

“Acts” by Michal Beth Dinkler

Review by Harold W. Attridge, Yale Divinity School

The new *Fortress Commentary on the Bible* offers a tool for encountering scripture in a new and multi-faceted way. Like many commentaries on the Bible, it provides information on the cultural and social situation in which the Biblical text was composed. In the case of the Acts of the Apostles, this process considers the ways in which the account of the early Church’s development reflects ancient literature and how the conceptual program of Acts responds to apologetic and theological concerns of the late first or early second century CE. But this commentary attempts more than a conventional reading in historical-critical terms. Each section of the text of Acts is followed by comments on the history of its interpretation. So the reader learns about, for instance, the role of Stephen as proto-martyr and the history of Christian tales of martyrdoms; or the local pride of Chrysostom in reading Acts account of the naming of Christianity in Antioch; or the ways in which Christian apologists and historians filled in the gaps in the narrative of Acts. The commentary also attends, for each of its pericopes, to the ways in which contemporary readers make sense, or more often find problems with, the biblical text. Thus the commentary addresses critical questions about the ways in which the account in Acts of the life of the early Church has been used to support anti-Jewish attitudes, how it reinforces stereotypes of masculine authority, or how it encourages Christians to support contemporary political and social structures that may need to be questioned. The commentary is not content to provide some useful information about the past of the Biblical text. It is thoroughly engaged in reading it, sensitive to the ways it has been and can be read for many different purposes. Unlike many commentaries, this one is more interested in stimulating a critical encounter with the biblical text than in providing a set of answers about what it once may have meant. With this approach, the commentary offers to be particularly useful to intelligent modern readers of the Bible, who respect its role as a formative text in the development of the Christian tradition, but who also approach the text sensitive to its potential dysfunction. The commentary not only invites but insists on a thoughtful response to the text. It promises to be a welcome tool for pastors and teachers seeking to encourage a thoughtful but critical engagement with the Bible.