

Book Reviews – Recensions – Buchbesprechungen

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Les Actes des Apôtres (1-12)

Daniel Marguerat

CNT Va; Genève: Labor et Fides, 2007, pb., 446 pp.

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ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Der erste Band von Professor Daniel Marguerats neuem Kommentar über die Apostelgeschichte zeigt die beträchtlichen Stärken von Marguerats Würdigung literarischer Züge einer Narrative zusammen mit einer besonderen Wertschätzung ihrer theologischen Bedeutung. Dabei bleibt aber ein Anflug von Enttäuschung zurück angesichts der scheinbaren Leichtigkeit, mit welcher der Autor historische Zusammenhänge außer Acht lässt. Die positiven Merkmale dieses Kommentars machen ihn zu einer unerlässlichen Lektüre für Prediger und Lehrer wie auch für Wissenschaftler. Jene, die sich eine ernsthaftere Auseinandersetzung mit den historischen Begleitumständen wünschen, auf welche die Narrative Bezug nimmt, werden einfach andere Kommentare benützen müssen.

SUMMARY

The first volume of Marguerat's new commentary on the Acts of the Apostles exhibits the strengths of his appreciation for literary features in a narrative along with an appreciation for the theological significance of the narrative, while leaving disappointment at the ease with which the author dismisses issues of historicity. The positive features of this commentary make it indispensable reading for preachers and teachers as well as academics. Those who wish to consider more seriously the historical circumstances to which the narrative refers will simply wish to supplement their use of this commentary with others.

RÉSUMÉ

Le point fort du premier volume du nouveau commentaire des Actes des Apôtres par Marguerat réside dans sa mise en lumière des caractéristiques littéraires de la narration ainsi que de l'apport théologique de celle-ci. L'auteur déçoit en revanche par la facilité avec laquelle il évacue les questions d'historicité. Les aspects positifs de ce commentaire rendent sa lecture indispensable pour les prédicateurs, enseignants et chercheurs. Ceux qui s'intéressent plus sérieusement aux circonstances historiques mentionnées dans le texte des Actes devront compléter cette lecture par celle d'autres commentaires.

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Professor Daniel Marguerat's first volume on Acts is a fine addition to the *Commentaire du Nouveau Testament* series of exegetical commentaries in French and to the available literature on Acts in general, though it is

not equally satisfying in every respect.

In his preface, Marguerat indicates that he intends to present a particular 'reading' (*lecture*) of Acts. He continues, 'Ma lecture des Actes des apôtres combine l'analyse narrative avec la critique historique' (7) ['My reading of the Acts of the Apostles combines narrative analysis with historical criticism.'] The dual emphasis on narrative and history will come as no surprise to those who are familiar with Marguerat's earlier writing. While I believe the narrative emphasis pays rich dividends, I fear that his commitment to a certain form of historical-critical approach has a negative effect on his appreciation of Acts as history.

The Introduction to the commentary is concise (17–31) but deals clearly with the relationship between the Gospel of Luke and Acts; our knowledge of the author ('L'auteur des Actes ne peut être un compagnon historique de Paul,' 19 ['The author of Acts cannot be a companion of the historical Paul']); provenance and date of Acts; the structure of the work; sources; genre; style; 'Luke' as a historian; the theology of Acts; and the text of Acts. On the historicity of Acts, Marguerat comments, in line with many others such as Hengel, that 'Luc n'est pas plus subjective que n'importe quel historien de l'Antiquité : comme eux, il raconte l'histoire à partir d'un point de vue.' (26) ['Luke is no more subjective than any other historian of Antiquity: like them, he recounts history from a point of view.'] However, although Marguerat clearly has a relatively high regard for Luke as a historian, he is nonetheless prepared to say that he 'recompose par la fiction ce que ne lui livrent pas ses sources'. (26) ['reconstructs by means of fiction that which his sources do not provide for him'.]

Each unit of the biblical text is treated in a standard manner. First, there is a French translation of the Greek text. This identifies words that are supplied for good sense in brackets and includes footnotes that provide information on textual variants or a more literal rendering of the Greek where necessary. The translation is followed by a select bibliography relating to the specific passage. The bibliographies generally include works in French, English and German, plus several items in Italian. The most recent title I found dated from 2005. A reasonable number of works by evangelical authors are included. Next comes the '*analyse*' [analysis], which examines fundamental literary and historical matters relating to the passage such as structure and rhetorical strategy. This is followed by a verse-by-verse '*explication*' [explanation] which treats each verse in detail. Finally, there is a short section of '*perspectives théologiques*' [theological perspectives] which highlights important theological issues.

Throughout the commentary, there are a few independent short studies which provide useful contextual information. For example, 'Pentecôte: L'histoire d'une fête' (71-72) [Pentecost: The history of a festival] and 'D'où vient le nom de "Chrétiens"?' (415-416) [From where did the name 'Christians' come?]. There are also a few simple black and white maps and illustrations at the appropriate point in the text. The numerous footnotes draw not only on a wide range of recent scholarship but also frequently refer to the church fathers and occasionally to Calvin's commentary on Acts. Thus, while not emphasising the history of interpretation as Bovon does in his commentary on Luke's Gospel in this series, Marguerat demonstrates a healthy appreciation for the contributions of earlier Christian writers.

Marguerat is at his best when he discusses the literary features and narrative flow of the text, often highlighting interesting comparisons, contrasts and structures. He is particularly good at suggesting how one pericope relates to those that precede or follow it. His theological reflections are also generally helpful. On the matter of the historical reliability of the narrative, Marguerat is less clear and convincing. His appreciation for the literary aspects of the text appears to lead him to downplay the historical issue. It is not that he is always pointing out faults in the narrative; in fact, he acknowledges the author's care and precision (27). It simply seems that the matter is of no great importance to Marguerat. As an example we might mention his comment on the narrative of the ascension: 'Luc a historicisé le kérygme de l'élévation (invisible) de Jésus pour l'inscrire dans le cours de l'histoire.' (45) ['Luke has historicised the proclamation of the (invisible) raising of Jesus in order to inscribe it in the course of history.']

I can commend this commentary warmly for what it does well: providing a reading of the text that is sensitive to its narrative features and theological significance. I would simply suggest that the reader supplement his or her study with a volume which wrestles with the historical questions more fully and rewardingly. Even with this caveat, I eagerly look forward to the publication of the second volume of this commentary.

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Communities of Conviction: Baptist Beginnings in Europe

Ian M. Randall

Schwarzenfeld: Neufeld Verlag, 2009, xi + 222 pp.,
hb., €15,00, ISBN 978-3-937896-78-6

SUMMARY

This book marks four hundred years of Baptist life and describes its beginnings in Europe. Baptist churches are presented as conviction-driven communities, sharing a common commitment towards Bible reading, discipleship and missionary outlook. They grew against oppression by state and state church, and thus religious freedom is in their 'genes'. Particularly striking is the dominant contribution of lay preachers to their development and growth. For the Baptist leader and pioneer Gerhard Oncken, a church of believers is a church of missionaries. This book's challenge is to revive that idea in our churches today.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Dieses Werk bezeichnet vier Jahrhunderte baptistischer Geschichte und beschreibt ihre Anfänge in Europa. Baptistengemeinden werden als von Überzeugung motivierte Gemeinschaften dargestellt, die eine gemeinsame Hingabe an Bibellese, Jüngerschaft und missionarische Perspektive teilen. Sie sind trotz der Bedrückung durch Staat und Staatskirche gewachsen. Somit findet sich Religionsfreiheit schon in ihren „Genen“. Besonders eindrücklich ist der vorherrschende Beitrag von Laienpredigern zur Entwicklung und zum Wachstum dieser Gemeinden. Für den baptistischen Leiter und Pionier Gerhard Oncken ist eine Kirche von Gläubigen zugleich eine Gemeinde von Missionaren. Die Herausforderung des Buches besteht darin, diesen Gedanken in unseren Gemeinden heute wieder zu beleben.

RESUME

Ce livre, tout en décrivant ses commencements en Europe, recouvre quatre cents ans de l'histoire baptiste. Les Églises baptistes sont présentées comme des communautés de conviction, dont les caractéristiques sont la lecture de la Bible, le « discipulat » et l'esprit missionnaire. Elles ont grandi en dépit de l'oppression de l'État et de l'Église d'État, et par conséquent la liberté religieuse fait partie de leurs « gènes ». Les prédicateurs laïcs ont contribué de manière décisive à leur développement et à leur croissance. Pour le leader et pionnier baptiste, Gerhard Oncken, une Église de croyants est une Église de missionnaires. Le défi de ce livre est de faire renaître cette idée dans nos Églises aujourd'hui.

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In the summer of July 2009, more than a thousand Baptists gathered in Amsterdam to celebrate four hundred years of Baptist life in the city where its heritage began in 1609. This book was launched at that congress. The author, Ian Randall, with his broad knowledge of not only Baptist history but also of many evangelical and renewal movements in Europe, is the right man for the