

Review of Dennis J. Horton, *Death and Resurrection: The Shape and Function of a Literary Motif in the Book of Acts*. Cambridge: James Clarke and Co., 2009.

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Death and Resurrection is a revised dissertation from 1995 that traces death and resurrection as a unified literary motif in the Acts of the Apostles. Horton analyzes the motif on the basis of diegetic references, mimetic illustrations on the part of both major and minor characters within the narrative, and intensification by means of contrast with a secondary motif of death and decay. The author's aim is threefold: (1) to demonstrate the value of motif analysis; (2) to strike a balance "between the extremes of past and present Lukan scholarship by considering the combined effect of suffering and renewed life within a single motif" (p. xv); and (3) to tease out implications of the motif's function as a heuristic device and its underlying message for the contemporary church. His conclusion describes a multifaceted function of the motif that includes aesthetic value, encouragement, warning, evangelistic appeal, and theological balance.

The book's Introduction provides a succinct overview of key definitions and methodology. Horton follows the work of William Freedman, who determines an "effective motif" on the basis of five qualifications: "(1) frequency, (2) avoidability, (3) occurrence in significant contexts, (4) coherency, and (5) symbolic appropriateness" (p. 2). Identification of a motif is made through images, (cultural) symbols, parallels, structure/sequencing, and language. None of these function convincingly on their own; rather, it is the combination of all three elements (along with sometimes multiple layers of narrative context) that justify the reading of various characters and scenes as illustrative of a literary motif. Unfortunately, Horton does not engage any alternative theories of motif, nor does he offer any rationale for preferring Freedman's definition. Moreover, while Horton is intent on properly distinguishing motif from aspects like "theme", "concept", and "topic", it is not until the book's Conclusion that he pointedly states the difference between motif and theme. There he indicates that motifs are more fully developed and not limited, for example, solely to diegetic remarks (p. 103). Hence, an argument Horton makes successfully throughout the book is that the presence, role, and effectiveness of a motif is determined largely by the degree to which it saturates the narrative in question.

Two additional matters of some importance surface in the Introduction. The first concerns the relationship of Acts to Luke's Gospel. Horton does not assume a narrative unity and states that "rather than forcing the two narratives into a single story, this study presents them as independent but related stories, allowing the Gospel to provide interpretive clues, not mandates, for understanding the Acts narrative" (p. 11). Later, drawing on Mikeal Parsons, he suggests that Acts be viewed as a sequel to Luke rather than as the second volume of a single narrative (p. 17 n. 17). Horton's rationale for taking this position is not entirely clear, and readers would surely benefit from seeing what difference it would make to one's understanding of the death and resurrection motif were Luke's Gospel and Acts treated together. The second qualification Horton makes concerns the relationship of the death and resurrection motif to the overarching plot of Acts, which the author feels is beyond the scope of his study. Not only would I like to have seen him address this issue, even if only in a somewhat preliminary or cursory manner, but I would argue that the question is paramount with respect to Horton's literary/narratological focus and his interest in the theological message of the motif. Here again questions regarding the relationship of Acts to Luke's Gospel come into play.

The first chapter presents Horton's argument for treating death and resurrection as a single, unified literary motif. Under the broad headings of hyperdiegetic comments (i.e., those made by the narrator) and intradiegetic comments (i.e., those spoken at a deeper level of the narrative by the characters themselves), Horton works fairly rapidly through passages that reference Jesus' death and resurrection together, and passages that make reference to either one or the other individually. In the first category, the inextricable connectedness of the two terms is explicit. In the latter two categories, Horton contends that both aspects are always in view, whether by implication (e.g., as an integral part of the early Christian kerygma already familiar to readers) or by extension (e.g., as a result of the "primacy effect", *à la* Meir Sternberg, whereby earlier episodes influence the reading of subsequent ones). In sum, death and resurrection together constitute the literary motif, share equal emphasis, and are central to Luke's christology in Acts.

Chapters 2 and 3 explore the mimetic development and further reinforcement of the death and resurrection motif *vis-à-vis* major and minor characters. On the basis of defining a major character as those figures that "appear in multiple scenes and/or deliver extensive speeches" (p. 39), Horton identifies three major characters in Acts: Peter, Stephen, and Paul. Horton recognizes the death and resurrection motif in the episodes of Peter's imprisonment and release, in Stephen's martyrdom and anticipated resurrection, and in Paul's experiences of conversion, near-death and recovery in Lystra, and shipwreck and rescue. These characters, according to Horton, either "participate in events that parallel the suffering and death of Jesus" or "partake of (or anticipate) resurrection-type experiences in accordance with the resurrection of Jesus" (p. 39). Minor characters are those figures "that make cameo appearances in one scene and/or have limited speech" (p. 61 n. 1): hence, Tabitha, Eutychus, the temple beggar of Acts 3 – 4, Aeneas, the lame man of Lystra, and Cornelius all qualify. Similar to the major characters, these minor characters either "undergo actual death-resurrection experiences", or else the narrator conveys the motif by "painting over [their] actions ... with the colors of the messianic pattern; that is, the narrator applies to these minor characters the appropriate images, symbols, parallels, and language befitting the twofold motif" (p. 61). Tabitha and Eutychus fall under the first category, while the temple beggar, Aeneas, and the lame man (by means of their respective healings), and Cornelius (by way of his conversion experience) reflect instances of the second category.

Horton's fourth chapter demonstrates how the death and resurrection motif is clarified and intensified by means of intradiegetic and mimetic contrast with the motif of death and decay. Horton focuses on Peter's Pentecost speech and Paul's Pisidian Antioch speech as examples of intradiegetic contrast, while Herod Agrippa, Judas, Ananias and Sapphira, Simon Magus, and Bar-Jesus/Elymas the magician serve as illustrations of mimetic contrast. Horton actually lists Simon Magus and Bar-Jesus/Elymas under the subheading of "the death and decay of the devil", stating that, while all of the minor characters he discusses "may justifiably be categorized as servants of Satan who fall into death and decay" (p. 93), Simon Magus and Bar-Jesus/Elymas are closely associated with Satan in the narrative and, therefore, their downfall uniquely foreshadows Satan's demise.

Some readers will likely question the inclusion of Stephen as a major character. The issue seems all the more debatable in view of the fact that Horton nowhere considers whether or to what extent the church and/or the Holy Spirit should be treated as characters in relation to the death and resurrection motif, which itself seems odd given his use of Satan as an example of the death and decay counter-motif.

Furthermore, while I am appreciative of Horton's interest in the literary dimensions and function of the death-resurrection motif, there are points at which some might perceive his treatment of resurrection as something experienced symbolically by various characters (see, e.g., pp. 47, 55, 58 n. 83), as reflecting a theology of resurrection akin to that of later deutero-Pauline writings (e.g., Ephesians) or even Valentinian literature, both of which differ from Luke's understanding. For this reason, I would like to have seen the author present a more nuanced explanation of how he

understands the relationship between literary motifs and theology. A more precise use of terminology would have helped in some cases. For example, Horton frequently uses “focalized” in a way that seems to mean, for him, focused, i.e., neither general nor diegetic (see, e.g., p. 17, and also p. 27, where he refers to a focalized scene as “decelerated”). In narrative theory, focalization is treated as a much more complex aspect of narrative discourse, and had Horton employed it more fully in his analysis, I am certain it would have added to the depth of his interpretation.

At roughly 115 pages, *Death and Resurrection* is a quick read, and I would be the last to disparage concision, but there are times when Horton’s presentation feels truncated. Nevertheless, on the whole, Horton makes a convincing case for death and resurrection as a unified and pervasive motif running throughout the narrative of Acts. As such, the book provides a good foundation on which to build future examinations and appraisals of other motifs in Luke’s work.



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