the overlapping accounts between the ending of the Gospel and the beginning of Acts; (3) the discrepancies between the three Pauline conversion accounts in Acts; (4) the significance of the "we" passages; and (5) the abrupt ending of Acts.

Section 3 contains only one chapter (ch. 9). Following Alan Culpepper's approach,<sup>1</sup> Kurz examines how the "implicit commentary" of irony and misunderstanding, which utterly depend on the stance of the narrator in recounting the incident, are filtered through the Lukan narrators and their points of view. Irony is shown to express itself through knowledge shared among the demons and the readers, through questions about the identity of Jesus, in parables, and in the passion of Jesus and its retrospections in Luke 24 and Acts. Misunderstanding is portrayed by the Lukan ignorance theme (especially as it relates to the guilt of the Jerusalemites

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<sup>1</sup> R. Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983).

in the death of Jesus) and through the mocking of Jewish exorcists and of magic and pagan superstitions.

The last section involves both a defense of the preceding approach to the study of Luke-Acts through a combination of narrative analysis and canonical awareness (ch. 10) and a call to appreciate the orality of scripture (ch. 11). According to Kurz, the fact of the reception of Luke and Acts into the Christian canon implies that the intrinsic concerns of Luke-Acts must be viewed beyond the context of the two-volume work into a wider canonical structure. It must be read as part of the historiographical sweep of the Bible from creation in Genesis to the end of history in Luke 21 and Revelation. It also means that the importance of the original implied readers and the original situation for which they are destined are relativized. Once canonized within the New Testament, "their life setting reaches beyond the original one to include all the contemporary Christian uses of scripture." (161) Thus Kurz warns against indiscriminate use of the modern literary-critical categories which originate from a study of the modern novel (and thus presuming the novelist's contemporary individualism) on traditional narratives like Luke-Acts (which works within a traditional framework and speaks for the tradition to which it belongs). He also criticizes the employment of hermeneutics of suspicion as it expresses itself through methods like deconstruction. The oral dimension of reading Luke and Acts to a gathered community makes such methods, which are developed for privatized narratives, inappropriate. They are also alien to reading the Bible as sacred scripture and as the word of God, for it amounts to "refusing to play by the rules for reading according to which the original biblical writing was produced and canonized (174)."

The contribution of Kurz's work is twofold. First, he has shown that narrative criticism is a worthwhile complement to historical criticism toward the resolution of old cruxes and exposure of new questions to explore. It does not merely confirm previously assured results from historical criticism. For example, his careful observation of the use and claims of the "we" narrator in Acts pretty much debunks any theory that claims a separate "we-source". Nevertheless, it is reassuring to see that results from such a narrative analysis actually accord well with conclusions drawn from historical analysis as done by scholars like J. Fitzmyer.<sup>2</sup> Methodologically the focus of narrative analysis on the narrators of the text greatly alleviates the often uncontrolled conjectures about the "author" of the text through historical means, especially when historical data are ambiguous or insufficient regarding the identity, background and intention of the author. The strength of the approach taken by Kurz in this volume is that it avoids the reductionistic and alienating tendencies of

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<sup>2</sup> J. Fitzmyer, *Luke the Theologian: Aspects of His Teaching* (New York: Paulist Press, 1989). Kurz compares his results with that of Fitzmyer's in 122-23.



historical criticism by taking a more wholistic perspective with the insistence of a firm anchoring on the text. In doing so it both elucidates and integrates the text together as an organic whole.

The second contribution of Kurz's approach is his insistence on reading Luke-Acts canonically, as scripture. This stance gives him the ability to distinguish useful methodologies from others which are incompatible with the trust involved in believing scripture as God's word. He makes no apology when his conclusions are not "politically correct". Kurz's analysis makes it clear that the literary nature of Luke-Acts is traditional, not novel. The canonical context of Luke means that the Jesus of Luke's portrait had to correspond to the Jesus who was already known, followed, and worshipped by the Christian community. In his words, "The attitudes and points of view of Jesus and the main characters and the narrator had to correspond to and express the Christian revelation about God, human, Christ, the world, and their interrelationship. They could not be idiosyncratic to the Lukan author (172)." These two emphases constitute a sober corrective to those who tends to look for unreliability in the historical data contained in scripture on the one hand and those who suspects economic or patriarchal oppression behind the sacred text on the other. The triad of historical, literary, and canonical methodologies used in tandem and in check of each other seems to be a most promising approach to biblical exegesis, even though the last mentioned is still young as a method.

Having said these, one needs to be aware of the fact that no single method is foolproof and completely free of pitfalls. For example, the most prevalent narrative mode of Luke-Acts is given by a third-person narrator who is "omniscient". Taken as a literary technique this narrative mode allows a narrator to penetrate walls and even minds. In contemporary literature, this technique belongs solely to the realm of fiction. While the use of this category allows the insightful distinction between the narrator of the prologues (the histor) who is perfectly human and is subject to ordinary human limitations and the narrator of much of the rest of the materials, it raises the question of plausibility and even truthfulness from an epistemological standpoint, something which an evangelical exegete cannot allow to escape. One almost inevitably has to resort to some kind of historical explanation. Kurz does not deal with the implications of the existence of such a narrator.

There is a related problem. What if a different narrator also exhibits "omniscience" in the narrative, as in the case of the "we" narrator of Acts in 27:38-44 and 28:4-6, where the soldiers' secret plan was described (27:42) and the mind of the native Maltians was exposed (28:6)? In both cases Kurz has to resolve to a historical explanation (108, 117). This illustrates an important point: The category of "narrators", being an artificial narrative construct, like all other artificial constructs, is incapable of accounting for all literary phenomena, even those within its domain of analysis. In particular, a historical narrative, if it corresponds to reality at all, will most likely not be subject to clean-cut literary categories like the

"narrator". By its nature analytic tools tend to be constructed in terms of distinctive or mutually exclusive characteristics. Problems occur when the text disallows such a disjunctive analysis. Kurz does not address this issue. The bottom-line has to do with the limits of literary criticism in general and narrative analysis in particular.

Caution notwithstanding, Kurz's work is a reliable guide to the overall narrative framework of Luke-Acts. It constitutes an excellent textbook for those who want to understand how narrative criticism illuminates the message of Luke-Acts. Even more valuable to the Christian is the fact that Kurz exhibits a judicious sense of judgment regarding the use of contemporary literary methodologies because of his canonical stance. I only wish that he had been able to expand on this portion of his work. His clear prose makes for easy and enjoyable reading, and a substantial bibliography (427 items) and ample endnotes allow the interested reader to pursue further research in related areas.

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