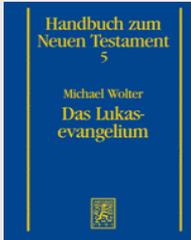


The *theological intent* of the Lukan Jesus-story

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The *theological intent* of the Lukan Jesus-story

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In this voluminous work the author confines himself to a tradition–historical approach, as determined by the publishers of the *Handbuch zum Neuen Testament* series, in order to explore the *theological intent* of the Lukan Jesus-story. As such, it continues in line with the *traditional* approaches in Biblical criticism, the previous commentary in this series being a form–historical approach by Erich Klostermann (1919, 1929). Tradition–historical criticism is, in short, a study of the process by which the oral and written traditions underlying the present text are developed. Wolter's commentary is accordingly characterised by a careful study of the Lukan 'text' and the use and meaning of each word or phrase within the cultural context of the ancient 'Jewish' (Hebrew or Judean), Greek, and Roman writers. It is an approach that highlights typical Lukan phrases and expressions and as such provides the reader with one key, amongst other, for understanding the uniqueness of the Gospel.

Although the line of thoughts are comfortably followed, the reading of the commentary is hampered, as noted by the author himself, by sentences being broken up by lengthy bracketed passages, as well as various sections in small print. This is attributed to the fact that the commentary had to be confined to one volume and the prescription that no footnotes were to be used.

In a typical historical approach, the *Introduction* addresses questions of reception, authorship, locality, sources, and intended readers. As a whole, the narrative is seen to be a 'simple act' (Aristotle), consisting of a series of 'episodes'. The beginning of each 'episode' is clearly marked by a shift in temporal, spatial, and/or personal particulars, which in turn provide the outline for the Gospel's structure. Unique Lukan features, which characterise Luke's style of writing, are highlighted extensively. They, in turn, form the stepping stones to an understanding of Luke's theological intent. On a macro-level, the story of Jesus is regarded as an *epoch* in the 'history of Israel'. As such, it forms an integral part of that history. The Jesus-story serves to explain to the Gospel's intended readers (Jesus followers in general throughout the ancient world and possibly also of future generations), why 'Christians' and 'Jews' are separated, despite having so much in common. Wolter rejects the notion that Luke's narrative merely describes the origin of the 'Christian movement'. It is the story of Israel, albeit a story of tension and rejection, which however, contributes to and culminates in the spreading of the Christ-story throughout the world. That there is continuity between the story of Israel and that of Jesus and his followers, is stressed throughout the Gospel, not least of all in the concluding reference that after Jesus' ascension into heaven, his disciples returned to 'Jerusalem' *joyfully*, and stayed in the 'temple' *praising God* (Lk 24:52–53).

The *Introduction* to Wolter's commentary is followed by the *Bibliography*, notably *before* the interpretation of the narrative itself. The bibliography is an extensive 20 pages, which stresses the fact that this commentary, voluminous and thorough as it is, is also a valuable *work of reference*.

With the sizeable array of references and the wealth of textual information provided on a verse by verse analysis of the text, the saying that you 'don't see the wood for the trees' applies. Each episode or passage is unfolded to the core, which makes it difficult to follow the golden thread in the story. Reading the *Introduction* is therefore essential to obtain a rough sketch of the Gospel's theological profile.

The commentary is not intended for the casual reader, but is aimed at scholars with an interest in a textual analysis of the Gospel. Being a tradition–historical commentary, references to ancient authors, such as Plato, Aristotle, Herodotus, Plutarch, Xenophon, Diognees Laertius, Athenaeus, Philostratus, Dio Chrysostom, Puleius, Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Philo, Flavius Josephus, and others abound (not listed in the *Bibliography*). These references provide both a contextual reading of the Gospel and highlight the unique Lukan features. Form-critical pointers and a narratological analysis of individual narratives further characterise the interpretation.

Such an in-depth commentary, in which the author purposefully confines himself to a particular interpretation methodology, is of immense value to any scholar. However, in view of the postmodern awareness of the limitations of each interpretation method used, it also highlights the need to engage with other interpretation methods. In the postmodern era commentaries are inevitably bound by the interpretation methodology used, and can therefore provide the scholar with only one interpretation amongst many. This particular volume's value lies in its thoroughness and its concentration on the original text within its literary and cultural context. The commentary makes a valuable contribution to the debate surrounding the uniqueness of the Gospel and the theological intent of the author. It is a must-have addition to the serious Lukan scholar's library and a worthy addition to the *Handbuch zum Neuen Testament* series.