

Orienting the Reading

References to Sabbath observance are relatively infrequent in the Scriptures of Israel (cf. e.g., Exod 20:8, 31:14; Lev 23:3; Deut 5:12), and yet the interpretations of Sabbath observance that developed in later Judaism are myriad. The rabbis of old observed this phenomenon and concluded that the many “laws of Shabbat are like mountains hanging from a strand” (m. Hagiga 1:8). The image is arresting: mounds of interpretation hanging from a few strands of Scripture!

The New Testament has generated an equally massive amount of interpretation. The interpretation of the New Testament has been described as a discipline that is “an inch wide but a mile deep” (Epp 1989, xxi). For others, “the

New Testament appears like a tiny treasure buried under a mountain of scholarly debris” (Baird 1992, xiii).

What is true of Shabbat regulations or the New Testament generally is no less true of the history of interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles. One need only consider the recently-published, four-volume, 4,500+ page commentary on Acts by Craig Keener (Keener 2012–15); it is a mountain of interpretation by itself! But Acts has not always drawn that kind of attention. In one of his Easter homilies on Acts delivered in 401 C.E., John Chrysostom, Bishop of Constantinople, called Acts a “strange and new dish” and complained that “there are many to whom this book is not even known, and many again think it so plain that they slight it. Thus to some their ignorance, to others their knowledge is the cause of the neglect” (*Hom. Act. 1*). By the twentieth century, however, W.C. van Unnik could famously refer to the Lukan writings as “a storm center in contemporary scholarship” (van Unnik 1980, 15–32). This attention has not come without a price. The theology of Acts has often been labeled as “early Catholic” by modern critical scholarship and, in comparison with Paul’s theological vision, found lacking (Vielhauer 1980, 33–50). This reception history commentary on Acts aims to chart the reception of the book of Acts from its relative obscurity in the early church to its recent focus of attention.

The Acts of the Apostles Through the Centuries attempts to fill in the gap created by critical biblical scholarship, which has sought to explicate what Acts “meant” in its original context, and what it now “means” in contemporary terms (cf. Stendahl 1962, 1:418–32). Unfortunately, this construal has operated from the assumption that we need only understand the context of the first century in which most NT texts were produced and the twenty-first century in which these texts are read. In this view, the intervening period (of nearly two thousand years!) is mostly an obstacle to be avoided. Between the original communication, “what it meant,” and the contemporary interpretive context, “what it means,” however, lies a largely neglected element, “what it *has* meant” at critical moments in its interpretive history. The Blackwell Bible Commentary on Acts joins other efforts in this series, along with scholars such as Brevard Childs (1977), David Steinmetz (1986), Ulrich Luz (2001–2008), and François Bovon (2001–2013), *inter alia*, who have written of the importance of patristic, medieval and reformation hermeneutics. The intent is to scour the “scholarly debris” of interpretation of Acts. After all, one person’s trash is another person’s treasure!

In this commentary, we examine not only the formal exegetical tradition, but also the influence of Acts on art, literature, music, liturgy, theology, Christian creeds, and film, as part of the *Nachleben*, the afterlife of these stories as they are reconfigured for a different place and time. Sources were chosen

because they typify the most common rendering of the text OR, conversely, because they represent some kind of innovation in the tradition. In short, we propose to adopt a “Noah’s Ark Principle,” in which we include as many species of interpretations from as wide a chronological span, geographical distribution, and theological spectrum as possible (Pelikan and Hotchkiss 2003, henceforth *CCF*).

Certain passages in Acts have drawn more attention than others. For example (with some notable exceptions), the first half of Acts (chapters 1–12)—with the colorful and compelling stories of the Ascension, Pentecost, the Stoning of Stephen, the “Conversion” of Paul, and the liberation of Peter from prison—has generally been the object of more sustained attention than the second half (chapters 13–28), which focuses more on the movements of Paul. And even within each chapter, certain verses have proven to be “magnet texts” for interpreters—especially patristic through early modern—who were interested in finding in Acts scriptural warrant for particular practices or doctrines.

Our textual excavation has revealed that not every verse of Acts has interpretive traditions that run a mile deep. Because of the particular contours of Acts’ reception, we have adopted a “sail and dip” method in which we have focused on those magnet texts that either for a particular period or across the span of reception have proven irresistible to subsequent interpreters. This has sometimes resulted in lingering (perhaps overly long) over the interpretive history of a particular text, or even word. Sometimes the focus has resulted in longish quotations from sources that might be unfamiliar to the modern reader. With the visual interpretations, especially, we have labored to provide a sense of how the artwork under consideration fits within the oeuvre of the artist, the theological and cultural context of the artist (and/or patron), as well as the interplay between the style and iconography of the art and interpretation of the text. Our assumption is that the visual tradition, and how to understand it, may be less familiar to readers of Wiley Blackwell’s Commentary Series.

Conversely, this focus on the “purple passages” of reception history has resulted in the relative neglect of other passages; readers may be disappointed to find brief or no treatment of certain favorite passages. Our hope is that this disappointment is at least partially compensated for by the rich theological and cultural fare that the commentary does provide. Given our strict word limit and the fact that Acts is the longest document in the New Testament, this is the best we could do!

The plot to the interpretive history of Acts, if there is one to be recovered, has been moved along by a series of conflicts in interpretation, whether between “Petrine” and “Pauline” forms of Christianity (Bauer and the Tübingen

School), or between an apocryphal (e.g., Apocryphal Acts) or canonical reception (e.g., Eusebius) of its historiography/hagiography, or between the tension in reading “history in Acts” (William Ramsay 1897; Gerd Lüdemann 1987/1989) or “Acts in history” (Henry Cadbury 1955). One might be tempted to construe the plot of Acts’ interpretation to emulate the Tübingen School’s Hegelian reading of Acts (indeed of all early Christian history) as thesis/antithesis/synthesis. We have resisted that construal because (1) the history of interpretation of Acts is not evolutionary (in the sense of making “progress” in a straight line), and (2) the conflict has not frequently resolved in any kind of synthesis. Nonetheless, we will attempt to tell a coherent story of Acts interpretation, while at the same time embracing as much of its interpretive reception as possible. In this regard, we are more interested in the *history* of reception and “on the ways in which readings have developed, interacted, become embodied in the lives of communities, opened up perspectives on, that is, the history of the meanings which the text has generated” than in reception *exegesis*, that is, the “focus on *the text itself* and the *authors’ engagement with it*” (Riches 2014, 383–87, esp. 386). Below we briefly sketch the resources available for such an enterprise.

Acts in its Ancient Literary Context(s)

The material in this commentary has been organized into rhetorical units that reflect the relevant attention given to it in the history of interpretation. In some cases, several chapters have been grouped together in units of roughly the same length (see outline below). Acts 2, however, which is the focus of so much attention across the centuries, has been given a double portion. A brief description of the contents of each unit, “Overview,” highlights the specific texts that have received the most attention in subsequent reception. This section is followed by “Reception and Interpretation” which deals with sub-units of the text or important themes as they appear sequentially in the text. The interpretations are arranged more or less in chronological order. This chronicle of interpretations constitutes the bulk of the commentary. At times, however, chronology gives way to a thematic grouping of interpretations that, even though from different time periods, address similar issues. By occasionally placing ideas from disparate time periods in conversation with each other, distinct and contrasting interpretations of the text are placed in bolder relief. While we attempt to show the limits and contours of the various receptions, for the most part we refrain from judging their efficacy in reflecting the *intentio operis* or intention of the work.

An Outline of Acts

Acts 1	Jesus' Ascension and the Beginning of the Church
Acts 2	Pentecost
Acts 3–5	Healings and Tensions
Acts 6–8	Stephen and Philip
Acts 9	Paul: Conversion and Call
Acts 10–12	Peter, Cornelius, James, and Herod
Acts 13–14	Paul's Initial Missionary Campaign
Acts 15	The Jerusalem Council
Acts 16–17	Paul in Macedonia and Achaia
Acts 18–19	Paul in and around Ephesus
Acts 20–23	Paul and Jerusalem
Acts 24–26	Paul before the Authorities
Acts 27–28	Paul's Voyage to and Time in Rome

The first half of Acts (chs. 1–12) focuses on events (Ascension, Pentecost) and personalities (Peter, Barnabas, Stephen, Philip) in the earliest church; the second half tends to focus on Paul in different places (Macedonia, Achaia, Ephesus, Jerusalem) and in various predicaments (on trial, on a sea voyage). One of the earliest images of the Apostle Paul comes from a mosaic in Ravenna, Italy and dates to the fifth-sixth century (**Figure 1**). As in later renditions and in keeping with early literary descriptions (see Acts Paul 2.3), Paul is balding; he is also bearded and depicted wearing Roman garb, indicative of his Roman citizenship.

Acts in the Exegetical Tradition(s) of Commentary and Homily

Paul Steuhrenberg (Stuehrenberg 1987, 100–131, has conveniently compiled a list of 148 pre-Reformation authors who have written commentaries or homilies or made extended comments on Acts. Many of these remain unpublished and largely inaccessible.

Pre-modern interpretations of Acts: Patristic through Reformation

Before commenting on individual pre-modern interpreters of Acts, it is important to note some unusual features of the text of Acts. First, the text of Acts has come to us in two forms, commonly known as the “Western” and “Alexandrian” versions

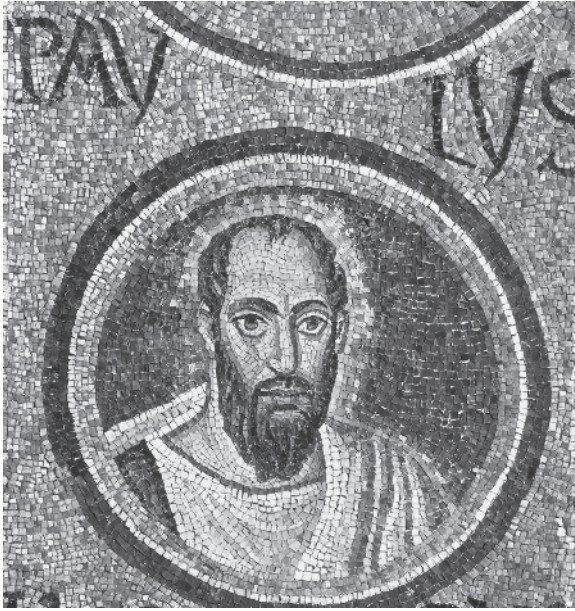


FIGURE 1 *St. Paul*. 5th–6th century. Detail of the vault mosaics. Archbishop’s Palace, Ravenna, Italy. Photo: Scala/Art Resource, NY

(Metzger 1994, 222). While arguments have been offered that the Western tradition holds priority over, or at least equal footing with, the Alexandrian version (e.g., Blass 1895; Clark 1933; Boismard and Lamouille 1984; Strange 1992; Ruis-Camps and Read-Heimerdinger 2004–2009), the general consensus is that the Western tradition, which is roughly 8.5–10% longer, is a later and secondary expansion of the Alexandrian text. As such, it represents an early stage in the reception history of canonical Acts (amongst others, cf. Haenchen 1971; Metzger 1975, 272).

Codex D (Cantabrigiensis), a fifth-century bilingual Greek and Latin manuscript, is considered the chief (but not sole) witness to the Western text of Acts. Often the variants in the Western tradition of Acts reflect an intentional effort on the part of ancient readers to clarify certain ambiguities in the text. For example, in Acts 16:6, early users added referents to specify whose “word” (*logos*) was in focus: the word becomes “the word of God” (<http://larryhurtado.wordpress.com/2013/10/30/textual-ambiguity-and-textual-variants-in-acts/>).

Other variants in Codex D suggest certain kinds of theological tendencies on the part of the scribe(s). These tendencies may include an anti-Jewish bias (cf. Acts 14:2; Epp 1966, 136–7, 169), or a bias against women (1:14; 17:4, 12; Malick 2007, 171–75), or a proto-papacy inclination to elevate the role of Peter among the apostles (Acts 1:23; Crowe/Tipton 1999).

Contemporary readers of Acts are most likely to encounter the impact of the Western version on the interpretation and reception of Acts in those four places in which verses are completely omitted from their translation (or in some versions, such as the NRSV, printed in a footnote):

Acts 8:37: And Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." And he replied, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God."

Acts 15:34: But it seemed good to Silas that they remain, and Judas journeyed alone (Codex D; cf. the Majority text, which reads: "But it seemed good to Silas to remain there").

Acts 24:6b–8a: And we would have judged him according to our law. But the chief captain Lysias came and with great violence took him out of our hands, commanding his accusers to come before you.

Acts 28:29: And when he had said these words, the Jews departed, holding much dispute among themselves.

All four additions are in Western witnesses (though Codex D is not extant in three of those instances). In each case, these additions attempt to expand upon or clarify the immediate context. In all four verses, the Western tradition was taken up into the Byzantine or Majority text, which was the basis for the first editions of the Greek text and also the earliest English translations with versification, including the Authorized King James Version. Once it was determined that the verses in question were not part of the "base" text, the editors and translators of the various Greek editions and English translations, rather than renumbering the verses from that point forward, opted rather to omit the verses and the numbers they had been given altogether (as they did in other places in the NT). These variants illustrate the ways in which early readers inscribed their responses into the text itself.

Another interesting issue regards the relationship of Acts to the Gospel of Luke. Common authorship has been assumed since the second century (with some notable exceptions). The two writings, however, have distinct textual histories; there is no Western version of Luke comparable to the Western version of Acts. Furthermore, Luke and Acts were typically treated as separate documents in the early church (see Gregory 2003), a point underscored by the fact that there is no evidence that the two ever circulated together in any pre-canonical form, nor did the two texts ever stand side-by-side in any canonical arrangement of the New Testament (Parsons and Pervo 1993). This early reception of Acts apart from Luke raises questions regarding the best way to read Acts: as "Luke-Acts," that is, as a single, continuous narrative with a single preface (Luke 1:1–4) and intentional parallelisms between the characterization of Jesus in the Gospel and Peter

and Paul in Acts? As a sequel to Luke, recognizing certain common literary devices and theological themes, while still respecting differences in emphases and perhaps genre? Or as a sequel to an emerging multi-fold Gospel (that finds later expression in the Tetraevangelium, the Four-Fold Gospel), the chief of which is the Gospel of Luke? (on these and other options, see e.g., Gregory and Rowe 2010).

Irenaeus (c. 125–200), Bishop of Lyon, is the first author to draw extensively on Acts. He cites Acts repeatedly in the early part of Book Three of *Against Heresies*, but also refers to, quotes from or alludes to it in all five books of this work. Tertullian (c. 155–240) also knows and appreciates the book of Acts (see *Bapt.* 4, 10, 13, 18; *Res.* 55; *Prax.* 30; *Tert. Pat.* 14; esp. *Marc.* 5). Likewise, Cyprian, in the middle of the third century, repeatedly uses the expression “in the Acts of the Apostles” (*Cyp. Epist.* 7.3; *Unit. eccl.* 25; *Dom. or.* 32; *Eleem.* 6.25; *Cyp. Pat.* 16; cf. Bovon 2006). Clement of Alexandria (ca.150– ca. 215) and Origen (c.185–235) also make use of Acts.

A list of fourth-century sources containing references to Acts is illustrative of the material available: Apollinaris of Laodicea (310–390), Athanasius (295–373), Basil the Great (329–379), Didymus the Blind (ca. 313–98), Eusebius (260–339), Ephrem the Syrian (c. 306–373), “Commentary on Acts”; John Chrysostom (347–407), *Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles*; among others. Later authors include Arator (sixth century) *On the Acts of the Apostles*.

The Venerable Bede (672/3–735) was a British monastic leader and author of the first extant British commentary on Acts, *Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*; Humanist Erasmus (1466–1536) also wrote a commentary, *Paraphrase on Acts*. In addition, Augustine (354–430) and Aquinas (1225–1274) made frequent reference to Acts, even though neither produced a commentary per se (on ancient commentary, see Martin 2006).

Much of the material in this early period draws on Acts for theological and Christological reflection. For example, presumably the Apostles’ Creed (second century) and later the Nicene Creed (fourth century) both draw on Acts 1 to depict the Ascension as the visible manifestation of Christ’s exaltation. Irenaeus found Acts useful in his debates against certain groups regarding the “bodily resurrection and ascension” of Jesus (cf. *Haer.* 1.10.1).

Acts continued to draw the attention of medieval and reformation commentators (cf. Chung-Kim and Hains 2014). John Calvin (1509–64) had a two-volume commentary on Acts. Neither Thomas Aquinas (c.1225–74) nor Martin Luther (1483–1546) wrote full-blown commentaries on Acts, but both made numerous references to the work in their writings. Acts was a favorite text also among those engaged in Radical Reformation, since their views of ecclesiology were profoundly shaped by the witness of Acts. Debates of who

should hold church offices and what those offices should be were often underpinned by references to the Acts of the Apostles (especially chapters 6 and 13).

The “invention” of Paul’s “three missionary journey”—never referred to by Luke as such—is an example of the use of Acts as scriptural warrant for certain endeavors in the early modern period. The missionary journeys of Paul were part of the propaganda developed by the Society for Promotion of Christian Knowledge (founded 1698) and the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (founded 1701) to provide a biblical pattern for missionaries going out from a central location to the “ends of the earth” and then returning periodically for spiritual renewal, administrative guidance, and financial support (Townsend 1985/1986, 99–104).

The Interpretation of Acts in the Modern Period

It is during the “modern” period (which we will designate as covering the eighteenth century forward) that the questions typically associated with the historical-critical study of Acts emerged. Among the pre-modern assumptions that were critically re-examined was a cluster of assertions surrounding the identity of the author of (Luke and) Acts: (1) the same person wrote both the Third Gospel and Acts; (2) that person was Luke the Physician; (3) Luke was a companion of Paul; (4) and Luke was a Gentile who wrote for a Gentile audience. What one thinks about the identity of Luke rests in large part on one’s assessment of early traditions. Either those in the early church had independent access to traditions about the identity of the author of Luke and Acts no longer available to us, or someone deduced the author’s identity from the NT evidence and secured a place for Luke very early on. In favor of the first option is the stability of the tradition in identifying Luke as the author. Strictly speaking, Acts, like the other canonical narratives, is an anonymous document making no claims itself about authorship, unlike the disputed Petrine and Pastoral epistles, which, if inauthentic, are pseudonymous, written in the name of someone else. When compared, for example, with the debate that raged in the early church about the authorship of Hebrews, another anonymous document, that all testimony agrees on Luke’s identity is no trivial matter. Added to that fact is the relative obscurity of Luke, known only through three passing references in the NT (Philemon 24; Colossians 4:14; 2 Timothy 4:11).

On the other hand, it is possible that someone looking to identify the otherwise anonymous author might have deduced Luke’s identity from the text of the NT itself. Presumably the Prologue (Luke 1:1–4), where the

author seems to identify himself as a second-generation Christian who was relying on other eyewitness testimony, excludes identifying the author as an Apostle (and thus making the choice of a “lesser” figure almost inevitable). The “we-sections” in Acts (16:10–17; 20:5–15; 21:1–18; 27:1; 28:16) demand someone who was a companion of Paul, and Luke emerges as a likely (though, importantly, not the only) candidate. If, as some now think, the name of Luke was attached to the document shortly after its publication to distinguish it from other Christian Gospels, already known to the general Christian public, then this very early attribution might account for the uniformity of the identification. Many modern interpreters today are agnostic about, or at least less interested in, the issue of authorship, perhaps because of the view that Luke and Acts can be adequately interpreted, despite our limited knowledge about their author. Others, despairing of traditional questions about authorship, have set their eyes on other aspects of the author. Some, using the language of “social location,” have tried to position the author (implied or real) in terms of rank, education, relationship to technology, etc. (e.g., Robbins 1991, 305–332).

Another issue that emerged in full force in the modern period revolved around the historical (un)reliability of Acts. Nineteenth-century German historian F.C. Baur famously saw Acts as part of a larger *Tendenz* to reconcile Gentile and Jewish forms of Christianity, represented by Paul and Peter, respectively, and thus questioned the historical reliability of the account (Baur 1887, 1:135; cited in Baird 1992, 1:267). Sir William Ramsey, on the other hand, moved from a skeptic regarding Luke’s historical reliability to the position that Luke was a careful and reliable historian. He pointed, for example, to the use by Luke of the correct local titles for local political authorities (Ramsay 1915, 95–97). In *The Book of Acts in History*, Henry Cadbury (1955) proposes to turn the focus from history *in* Acts, that is, questions of historicity, to Acts *in* history, that is to the Greek, Roman, Jewish, and Christian settings in which the book was produced. Others have persisted in their attempts to defend the historical reliability of Acts (Hengel 1980; Hemer 1989). When it comes to the “life of Paul,” the modern scholarly consensus is that Paul’s letters are to be given priority over Acts in any historical reconstruction (cf. J. Knox 1950; though see also Moessner et al 2014). With the critically acclaimed film, *A Polite Bride*, by author and director Robert Orlando, the views that Acts is secondary to Paul’s letters as a historical source and that Acts must be carefully sifted and mined for historical information have now made their way into cinematic culture.

Recent feminist studies and post-colonial studies also have contending views regarding the ideological perspective reflected in the text. These are

taken up at relevant points in the commentary (Anderson 2004; Aymer 2012; Gaventa 2004; O'Day 1998).

Conclusion: Key Interpreters

While the voices of a large number of interpreters, spanning many centuries, will be heard in this book, the voices of the following interpreters will be heard especially frequently:

John Chrysostom (347–407) preached an important collection of sermons on Acts, *Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles*.

St. Augustine (354–430) was Bishop of Hippo and an influential theologian in Western Christianity. His interpretations of Acts frequently reflected past interpretation or shaped subsequent reception.

Arator (490–550), wrote an influential commentary on Acts in poetic form, *On the Acts of the Apostles*.

Venerable Bede (673–735) wrote one of the first commentaries on Acts.

Aquinas (c.1225–74) was a medieval Christian theologian who made many references to Acts in his writings.

Erasmus (1469–1536) was a renowned Dutch Humanist theologian who wrote a commentary on Acts, *Paraphrases on Acts*.

Martin Luther (1483–1546) was leader of the Protestant Reformation in Germany. He made many influential references to Acts but did not publish a commentary on it.

John Calvin (1509–64) was a Magisterial Reformer who wrote an important two-volume commentary on Acts.

Søren Kierkegaard (1813–55) was a Danish philosopher and theologian who made significant use of Acts in his writings.

Karl Barth (1886–1968) was a Swiss Reformed theologian and leader of the “neo-Orthodox” movement, who made significant use of Acts in his highly influential *Church Dogmatics*.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906–45) was a German Lutheran theologian and martyr. Acts figured prominently in his writings.

The interpretations of these core authors provide a touchstone throughout the commentary; we have consulted them for every section of Acts. When the comments of each of these authors are read together (with the aid of the index), they reveal interpretive threads that at times reflect the dominant exegetical traditions and, at times, resist them. A list of brief biographies of interpreters, along with a glossary of selected terms, is located at the back of the volume to assist the reader.

Acts in the Liturgical Tradition of Calendar, Lectionary and Creeds

Although Acts is not part of the regular readings in the various lectionary traditions, it does appear with some frequency (though curiously with nothing beyond chapter 19; <http://www.textweek.com/acts.htm>. Accessed 9 November 2006). Two of the four principle feasts of the Christian calendar—the Feast of the Ascension and the Feast of Pentecost—are based on the book of Acts (these are also holy days of obligation in the Roman church). In addition, the Feast Days of Saint Stephen and Saint Paul use readings from Acts in their liturgy.

	RCL	Roman	Episcopal	Lutheran	United Methodist
Acts 1:1–11	Ascension ABC	Ascension ABC	Ascension ABC Easter 7A	Ascension ABC	Ascension ABC
Acts 1:6–14	Easter 7A	Easter 7A	Easter 7A	Easter 7A	Easter 7A
Acts 1:15–26	Easter 7B	Easter 7B	Easter 7B	Easter 7B	Easter 7B
Acts 2:1–21	Pentecost A Pentecost B Pentecost C	Pentecost A Pentecost B Pentecost C	Pentecost A Pentecost B Pentecost C	Pentecost A Pentecost B Pentecost C	Pentecost A Pentecost B Pentecost C
Acts 2:14–41	Easter 2A Easter 3A	Easter 3A Easter 4A	Easter 2A Easter 3A	Easter 2A Easter 3A	Easter 2A Easter 3A
Acts 2:42–47	Easter 4A	Easter 2A	Easter 3A	Easter 4A	Easter 4A
Acts 3:1–7					
Acts 3:12–26	Easter 3B	Easter 3B	Easter 2B	Easter 3B	Easter 3B
Acts 4:5–12	Easter 4B	Easter 4B	Easter 3B	Easter 4B	Easter 4B
Acts 4:23–37	Easter 2B	Easter 2B	Easter 4B	Easter 2B	Easter 2B
Acts 5:12–29		Easter 2C	Easter 2C		
Acts 5:27–41	Easter 2C	Easter 3C	Easter Evening A Easter Evening B Easter Evening C Easter 2C	Easter 2C	Easter 2C
Acts 6:1–9		Easter 5A	Easter 4A		
Acts 7:1–60	Easter 5A	Easter 7C	Easter 4A	Easter 5A	Easter 5A
Acts 8:5–8		Easter 6A			
Acts 8:14–17	Baptism C	Easter 6A		Baptism C	Baptism C

	RCL	Roman	Episcopal	Lutheran	United Methodist
Acts 8:26–40	Easter 5B		Easter 5B	Easter 5B	Easter 5B
Acts 9:1–20	Easter 3C		Easter 3C	Easter 3C	Easter 3C
Acts 9:26–31		Easter 5B			
Acts 9:36–43	Easter 4C			Easter 4C	Easter 4C
Acts 10:25–34		Easter 6B			
Acts 10:34–43	Baptism A	Baptism A	Baptism A	Baptism A	Baptism A
	Easter Day A	Easter Day A	Easter Day A	Easter Day A	Easter Day A
	Easter Day B	Easter Day B	Baptism B	Easter Day B	Easter Day B
	Easter Day C	Easter Day C	Baptism C	Easter Day C	Easter Day C
Acts 10:44–48	Easter 6B	Easter 6B		Easter 6B	Easter 6B
Acts 11:1–18	Easter 5C			Easter 5C	Easter 5C
Acts 11:19–30			Easter 6B		
Acts 13:14–52		Easter 4C	Easter 4C		
		Proper 7C/ Ordinary 12C	Easter 5C		
Acts 14:8–18			Easter 6C		
Acts 14:21–27		Easter 5C			
Acts 15:1–29		Easter 6C			
Acts 16:9–15	Easter 6C			Easter 6C	Easter 6C
Acts 16:16–34	Easter 7C		Easter 7C	Easter 7C	Easter 7C
Acts 17:1–15			Easter 5A		
Acts 17:22–31	Easter 6A		Easter 6A	Easter 6A	Easter 6A
Acts 19:1–7	Baptism B			Baptism B	Baptism B

Acts has also played an important role in the various confessions and creeds produced over the two thousand-year history of the Christian church. Fortunately, Jaroslav Pelikan and Valerie Hotchkiss have collected nearly three hundred creeds and statements of faith from a wide variety of confessional communities and published them in a magisterial three-volume work, *Creeds and Confessions of Faith in the Christian Tradition* (2003). Since creeds often

reflect the theological conflicts and tensions of the age in which they were produced, we drew upon these resources to gain a deeper understanding into the role of Acts in these hermeneutical and theological debates. In particular, we have made use of creeds and confessions formulated in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England by dissenters, Baptists, and nonconformists, and have referred to important individuals from this period (John Smyth, John Gill, Hanserd Knollys, and others). This period represents a complicated and “rough and tumble” period of religious history in which dissenters were engaged in debates with establishment Anglicans as well as each other. Religious leaders moved in and out of various groups, which were themselves quite fluid. Political issues mingled with doctrinal controversies to produce a period of tumultuous upheaval. The confessions produced by Baptists and Separatists during this period provide a window into these debates in which the interpretation of Acts figured prominently (on issues such as the separation of church and state, the validity of infant baptism, church polity and governance, etc.), and we make ample use of them.

- 1611 Declaration of Faith
- 1612–1614 Propositions and Conclusions Concerning True Christian Religion
- 1644 First London Baptist Confession
- 1651 The Faith and Practice of Thirty Congregations
- 1654 The True Gospel-Faith Declared According to the Scriptures
- 1656 The Somerset Confession of Faith
- 1655 Midland Confession of Faith
- 1660 The Standard Confession
- 1678 The Orthodox Creed
- 1689 Second London Baptist Confession

We do not mean to imply that Acts does not play a significant role in creeds produced by other denominations. Pelikan and Hotchkiss list over 1200 references to Acts in some 300 creeds over the history of the Christian tradition. In Appendix 1, we have produced a scriptural index to those creeds for readers interested in learning how Acts has figured in other Christian traditions.

In conclusion, by gaining some sense of how Acts “has been prayed and sung in its liturgy, confessed in its creeds and confessions of faith, [and] defended by its seven ecumenical councils” (Pelikan 2005, 26) we may come to a better understanding of the liturgical function of the book within worshipping communities over the ages.

Acts in Literature and the Arts

The influence of the book of Acts on the “aesthetic” tradition has not been inconsequential. Certain figures (Stephen, Judas) and events (Pentecost, Paul’s Damascus Road experience) have entered into the cultural thesaurus of popular religious imagination (cf. Jeffrey 1992). Likewise, at least since the medieval hymn, *Veni Sancte Spiritus* (the “Golden Sequence” sung during the Mass of Pentecost), various themes in Acts have been pursued in music, especially (but not exclusively) in the Christian hymn tradition. For example, echoes of Acts appear in the hymns by the Wesley brothers, John and Charles. In *A Collection of Hymns, for the Use of the People Called Methodists* (London, 1780), Wesley sometimes prefaces a hymn with a scriptural reference or (less frequently) a citation, as is the case with Hymn 860:

“Peter and John went up into the temple at the hour of prayer” –

Acts iii, 1.
WHO Jesus our example know,
And his Apostles’ footsteps trace,
We gladly to the temple go,
Frequent the consecrated place
At every solemn hour of prayer,
And meet the God of mercy there.

One of the distinctive features of this volume is the sustained attention paid to the reception of the text in the visual arts. Visual depictions of the biblical text, until recently, represent understudied examples of the reception history of the biblical text. Connoisseurship, stylistic analysis, and especially iconography can illuminate our understanding of the text by a particular artist (and/or patron).

Luke as Painter

The focus on Acts in art may also be justified, in part, by appealing to an ancient legend attributed to Theodorus Lector (c. 530) that Luke was himself an artist, most famous for painting an icon of the Virgin Mary (see Hornik and Parsons 2003). The origins of the legend about Luke the painter are not clear. One fascinating theory has emerged that the motif of the painting evangelist had a long pre-history (Klein 1933). The image of the reading philosopher in the classical period became, in the Augustan period, that of a

writer, which served as a model for the writing evangelist. Later a painting board was substituted for the codex, transforming the figure into the painter saint. What this view fails to account for is why it is Luke and not one of the other Evangelists around whom this legend grows. Two possibilities commend themselves.

First, note that all the paintings attributed to Luke are paintings of Mary and, in fact, countless Byzantine images of the Madonna have been attributed to Luke. Augustine, fourth–fifth century Bishop of Hippo, had commented that no one knew what the Virgin looked like (*Trin.* 8.5.7), but at some point there arose the need is to have a “*vera ikon*” (a true image) of the Madonna. Logically, the image had to have been painted by someone who lived in Mary’s time. Who better than Luke, who writes more about Mary and the infancy of Christ than all the other canonical Gospel writers combined, fits the bill? Thus, the desire for an “authentic” likeness of the Madonna may have spurred the transformation of Luke into a painter.

Second, in addition to Luke’s apparent knowledge of Mary, his literary artistry as a writer may also have contributed to his depiction as a painter. Jerome (c.340–420) comments several times on the quality of Luke’s writing style. In his *Commentary on Isaiah*, he asserts that Luke’s “language in the Gospel, as well as in the Acts of the Apostles, that is, in both volumes is more elegant, and smacks of secular eloquence” (3.6). Elsewhere, he notes that Luke “was the most learned in the Greek language among all the evangelists” (*Jer. Epist.* 20.4). Evidence of the high regard for Luke’s literary prowess, while sporadic, continued right through the Medieval and Renaissance Periods. In *The Golden Legend*, for example, Jacobus de Voragine (1229–1298) praises Luke’s writing as clear, pleasing, and touching.

Clarity is combined with vividness as virtues extolled in the ancient rhetorical handbook tradition from the Hellenistic period (see Quintilian, *Inst.* 8.3.62; *Rhet. Her.* 4.39.51). The authors of the so-called *progymnasmata* (rhetorical exercises for schoolboys) also commended the vividness, clarity, and style of both the accomplished speaker and writer. The first-century C.E. author, Aelius Theon, combines clarity and vividness when he asserts that the “desirable qualities of a description are these; above all, clarity and vividness, in order that what is being reported is virtually visible” (*Prog.* 7.53–55). Since “clarity” was so often linked to “vividness” (i.e., appealing to the eye and not the ear), it was a simple move to characterize Luke the rhetorical artist as the painting evangelist. Thus, Luke’s attention to Mary combined with his rhetorical artistry commended him as the one obvious choice to be credited with painting an authentic likeness of Mary.

These traditions of Luke as physician and painter coalesced in a most remarkable way around an image of the Virgin and Child in S. Maria Maggiore.

The *Golden Legend* reports that St. Gregory the Great (c. 540–604) carried the portrait of the Virgin, attributed to Luke, through the city streets in an effort to stop the plague. Thus, just as Luke's literary work was believed to be an example of his expertise in the "art of curing souls" (Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.4), so here Luke's work of art also becomes a vehicle of healing.

The image of Luke painting the Virgin becomes itself a popular subject in the regions north and south of the Swiss Alps during the Renaissance period (e.g., Rogier van der Weyden, *St. Luke Drawing the Virgin and Child*, c. 1435; Guercino, *Saint Luke Displaying a Painting of the Virgin*, 1652–53). Eventually, this tradition of Luke the Painter gave rise to another, Luke as patron saint of artists. Thus, late medieval Florentine painters belonged to the Guild of Doctors and Pharmacists not only because they ground their colors as pharmacists ground materials for medicines, but also because painters and doctors enjoyed the protection of the same patron saint, St. Luke, physician and painter (Howe 1996, 19:787–789). Thus artists may have been drawn to subjects found in Acts (and Luke) because of the affinity they felt to Luke the painting evangelist!

In any case, the visual tradition of depicting Acts in art is an important, if often neglected, aspect of the history of interpretation. In this volume, we will discuss in detail more than forty images from across the centuries so as to remind readers (most of whom are more accustomed to dealing with texts than images) of the importance of examining these works of art within their historical context(s). Our assumption is that most readers are better prepared to provide the larger context for the various textual interpretations than they may be for the visual arts.

In this volume, then, we utilize an art-historical methodology of interpretation on the works of art. Each object is placed in its historical context and informed by the political, social and religious cultures in which it was created. The object's meaning or iconography is discussed alongside its formal stylistic characteristics (color, line, shape, composition, medium). The patron and original program (if known) complete the iconological interpretation. Many of the objects have been shaped by the concerns of the patrons who often introduce visual elements drawn from extra canonical sources (written and visual) where needed. So, against popular imagination, rarely do we ever have the artist as individual genius interpreting the text as *Scriptura Nuda* (the bare text), but always informed by theological advisors and shaped by various traditions of which the text is first among equals. To leap into iconography prematurely and to avoid a discussion of the artist, the patron, the style and the iconology does a disservice to the object and gives an incomplete interpretation. We hope the reader will enjoy this brief glimpse into art history in a truly trans-disciplinary study of Acts through the centuries.

Conclusion

The Acts of the Apostles has exerted an enormous influence on subsequent Christian theology, liturgy, and practice, and obviously we have not in this survey been able to deal adequately with all the issues surrounding its interpretation across the centuries. Various observations about the ways in which the text's reception history illuminate its originating meaning(s) are scattered throughout the commentary. But the use and influence of sacred texts has value more than simply clarifying or reinforcing textual meaning. One scarlet thread running through much of this material is an explicit interest in using the Scripture to articulate (or sometimes to justify) doctrine or to shape (or sometimes to justify) ecclesial practices. The interpretation of Acts has not only been shaped by its reception; the world receiving Acts has been profoundly shaped by the text. As Luke Timothy Johnson has observed:

At the beginning of the 21st century, precisely when the limitations of the historical-critical approach to the Bible have become clear to nearly everyone, there has simultaneously arisen the corresponding realization that the examination of the world that produced the Bible is not nearly so satisfying or important as appreciating the world that the Bible produced (Johnson 2004, 41).

It is "the world that the Bible produced" and the specific ways in which Acts contributed to that world that demands our attention in the pages that follow. The differences in interpretation, however, cannot only, or always, be explained on the basis of the social location or vested theological interests of the interpreter; rather, they may reflect to some degree the wonderful and mystical polyvalence and ambiguity of the language of Scripture (or indeed any language) that continues to baffle its readers and their attempts to explain the ineffable.