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some, and perhaps all, of the gospels were written in substantially their present form within thirty years of the events, and that much of the material was already collected and written a decade or two before that” echoes J. A. T. Robinson’s conclusions, which have as yet to gain a large following.

These few comments, however, do little to detract from a work of substantial merit. France’s principal conclusions should be amiably received by scholars and enthusiastically read by laypeople.

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Tannehill approaches Luke-Acts as a unified literary work. With the help of narrative criticism he wants to show that the author has carefully provided disclosures of the overall purpose that unifies the narrative. Four types of material provide disclosures of the overall purpose: previews and reviews, repeated or highlighted Scriptural references, commission statements, and interpretive statements by reliable characters. The unifying purpose of Luke-Acts is the same as the purpose of God in the world—that is, universal salvation. At the end of Acts, however, the purpose of God is only partially fulfilled because of the frequent and persistent rejection of salvation by a recalcitrant humanity. Yet these rejections do not lead to the defeat of God’s purpose but open the way for new triumphs. The strain of negativity in the plot makes the story richer and more complex.

Tannehill does not provide a complete literary analysis of Luke but chooses to focus on connections and characterization. His emphasis on the unity of the narrative leads him to note the many internal connections among the different parts of the narrative. The central chapters of this work are organized by narrative roles and concern Jesus as he interacts with groups that appear repeatedly in the narrative.

The book begins with a study of the Lukan birth narrative, which is united by a pattern of repetition and by a sequence of disclosures of God’s purpose in Jesus. The narrative next moves to the mission of John the Baptist and the beginning of the mission of Jesus. The story of Jesus develops as Jesus interacts with various groups. Jesus is portrayed as a prophet mighty in work and word in the gospel of Luke. Tannehill shows how the plot unfolds as Jesus deals with the oppressed and excluded, the crowd or people, the authorities, and the disciples. The book ends with a study of Luke 24, an important bridge that helps to unify the story of Jesus and the story of his witnesses.

The nature of Tannehill’s approach can best be understood by comparing his work with other approaches to Luke-Acts. First, Tannehill calls his work a commentary, but he wants it to be a different kind of commentary that highlights what he believes the narrator is highlighting through the literary design of the work. By doing this he hopes to avoid the “flattening” effect of most commentaries, in which a narrative’s main interest and emphases are lost in the host of details discussed.

Second, Tannehill is interested in the nature of Luke-Acts as a unified narrative, and so he does not focus on the concerns of form and redaction criticism. He is concerned with Luke-Acts in its finished form, not with the task of discerning pre-Lukan tradition or with distinguishing tradition from Lukan redaction of that tradition. Tannehill’s work is also distinct from redaction criticism because he is not attempting primarily to isolate the theology of Luke. He views the gospel of Luke as narrative rhetoric because the story is constructed to influence its readers and because there are particular literary techniques used for this purpose. A gospel story exercises influence in a much richer way
than through theological statements that might be presented in an essay. Looking simply for a Lukan theology within Luke-Acts tends to divorce theological themes from the larger purpose of the work.

Third, Tannehill distances himself from a reader-response criticism that attempts to record the reading process with its many temporary interpretations, anticipations and adjustments. Though he wants to be sensitive to the ways in which the text is leading the reader he does not want to be confined to what is happening when reading for the first time, with much of the text still unknown. Tannehill still talks, however, about the influence of the text upon its readers, and he can be quite sensitive to the sequential flow of the narrative. Some of the best material in the book is found in the places where Tannehill pays close attention to the sequence of the narrative. This can be seen in his discussions of the progressive disclosure of God’s purpose in the angelic messages and prophetic canticles of the birth narrative, the tragic story of Israel, and the interaction of Jesus with the people, the authorities, and the disciples.

Narrative commentaries on the Bible are only starting to be written, and Tannehill’s book on the gospel of Luke is a good example of this approach. His work shows just how much can be learned when we pay close attention to the literary techniques of the author and to what the text is actually saying.

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An attempt to make the Pauline literature a relevant part of the Christian’s devotional life, this book is divided into three major sections. “Part I: Dialoguing with Paul” is a fairly conventional treatment of Paul’s life and letters within a relatively moderate historical-critical framework. Thompson’s goal here is to reveal the human Paul rather than the Paul of Tridentine dogma.

The middle section comprises half the book. “Part II: Finding Meaning in Paul’s Message” contains discussions of the major Pauline theological categories. Here Thompson stands in the mainstream of modern Pauline scholarship and shows great affinity to Catholic scholar D. M. Stanley. For each section he includes modern examples that reinforce Paul’s affirmations (many of these are fairly radical condemnations of sexual inequality in the Church).

The final section is entitled “Part III: Praying with Paul’s Letters.” Thompson wraps up the book with a practical, detailed explanation of how to practice “Prayer Dialogue” in and through Paul’s letters. It is Thompson’s suggestions for reading Paul that form the leitmotif for his book. He is seeking to broaden the horizons of Christians who “pray through” the gospels (e.g. by praying to the Good Shepherd, or by mentally casting themselves in the role as the forgiven sinner). His plan for overcoming the cultural barrier between the reader and first-century Christianity is fairly subjective: The reader should try to grasp Paul’s feelings and desires as he reads and then gradually sort out the similarities with his own situation. The relevance of the letters is thus heavily influenced by the reader and his context, which Thompson assumes will follow general patterns of experience that are universally valid. He avoids the extremes of the new hermeneutic and a full-fledged contextual hermeneutic. Still, his model retains an oddly horizontal feel that minimizes the vertical dimension in inspiration, illumination and practice.

Thompson states that his plan for dialogue with Paul is an outgrowth of the Lectio Divina tradition of contemplatively reading the Bible: “In his letters Paul tells us about