

BOOK REVIEWS

GEOGRAPHY AND THE ASCENSION NARRATIVE IN ACTS. By Matthew Sleeman. Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series 146. New York: Cambridge University, 2009. Pp. xii + 300. \$99.

Since Hans Conzelmann called attention to the geographical elements in Luke, scholars have worked on the significance of geography in Luke and Acts. Sleeman's revised University of London dissertation takes the interest in geography a step further than the traditional uses by applying geographical theory in the form of Edward Soja's concept of thirdspace to the geography of Acts 1:1–11:18.

S. organizes his work in two parts. The first lays out the theoretical framework in two chapters. He sets out to relate three foci: the ascension of Jesus, the importance of narrative, and the place of space within the narrative. He notes with appreciation and criticism the work of Mikeal Parsons, who attempted to understand the ascension within a narrative but failed to recognize the power of the ascension to structure space. S. notes attempts of previous scholars to account for Jesus' absence by positing an absentee Christology, "an empty center," or "intermediary experiences." The fundamental problem is that all these attempts assume that absence equals inactivity and presence equals activity. S. suggests that the ascension requires a more dynamic understanding of geography, an understanding that he finds provided by Soja. Soja thought of firstspace as real spatiality, e.g., as expressed by maps; secondspace as mental projections, e.g., an architectural plan; and thirdspace as both real and imagined, e.g., "no man's land" between the trenches in World War I. S.'s thesis is that the heavenly Christ (thirdspace) orders the firstspace and secondspace for early Christians.

S.'s adoption of Soja's concept of thirdspace is both bold and productive. It has an immediate plausibility because it enables a reader to make more sense of the role of the risen Christ in the narrative than did any previous theory. It is, however, not without weaknesses. Thirdspace is a modern construct and unknown to the author of Acts. S. acknowledges this, but only in his conclusions (264). It needs to be addressed in the theoretical sections with some attention to the following: S.'s analysis is based on Acts 1:1–11:18 without accounting for Luke's Gospel. What is the relationship between how the earthly Jesus and the heavenly Christ order space? Can the two be separated? Would the author of Luke and Acts have separated them? S. downplays the centrality of Jerusalem, but this is harder to do when Luke is combined with Acts. The fact that Luke opens and closes in Jerusalem and that Acts opens in Jerusalem forces us to ask whether

Jerusalem had some thirdspace significance as it did for many ancient Jews. S. downplays Jerusalem because he emphasizes heaven as *the* defining geographical space. However, references to heaven fall off precipitously after Acts 11:10: *ouranos* appears 23 times in 1:1–11:10 and only three times in 11:11–28:31. S. anticipates this objection at the end of his work by arguing that 1:1–11:18 lays the foundation for the later narrative (257). Yet it is difficult to square this with his insistence that heaven determines all earthly space. These are not fatal objections, but point to issues that need more attention than they are given.

The second part of the volume works through units of Acts 1:1–11:18, explaining them on the basis of their geographical space. S. divides the text into chapters based on well-recognized literary units: 1:1–26; 2:1–6:7; 6:8–8:3; 8:4–9:31; and 9:32–11:18. The reader should note that narrative settings are not equated with geographical settings. For example, in 2:1–6:7, S. discusses Israel-space, Temple-space, Sanhedrin-space, Ecclesia-space, and then revisits the last two. Narrative and geography are linked but are not coterminous. Some of the analyses in this section are superb, especially S's treatment of the Ethiopian eunuch (186–97). On the other hand, S. occasionally allows his project to lead him to conclusions that, in my judgment, the text will not sustain. For example, he argues that Peter has a Christocentric vision in Acts 10:9–16 (226–29). This is impossible to square with 10:28 where Peter recognizes that it was God who showed him the vision. Fortunately, these occasions are rare in the work.

S. brings his monograph to a close with a summary of his findings. The conclusion anticipates some of the possible objections and draws out the significance of the work. It is a sophisticated treatment of an issue that touches on a basic understanding of the narrative of Acts. It is commonplace in NT studies to recognize that advances may be made either by bringing a new set of relevant texts to bear on the NT or by introducing a new methodology that forces us to read and think about the texts in a new light. S. has done the latter and done it well.

University of Notre Dame

GREGORY E. STERLING

EMPOWERED BELIEVERS: THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE BOOK OF ACTS. By Gonzalo Haya-Prats. Translated from the French by Scott Ellington. Edited by Paul Elbert. Eugene, Ore.: Cascade, 2011. Pp. xxv + 287. \$35.

Most dissertations go unnoticed by the larger academy and are seldom or never discovered. Thankfully, some of these projects eventually make their way into the conversation. Haya-Prats's *Empowered Believers* is one such work. Originally written in Spanish as a doctoral dissertation at the Gregorian University of Rome under the supervision of Ignace de la