

Matthew L. Skinner. *Acts*. Interpretation Bible Commentary. Westminster John Knox Press, 2025. 321 pages. \$45.00.

Interpretation Bible Commentary intends to capture the spirit of the earlier *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Preaching and Teaching* (1982–2003) by offering exegetical, theological, and hermeneutical insights from leading scholars taking advantage of interpretive developments over the last fifty years and written in language that is accessible and lightly suggests homiletical possibilities. Matthew Skinner's commentary on *Acts* is a herald of the new series and exemplifies the *Interpretation* approach while setting a high bar for subsequent volumes.

Professor Skinner sees Acts not as an objective historical account of events but as a theological narrative Luke created for a congregation perplexed by the delay of the second coming and other factors resulting in “confusion, disillusionment, and attrition.” The time was likely a period of “change, discernment, and possible instability” (2). To a congregation besieged by discouragement and flagging in mission, Luke seeks for Acts to “bolster the faith” and to empower the witness of the congregation (2).

Luke's strategy is to tell the story of Acts as the story of God working through the risen and ascended Jesus by means of the Holy Spirit to continue the movement towards salvation initiated in the ministry of Jesus but yet to reach its height in full and final salvation. With great sensitivity, the commentator identifies Luke's rhetorical, literary and theological artistry and its intended effects. Throughout, Professor Skinner points to God's initiative in the transformation from the new to the old as the spark for human response.

The work is enhanced by eight excurses that offer deeper considerations of leadership, humor in scenes of violent retribution, Paul as pictured in Acts, devout gentiles who reverence God, the significance of travel in antiquity, how to understand the Jewish opponents of Paul, the functions of “we” passages, and Paul's legal situation vis-à-vis Rome.

Our time, especially in the historic churches, is also one of “confusion, disillusionment and attrition” not only with respect to the church but increasingly with respect to developments in the national culture of the United States, especially in the political world. Professor Skinner highlights four ways in which Acts can encourage the church today. 1) The biblical book reminds the church of its foundational identity and mission to continue the work of Jesus. 2) Acts points to the diversity of Christian communities. 3) Acts does not impose specific agendas on the church but portrays the church responding creatively to the presence of the Spirit. 4) The narrative tells the story with “wonder, adventure, and delight” that can prompt congregations to “expect more from God” (15) and that invite listeners to see these qualities as part of Christian life.

The Revised Common Lectionary appoints readings from Acts every year on Easter Day, the Sundays after Easter, Ascension Day, Pentecost, and other significant liturgical occasions, such as the Nativity of John the Baptist and the Conversion of Paul. Professor Skinner helps the preacher consider how themes from the lectionary and from Acts relate with one another. However, the lectionary does not allow the congregation to hear the story of Acts in sequence, thus depriving the congregation of the opportunity to experience Luke's theological artistry in its ongoing narrative expression. The preacher could easily create a season of semi-continuous preaching on Acts that would expose the congregation to the narrative movement of the biblical book by selecting representative passages from the six parts into which Professor Skinner divides Acts and summarizing the intervening developments.

I am puzzled by the editors of commentary series continuing to assign separate scholars to the commentaries on the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts. The two books tell one story. The preacher cannot offer a fulsome interpretation of the Third Gospel without taking account of how the narrative continues in the Acts, and the preacher similarly cannot capture a full sense of Acts without having in mind the story told in the Gospel of Luke. It would make sense to have the two books interpreted by one scholarly point of view.

The last forty years have given birth to a number of resources in support of preaching. In a world of limited financial resources, preachers must make choices among the resources. I think preachers will find this commentary to be not only a reliable companion but an exciting one that will help the preacher toward sermons that are “informed, imaginative, and critical” and that help congregations “celebrate, seek out, and proclaim God’s faithfulness” (4).

Ronald J. Allen, Professor Emeritus of Preaching, and Gospels and Letters, Christian Theological Seminary, Indianapolis, IN