

Five Recent Commentaries on the Book of Acts

by Brandon C. Wason

Introduction

It is not uncommon for people working in theological libraries to be asked what the best commentary on X is. The problem, of course, is that there is no right answer to that question. Commentaries are expressions of a person's (or persons') perspective(s) on a specific text, and this comes in many shapes and styles. Even though we might have our own favorites, no one would seriously suggest that there is some platonic ideal form of a biblical commentary by which others should be judged. Commentaries have specific agendas and approaches and their usefulness should be evaluated on the basis of how well they meet their own criteria and the relevance of those criteria for use by students, pastors, scholars, or others interested in the text. Thus, to the patron looking for the best commentary on X, I usually ask them about their project or what type of information they hope to get out of a commentary before making some recommendations. There is a whole spectrum of reasons that people are reading scripture, and, for the most part, commentaries have filled these niches (and probably more!).

In 1988, F. F. Bruce described the abundance of commentaries written on Acts as an *embarras de richesse*.¹ Since then, there has been a steady stream of new commentaries in various series and formats, and thus today's interpreter of Acts has an overabundance of works at their disposal, which draw on a wide-range of perspectives and methodologies.² This essay outlines some of the prominent commentaries published in the last half century and then takes a more detailed look at five recently published works with suggestions for their use among students, pastors, and scholars.

The Background

In this section I outline some of the major works published on Acts between the 1950s and 2010. While commentaries have accompanied scholarly research on the Bible since its origins, there has been a relatively recent proliferation of new commentaries and commentary series. This was not the case in the middle of the twentieth century especially for commentaries on Acts. One reason for this is that German scholarship in the first part of the twentieth century tended to favor the writings of Paul and John over Acts. Martin Dibelius is a notable exception but he never wrote an Acts commentary.³ Conzelmann's pioneering monograph on Luke's theology helped rejuvenate *Actaforschung* (Acts scholarship).⁴ He later published his own commentary (1963), which was eventually translated into English for the Hermeneia series in 1987, and while it has its moments of brilliance, it is often uneven in its treatment of the text.⁵ Perhaps the most notable

¹ F. F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, rev. ed., New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988).

² Despite such an abundance of commentaries published to date, there are still major series that have lacunae at Acts such as the New International Greek Text Commentary (being written by Stanley E. Porter), the Word Biblical Commentary (being written by Steve Walton), and the New Testament Library (being written by Carl R. Holladay).

³ Martin Dibelius, *Studies in the Acts of the Apostles*, ed. Heinrich Greeven, trans. Mary Lang and Paul Schubert (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1956), trans. of *Aufsätze zur Apostelgeschichte* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1951).

⁴ Hans Conzelmann, *The Theology of St. Luke*, trans. Geoffrey Buswell (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1960), trans. of *Die Mitte der Zeit: Studien zur Theologie des Lukas* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1954).

⁵ Hans Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles*, ed. Eldon Jay Epp, trans. James Limburg et al., Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), trans. of *Die Apostelgeschichte, Handbuch zum Neuen Testament* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1963).

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German commentary from this period is the tenth edition of the Meyer commentary on Acts by Ernst Haenchen (1966), which he began writing while in a Swiss hospital in 1944.⁶ Haenchen's work on Acts is insightful, thorough, and (judging by recent treatments of Acts) continues to be a relevant conversation partner. The prolific essays and commentary by the French scholar Jacques Dupont were also influential though not as accessible to English readers.⁷

A few English-language commentaries stand out from this period as well. The first is the commentary of Kirsopp Lake and Henry J. Cadbury, which is part of the five-volume set on Acts called *The Beginnings of Christianity*.⁸ This is the only commentary from the hand of Cadbury, who was a widely influential American scholar who paved the way for a literary-critical understanding of Luke's writings.⁹ F. F. Bruce, the Scottish biblical scholar whose training began in the classics, composed two significant commentaries on Acts. The first, originally published in 1951, deals with the Greek text and includes philological and historical discussions.¹⁰ The second, based on an English translation, is more theological and historically centered.¹¹

Robert C. Tannehill's two-volume work on Luke-Acts also deserves mention. The second volume, published in 1990, covers the book of Acts and demonstrates the narrative parallels within Acts and between Acts and the gospel of Luke.¹² Tannehill is one of the first to write a non-traditional commentary,¹³ and from the 1990s onwards commentaries begin to break into more discrete categories. Some argue specific theses¹⁴ and others specific approaches or methodologies.¹⁵ Luke Timothy Johnson writes in the Catholic series *Sacra Pagina*. He pays close attention to the literary and theological aims of

⁶ Ernst Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary*, trans. R. McL. Wilson *et al.* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1971), trans. of *Die Apostelgeschichte*, 14th ed., *Kritisch-exegetischer Kommentar über das Neue Testament* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1965).

⁷ Jacques Dupont, *Les Actes des Apôtres*, 3rd ed. (Paris: Cerf, 1964); Jacques Dupont, *Études sur les Actes de apôtres* (Paris: Cerf, 1967); Jacques Dupont, *Nouvelles études sur les Actes des apôtres* (Paris: Cerf, 1984); and in English: Jacques Dupont, *The Sources of Acts*, trans. K. Pond (New York: Herder & Herder, 1964); and Jacques Dupont, *The Salvation of the Gentiles: Studies in the Acts of the Apostles*, trans. J. Keating (New York: Paulist, 1979), which contains only select essays from Dupont's *Études sur les Actes des apôtres*.

⁸ Kirsopp Lake and Henry J. Cadbury, *English Translation and Commentary*, vol. 4 of *The Beginnings of Christianity, Part 1: The Acts of the Apostles* eds. F. J. Foakes Jackson and Kirsopp Lake (London: Macmillan, 1933). *The Beginnings of Christianity* series was a landmark publication that retains much value today. The more recent series called *The Book of Acts in Its First Century Setting* (BAFCS) edited by Bruce Winter has been published in this same tradition although the two series have different aims.

⁹ Cadbury's dissertation, "The Style and Literary Method of Luke" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1914), examined Luke's use of medical language since it was often argued (e.g., Hobart) that Luke was a physician and as such used more medically oriented language. Cadbury compared Luke's language to other writers from the period and concluded that Luke did not use a higher volume of medical language, and so it is often said that Cadbury received his own doctorate by stripping Luke's of his. Cadbury also popularized the term "Luke-Acts," which refers to the literary unity of the two books. In addition to numerous essays on Acts, he published a couple of notable books: Henry J. Cadbury, *The Making of Luke-Acts* (London: SPCK, 1958) and *The Book of Acts in History* (New York: Harper, 1955).

¹⁰ F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles: The Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990).

¹¹ F. F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, rev. ed., *New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988).

¹² Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts*, 2 vols. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1986–1990).

¹³ Referring to the genre of his work, Tannehill, *Narrative Unity*, 2:8 writes: "This work is not a monograph but a new kind of commentary."

¹⁴ For example, Jacob Jervell, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, *Kritisch-exegetischer Kommentar über das Neue Testament* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1998), argues the thesis that Luke was a Jewish Christian and to get at Luke's theology one must read Acts in light of its Jewish context. The commentary extends other works by Jervell that follow this trajectory: Jacob Jervell, *Luke and the People of God: A New Look at Luke-Acts* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1972); Jacob Jervell, *The Unknown Paul: Essays on Luke-Acts and Early Christian History* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984); Jacob Jervell, *The Theology of the Acts of the Apostles, New Testament Theology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

¹⁵ For example Bruce J. Malina and John J. Pilch, *Social-Science Commentary on the Book of Acts* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008); Mikael C. Parsons and Martin M. Culy, *Acts: A Handbook on the Greek Text* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2003).

Luke, favors primary sources over secondary sources, and has rich analyses in the interpretation sections.¹⁶ C. K. Barrett's two-volume contribution to International Critical Commentary is very detailed, and between his commentary and Joseph A. Fitzmyer's Anchor Bible treatment of Acts, there are very few secondary sources that are overlooked.¹⁷ For analysis that incorporates rhetorical criticism, the works of Ben Witherington and Mikael Parsons are worth consulting as well.¹⁸

One of the most significant commentaries to emerge in this period is Richard Pervo's volume that replaced Conzelmann's commentary in the Hermeneia series.¹⁹ Pervo contends that Acts is an early second century work, written in Ephesus, and dependent on Paul's letters and Josephus. Pervo resists rigid classifications of the book's genre and argues that it is a popular work of history sharing qualities with ancient fiction.²⁰ While many interpreters of Acts will remain unconvinced by his conclusions (as some of the more recent commentaries reveal), Pervo's contributions to Acts cannot be ignored. His expert handling of primary and secondary sources, his detailed yet concise treatment of major issues in the text, and his captivating writing style have contributed to his work earning a place next to Haenchen's as one of the premier commentaries on Acts.

It has been more than a half-decade since the publication of Pervo's commentary on Acts, and currently there are a number of new contributions staking their claims in the marketplace. Newness offers the advantage of being up-to-date, but it does not guarantee that a commentary is fresh. In the following section I will highlight some of the strengths and approaches of these recently published commentaries and point out ways that they reach their target audiences.

A Student's Commentary

Eckhard J. Schnabel has contributed a large, one-volume commentary for the Zondervan Exegetical Commentary the New Testament (ZECNT) series.²¹ This series is aimed at students and pastors who have familiarity with Greek but do not want to be distracted by many of the critical and scholarly digressions. This makes it a suitable option for use in an exegesis class.

One of the commentary's strengths is the layout. Each section of the commentary is divided into seven components: Literary Context, Main Idea, Translation and Graphical Layout, Structure, Exegetical Outline, Explanation of the Text, and Theology in Application. Some of these features are more helpful than others, and, because they exist for every passage, the reader might find them redundant at times. The "Main Idea" section allows the reader to quickly get a sense for the author's assessment of the passage without getting lost in the verse-by-verse minutia in the explanation section. The unique graphical layout of the author's translation visually demonstrates the text's flow of thought according to Schnabel. This may be useful as a reference, but also obscures the readability of the translation. There are "In Depth" text boxes that are separated from the main flow of text. These offer supplementary background information about a topic or address issues that are weaved throughout Acts (e.g., The Speeches in Acts, Ephesus, Epicureans and Stoics, and Peter). They typically read like brief encyclopedia entries on the given subjects. One feature that makes the commentary even more

¹⁶ Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Sacra Pagina (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992).

¹⁷ C. K. Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, 2 vols., International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1994–1998); Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles: A New Translation and Commentary*, Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1998). The bibliography of Fitzmyer's commentary, though now sixteen years old, still serves as a worthwhile starting place for individual passages or issues in Acts.

¹⁸ Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998); Mikeal C. Parsons, *Acts*, Paideia (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008).

¹⁹ Richard I. Pervo, *Acts: A Commentary*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009). Pervo's contributions on Acts have engendered much scholarly discussion on the book's genre and date; his most notable works on these topics are Richard I. Pervo, *Profit with Delight: The Literary Genre of the Acts of the Apostles* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987) and Richard I. Pervo, *Dating Acts: Between the Evangelists and the Apologists* (Santa Rosa, CA: Polebridge, 2006).

²⁰ Pervo, *Acts*, 18: "Acts is a 'popular' work. Unrestrained by the conventions governing elite literature, popular writers were able to blend genres and create new ones."

²¹ Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Acts*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012). Schnabel's other major contribution is a two-volume work on Christian mission: Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, 2 vols. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004).

accessible to pastors and Bible teachers is the “Theology in Application” component, which discusses the text’s theology and its relevance for present-day readers.

In terms of the standard introductory issues, Schnabel endorses the view that Acts is a continuation of the Gospel of Luke, written at an early date (possibly as early as 62 C.E.) by Luke, the physician and companion of Paul.²² He considers Acts to be a work of history although he rejects most scholarly attempts to label the specific genre of Acts.²³ There is also an appendix following the main commentary that addresses Luke’s theology and its applicability to the church today.

The approach of Schnabel’s commentary is grammatico-historical, and the Greek text drives the thought of the commentary.²⁴ Schnabel generally does not refer to lexical, syntactical, and grammatical issues in a gratuitous fashion, but addresses them in ways that inform his comments. Historical background is also used to illuminate the ancient text. Yet advanced students and scholars might observe the massive size of this commentary (1162 pages) and expect a lot of depth related to secondary sources and scholarly discussions. They, of course, would be disappointed because this is not one of the commentary’s aims. Ministers, Bible teachers, and students with exposure to Greek will find more value in it, especially those who hold to similar perspectives on Acts. The commentary may be useful in exegesis classes, but students writing research papers will want to consult other major commentaries to enlarge their bibliographies.

A Reformation Commentary

InterVarsity Press recently launched a new series called the Reformation Commentary on Scripture, and the volume on Acts is one of the first to appear.²⁵ Those familiar with InterVarsity’s earlier series called the Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture will quickly note the resemblance between the two series.²⁶ The editors of the volume are Esther Chung-Kim and Todd R. Hains, neither of who are New Testament experts by trade,²⁷ but this is not a disadvantage for a commentary that presents biblical interpretation from the sixteenth century.

Because interpreters of the Bible in the sixteenth century approached the text differently than we do today, the general introduction, written by the series editor Timothy George, provides a background to studying these texts and includes a primer on the use of the Bible during this period. The commentary’s format breaks the book of Acts into smaller passages and, following a brief introduction to each passage by the editors, are excerpts from the Reformation authors in English (translated if need be). The commentary presents a variegated selection of authors who represent different ecclesial affiliations. Additionally, the authors selected are not just the John Calvins and Martin Luthers; many lesser-known thinkers are represented and some texts included in this publication are here translated into English for the first time. The selection of comments from the sixteenth-century authors is what the editors deemed to be most relevant for the commentary. Thus, if a reader is looking for specific author’s comments on a text (e.g., John Calvin) they might not find what they are looking for, but they may be pleasantly surprised by what they do find. After the conclusion of the commentary proper, there is a timeline of the Reformation (spanning from 1337 to 1691), followed by biographical sketches of the authors quoted in the volume. Readers can track down the sources (listed in the bibliography) to get a better picture of the larger context of the excerpted passages.

²² Schnabel, *Acts*, 22-28.

²³ Schnabel, *Acts*, 28-41.

²⁴ Schnabel, *Acts*, 41-43, endorses the Alexandrian witness to Acts and generally does not interact with the Western readings unless they have bearing on his interpretation of Acts. In general, the commentary is weak on text-critical analysis which is highlighted in a recent review: Peter R. Rodgers, review of Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Acts: Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, *NovT* 55 (2013): 404-5.

²⁵ Esther Chung-Kim and Todd R. Hains, *Acts*, Reformation Commentary on Scripture (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2014).

²⁶ The contribution for the Ancient Christian Commentary series on Acts is Francis Martin, *Acts*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006). InterVarsity also publishes a related series called Ancient Christian Texts, which includes commentaries or sermons from church fathers although there are currently no volumes covering the book of Acts within this series.

²⁷ Esther Chung-Kim is a professor of Religious Studies specializing in Reformation history and early modern Europe. Todd R. Hains is a PhD candidate studying historical theology.

The value of this type of volume coincides with a trend in biblical studies to pay more attention to the Bible's reception throughout history.²⁸ Though there are specific commentaries that treat issues of reception history,²⁹ the importance of this series (and the Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture series) is that readers are faced with the primary texts themselves rather than a scholar's opinion of the text. This allows the reader to make use of these resources in whatever way they see appropriate. The Reformation Commentary on Acts is a very fitting volume for anybody wanting to learn more about the Reformation, the history of the Bible's interpretation and its reception, or to simply broaden their perspective beyond what they might typically find in current books about the Bible.

A Catholic Commentary

William S. Kurz has recently contributed the Acts volume for the Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture series.³⁰ The work is accessible to readers with no knowledge of Greek since it is based on an English translation. One could gather that Kurz's decades of scholarly research on Acts has surely left its mark on the commentary, but the text is not aimed at scholarly discussions and digressions.³¹ It is direct, concise, and reservedly employs footnotes. The additional resources section at the end of the commentary is also very selective. Although Kurz brings a historical-critical eye to Acts, he also retains an interest in its contemporary application. He states that Acts "provides a paradigm for the life and mission of the church today."³² Kurz joins the discussion of other commentators, such as Luke Timothy Johnson and Joseph A. Fitzmyer, who bring a Catholic perspective to the book of Acts.

Kurz upholds the traditional position that the author of Acts was Luke, the travelling companion of Paul, but he acknowledges that there are differences between Acts and the letters which are best explained by the later date of Acts (post 70 C.E.).³³ For each passage, the commentary proper presents the text from the New American Bible Revised Edition, followed by cross-references, notes on the catechism, and then Kurz's own comments that typically address one to three verses at a time. Scattered throughout the commentary are maps and photographs of ancient sites as well as sidebars that address background subjects (e.g., "The Judaizing Problem in the Early Church"), or material from postbiblical Christianity (e.g., "St. John Chrysostom on the Parting of Paul and Barnabas"). Each section of the commentary ends with a Reflection and Application segment that bridges the gap between the ancient document and today's setting. The resulting product is a very readable and accessible work that could be used by (Catholic and non-Catholic) church leaders and laypersons wanting to know more about this biblical book.

A Preaching Commentary

Ronald J. Allen's recent commentary is one of the first published in the Fortress Biblical Preaching Commentaries series.³⁴ Allen holds the position of Professor of Preaching and Gospels and Letters at Christian Theological Seminary and has

²⁸ See, for instance, Mark Knight, "Wirkungsgeschichte, Reception History, Reception Theory," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 33 (2010): 137-46; David Paul Parris, *Reception Theory and Biblical Hermeneutics* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2009); Michael Lieb, et al., eds., *The Oxford Handbook of the Reception History of the Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); and Dale C. Allison Jr., et al., eds., *Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2009-).

²⁹ The Blackwell Bible Commentaries series is an excellent resource for those interested in the reception history of biblical books, but at the present the volume on Acts has not yet appeared.

³⁰ William S. Kurz, *Acts of the Apostles*, Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013).

³¹ In addition to numerous articles on Acts, Kurz has written the following books: William S. Kurz, *Following Jesus: A Disciple's Guide to Luke and Acts*, rev. ed. (Ann Arbor: Servant Publications, 2003); William S. Kurz, *Reading Luke-Acts: Dynamics of Biblical Narrative* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993); William S. Kurz, *Farewell Addresses in the New Testament, Zaccchaeus Studies* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1990).

³² Kurz, *Acts of the Apostles*, 18.

³³ Kurz, *Acts of the Apostles*, 15-16: "Although Acts has some theological differences from Paul's Letters, or has details about the Judaizing controversies that are hard to reconcile with Paul's own account in Galatians, these can be partially explained if Acts was written at a later time, when the controversies were no longer burning questions."

³⁴ Ronald J. Allen, *Acts of the Apostles*, Fortress Biblical Preaching Commentaries (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013).

a long history of combining biblical interpretation and preaching.³⁵ The commentary demonstrates a well-grounded understanding of Acts scholarship, although he rarely cites scholars directly. Allen offers an easily readable distillation and presentation of his views on the text. In the introduction he presents Luke as Jewish, unlikely a physician, who wrote Luke-Acts somewhere between 80-90, although he does not always have a strong conclusion on these matters. He writes a culturally sensitive commentary and seeks to make his own perspectives transparent since one cannot fully separate them from a commentary on preaching. Though many who use this book will certainly bring a different perspective to the table, they will nevertheless find much of his application of the text useful to their own contexts.

The commentary proper is well reasoned and clearly written. For each passage, Allen gives an explanation that draws on historical-critical and literary methods, and then offers suggestions as to how a person can preach on the passage. He does not give detailed sermon outlines or fully developed sermon topics, but presents ideas that the reader can think through on their own. This is probably the part of the book that will be most helpful to its target audience. Of course, those not needing the work for preaching purposes will still find the preaching ideas stimulating.

Allen is also a strong proponent of the narrative unity of Luke-Acts and argues that attention to this unity should be incorporated into one's preaching of Luke-Acts. "To read the two volumes in separation is to rend asunder what Luke intended to join together."³⁶ Thus, a person composing a sermon on Luke should trace its themes into Acts and vice-versa. However, his understanding of this structural unity of Luke-Acts may be a bit ambitious. He argues that the overall structure of Luke-Acts is a macro-chiasmus and thus each passage in Luke has a corresponding passage in Acts. At the center of the chiasmus, the most important part is the ascension of Jesus. For each section of his commentary he discusses the parallels to the corresponding passage in Luke. While some may not accept this presentation of the structure of Luke-Acts, his commentary does promote interaction between the two volumes in a way that is unparalleled in other mainstream commentaries on Acts.³⁷

Readers interested in preaching or finding contemporary application in the book of Acts will want to consult Allen's commentary. They will find it inviting and thought provoking. The annotated bibliography at the end of the work lists many of the major publications on Luke and Acts to direct the reader further.

An Encyclopedic Commentary

The third volume of Craig Keener's *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary* has just been published (October 2014).³⁸ While Keener has written extensively on Acts³⁹ and has authored other major commentaries and critical works,⁴⁰ this massive

³⁵ Here are a few of the works that Allen has published dealing with Luke-Acts and preaching: Ronald J. Allen, *Preaching Luke-Acts*, Preaching Classic Texts (Saint Louis: Chalice, 2000); Ronald J. Allen, "The Story of Jesus According to 'Luke'" and "The Story of the Church According to 'Luke,'" in *The Chalice Introduction to the New Testament*, ed. Dennis Smith (Saint Louis: Chalice, 2004), 175–219; Ronald J. Allen, *Interpreting the Gospel: An Introduction to Preaching* (St. Louis: Chalice, 1998).

³⁶ Allen, *Acts of the Apostles*, 3.

³⁷ Tannehill's *Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts* does something similar.

³⁸ Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary*, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012–).

³⁹ Craig S. Keener, "Paul and Sedition: Pauline Apologetic in Acts," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 22 (2012): 201-224; Craig S. Keener, "Interethnic Marriages in the New Testament (Matt 1:3-6; Acts 7:29; 16:1-3; cf. 1 Cor 7:14)," *Criswell Theological Review* 6 (2009): 25-43; Craig S. Keener, "Fever and Dysentery in Acts 28:8 and Ancient Medicine," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 19 (2009): 393-402; Craig S. Keener, "Why does Luke use Tongues as a Sign of the Spirit's Empowerment?" *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 15 (2007): 177-184; Craig S. Keener, "Acts 10: Were Troops Stationed in Caesarea during Agrippa's Rule?" *Journal of Greco-Roman Christianity and Judaism* 7 (2010): 164-176; Craig S. Keener, "The Plausibility of Luke's Growth Figures in Acts 2.41; 4.4; 21.20," *Journal of Greco-Roman Christianity and Judaism* 7 (2010): 140-163; Craig S. Keener, "Power of Pentecost: Luke's Missiology in Acts 1-2," *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 12 (2009): 47-73.

⁴⁰ For instance: Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003); Craig S. Keener, *1-2 Corinthians*, New Cambridge Bible Commentary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009); Craig S. Keener, *Romans*, New Covenant Commentary Series (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2009); Craig S. Keener, *The Historical Jesus of the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009).

new Acts commentary is truly a *magnum opus*. In its final form, Keener's commentary will have four volumes and be the most extensive academic commentary on Acts to date. There are already more than 3,300 pages in the first three volumes (not counting bibliography and indexes which are supplied via CD-ROM).⁴¹ It is an immense and encyclopedic work of scholarship. Scholars and advanced students are likely to benefit the most from it. Church workers preparing for sermons or ministers are less likely to consider it a suitable companion to their study.

The commentary takes a social-historical approach to Acts and excludes other methodologies and styles of commentaries. Thus, his work is relatively light on modern literary theory, reception history, and lexical and grammatical issues. The 41-page prolegomena (too long to be called a preface) sets out the limitation and aims of his work in the hopes that readers and reviewers do not judge it for something that it is not. The majority of the first volume is dedicated to the introductory matters, such as authorship, date, genre, theology, and historicity. Here the reader will benefit from consulting the elaborate table of contents so as not to get lost in the introduction. Keener argues that the author of Acts, Luke, was a traveling companion of Paul, and dates the composition of the work in the early 70s C.E.⁴² Luke also provides a generally historically accurate narrative. For the speeches, Keener points to the practice of ancient historians and argues that the speeches were shaped by Luke in accordance with his literary aims but at the same time retaining their original gist when those data was accessible to him.⁴³

Commentaries do not provide definite answers to the issues in the text, but they can tell us how individual scholars came to their conclusions. Whether or not one ultimately agrees with Keener's analyses, this commentary offers a wealth of data mined both from both ancient and modern sources. Keener's work guides readers through a maze of scholarly material that is unmatched in any other work of its kind. The value of its up-to-date and expansive secondary sources (despite his claim that they are not an emphasis) will help users build the necessary bibliographies for research on Acts. The bibliography contained on the CD-ROM for the first three volumes takes up three hundred densely formatted pages. For this reason the work can also be labeled as a reference or encyclopedic commentary. It may not be the best first option as a source on Acts because it simply offers so much information, but librarians may want to consider pointing patrons who are looking to dig deeper into the text of Acts to the work.

Final Remarks

New is not always better and theological librarians will have to evaluate the relevance of these recent commentaries based on their own library's needs. Yet each of these five commentaries do bring something new to the table, whether that consists of the arrangement, historical content, theological perspective, application, or scholarly insight. Schnabel's work will most likely appeal to students of Greek within the evangelical tradition. The Reformation commentary by Chung-Kim and Hains will be sought out by students and scholars interested in church history and the Bible's reception. Kurz's commentary introduces a Catholic academic's perspective to readers of the text in English. Allen's approach similarly bridges the gap between the academy and the pastor or layperson, but additionally tailors his work for preaching. Lastly, Keener's work will help advanced students and scholars gain more insight into social and historical issues in the text. For the best results, the mindful interpreter of Acts should create some sort of cocktail of commentaries that presents a spectrum of theological perspectives, methodological approaches, and mixture of older and newer texts.

⁴¹ Schnabel's commentary comes in at 1168 pages, but other major critical commentaries on Acts are still under 1,000 pages. Josef Zmijewski, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, Regensburger Neues Testament (Regensburg, Germany; Friedrich Pustet, 1994) is 971 pages; Pervo, *Acts* is 812 pages; Witherington, *Acts of the Apostles* is 874 pages; Fitzmyer, *Acts of the Apostles* is 830 pages; Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007) is 880 pages.

⁴² Keener, *Acts*, 1: 400.

⁴³ Keener, *Acts*, 1: 29 and 1: 317-19.