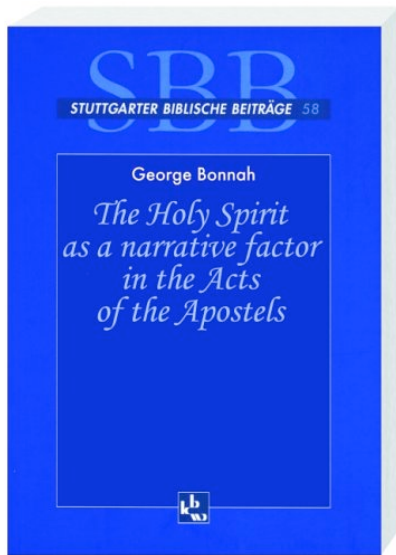


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Bonnah, George Kwame Agyei

The Holy Spirit: A Narrative Factor in the Acts of the Apostles

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George Bonnah's monograph is a lightly revised form of his doctoral dissertation completed under the supervision of Michael Theobald at the University of Tübingen. Employing narrative criticism, Bonnah attempts "to portray that the Holy Spirit ... is a narrative factor of power in the theological historical writing of Luke about the beginnings and the growth of the Church, about the 'journey' of salvation from Jerusalem to the end of the earth" (57). He asserts that salvation is central in the narrative and argues that Luke writes to Theophilus about "how the salvation was made known to the Jews through the Church in Jerusalem and how the message of salvation crossed the frontiers of the land of the Jews to the world of the non-Jews through the power and under the direction of the Holy Spirit" (57).

Chapter 1 begins with a review of previous scholarship regarding the Holy Spirit in Acts. Bonnah claims that a scholarly consensus asserts Luke-Acts to be a literary whole (the existence of any such consensus is questionable), a key theme of which is "salvation-to-all" (11). He demonstrates that contemporary studies in Luke-Acts have reached various conclusions regarding the primary function(s) of the Holy Spirit.

In chapter 2, Bonnah provides an overview of the presentation of the Holy Spirit in Acts. He begins by observing the terminology used to refer to the Spirit, the grammatical

functions of these terms in their respective contexts, and other verbs and nouns associated with the Holy Spirit. He concludes that the narrator's presentation of the Spirit takes the form of *drama* (71). Bonnah traces the narrator's speech regarding the Spirit and compares the ways in which the narrator uses prominent actors to speak of the Spirit in the narrative. He also notes instances in which the Holy Spirit is portrayed in harmony with Jesus and God (or Father), calling this presentation a *triad* (97).

In chapter 3, Bonnah analyzes the presentation of the Holy Spirit in Acts 1. After a brief discussion of the structure of the chapter, he devotes his attention to examining grammatical, syntactical, and lexical concerns related to Acts 1:2, 5, and 8, respectively. In the end, he observes a sequence presented by the narrator as it relates to the relationship between the Holy Spirit and the apostles: election through the Spirit (1:2); baptism with the Spirit (1:5); and witness in the power of the Spirit (1:8) (117). This witness is to be carried out unto the ends of the earth, and thus it will include Gentiles. Bonnah, like many others, understands 1:8 to be programmatic in understanding the whole of Acts. He closes this section with a discussion of the source materials for Acts 1, suggesting that 1:1–26 likely reflects the redaction of multiple sources.

In chapter 4, Bonnah analyzes four contexts (Acts 4:23–31; 8:4–25; 9:32–11:18; 18:24–19:7) in which the Spirit descends, comparing them with the context of Pentecost in Acts 1–2. Beginning with the Pentecost account, each passage is examined from a narrative-critical perspective, and observations related to the historical context also appear where appropriate. Bonnah concludes that the descent of the Holy Spirit in the Pentecost account in Acts 2 is a unique event, distinct from the other passages that report the Spirit's descent. The initial Pentecost event empowers the church in Jerusalem for mission. Through this mission, others will receive the Holy Spirit. Subsequent to Acts 2, the Spirit's descent has the purpose of validation, identifying converts as genuine. Bonnah also notes that the "descent" accounts reflect different geographical settings that correspond to the mission that the Spirit originally empowered the Jerusalem church to fulfill: the Jewish church in Acts 2 and 4; Samaria in Acts 8; Caesarea in Acts 10; and Ephesus in Acts 18.

In chapter 5, Bonnah traces the relationship between the Holy Spirit and the Scriptures in Acts by analyzing Septuagint quotations and discussing the relevant textual issues. He suggests that the narrator's frequent appeal to the Old Testament serves his purpose in writing to Theophilus. Also, a reciprocal relationship between the Holy Spirit and the Scriptures is presented: the Scriptures attest to and promise the coming of the Holy Spirit, yet the Holy Spirit is also presented as "speaking" through the Scriptures about the Spirit-empowered church. In discussing the two passages in which Septuagint quotations are attributed to the Spirit, Bonnah suggests an *inclusio* (1:16; 28:25). He thus asserts, "The

Holy Spirit ... is responsible for all that the narrator has to relate to Theophilus and the entire [*sic*] readers of Acts” (265). Bonnah concludes that the author attempts to “legitimate his narrative” through the presentation of the relationship between the Holy Spirit and Scriptures (266).

In chapter 6, Bonnah suggests another way the narrator attempts to legitimate his narrative: the presentation of Holy Spirit’s responsibility in the church’s mission. This responsibility is broken down into four categories, each of which is supported by exegetical analysis: (1) “dynamic assistance” by which the Spirit enables missionaries; (2) witness in which the Spirit itself engages; (3) direction of the “missionary way” of the church; and (4) direction in the “administration” of the church (269–70). Bonnah also notes that these four roles are observed in all four of the geographical areas outlined in Jesus’ commission in Acts 1:8. Bonnah finishes the chapter with a brief section implying that the abrupt ending of Acts is appropriate, since “the great missionary has arrived at his goal ... and continues to proclaim the message of salvation ... to all who come to him” (390).

In the final chapter, Bonnah concisely summarizes his thesis and offers some theological observations. He discusses the Christology and soteriology of Luke-Acts in terms of the “message of the church” (395–99). Also, he asserts that the Holy Spirit has more than one primary function in the narrative of Acts, insisting that the Holy Spirit is not only a “character” in the narrative but a “narrative factor” used “to legitimate the missionary activities of the Church” (402). Exactly how the description of the Spirit as a “narrative factor” differs substantially from the description as a “narrative character” is (regrettably) not explained.

The volume ends with a medium-length bibliography; it contains no indices. Non-English quotations of modern authors are translated into English in the main text, with footnotes containing the original language. The translations of German into English occasionally result in awkward syntax, although essential meaning is not lost.

The strength of Bonnah’s work (perhaps owing to his use of narrative criticism) is the constant synthesis of themes, characters, actions, and the like, while avoiding a complete divorce between the narrative and its historical context. At times, however, literary approaches to the text seem to be nothing more than careful reading. Much of the monograph reduplicates previous research on the subject, though Bonnah’s method is more rigorous in its detailed analysis of *every* occurrence of the Spirit in the narrative. Even so, François Bovon’s complaint that “repetitions” are common in recent Lukan scholarship seems to apply in this case (*Luke the Theologian: Fifty-Five Years of Research (1950–2005)* [2nd ed.; Waco, Tex.: Baylor University Press, 2006], 563).

One area that begs for clarification and support is Bonnah's view of the literary relationship between the Third Gospel and Acts. Bonnah surprisingly claims, "It is now an accepted fact that the third gospel (according to Luke) and the theological historical report about the beginnings and missionary work of the early church (the Acts of the Apostles) are a two-volume work originating from the same author" (11). Although Bonnah's work was published before the most recent challenge against authorial unity in Luke-Acts (by Patricia Walters, *The Assumed Authorial Unity of Luke and Acts: A Reassessment of the Evidence* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009]), an earlier work by Mikeal Parsons and Richard Pervo (*Rethinking the Unity of Luke and Acts* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993]) raised serious questions about the literary unity between the two works (without explicitly denying shared authorship). Bonnah frequently revisits the person of Theophilus and the preface of the Third Gospel as he works through his argument in Acts, yet the reader is never given an explicit explanation of how the preface of the Third Gospel should be understood in relation to Acts.

Overall, Bonnah's work succeeds in demonstrating the pervasive role of the Holy Spirit in the narrative of Acts. His approach is best understood as narrative-critical, but he is careful to address historical concerns. Readers who are not familiar with the methods and terminology of narrative criticism benefit from a brief but adequate explanation in the introduction. Although the volume sometimes reduplicates what others have done in the field, Bonnah offers insightful gems throughout, not least of which is his (brief) discussion of a possible *inclusio* (Acts 1:16; 28:25) and its relation to the whole of Acts.