

Coleman A. Baker, *Identity, Memory, and Narrative in Early Christianity: Peter, Paul, and Recategorization in the Book of Acts* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011). Pp. xviii + 263. Paper. \$ 31,00. ISBN 978-1-60899-514-1.

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Coleman A. Baker has been interested in socio-narrative analysis of the biblical texts for some time (see *Bible & Critical Theory* 8 no 2 2012) and his book is a good example of his creative approach in the field. The book is a revision of his doctoral dissertation defended in 2010 at Brite Divinity School, Texas Christian University. In his dissertation the author claims that the narrative of Acts is to achieve two main goals: unifying ethnically and culturally diverse Christian groups into a common identity and distinguishing between Christian belief and practice versus Jewish (Baker prefers the term Judean) and Greco-Roman ones. Baker is certain that Luke recategorises both groups (Jewish and non-Jewish Christ-followers) by presenting the two main Apostles – Peter and Paul – as prototypes of a new common superordinate Christian identity. In his study he identifies three methodological phases of this prototypicality: historical, literary and a *new-identity-forming one*, but in opposition to the former historical-critical studies Baker's focus is mainly on the effect of the text on the recipients of the Lucan message. His goal is to study “the anticipated impact of the narrative on Luke's audience” expressed in *identity-forming* characters: Peter and Paul (s. XVI). The author believes that through his study he has successfully established a model for reading biblical texts as identity-forming documents within their historical and cultural context and thus filling the gaps of former researches.

Such a narrative-identity model demands proper methodology and thus the author provides it in the first chapter of his book including theories devoted to social identity, social memory and narrative ones. The main idea of “narrative identity” is taken from P. Ricoeur's *Time and Narrative*. However, for Baker this is just a starting point. He subsequently presents two main methodological approaches of his book: a social identity theory and a narrative theory. His first group of scientific tools contents of the

social identity theory (G.H. Mead, T.W. Adorno, L. Festinger, M. Sherif, H. Tajfel), self-categorization theory (J.C. Turner, S. Gaertner), classifying boundaries and rituals (A. Varzi, M. Lamont, V. Molnár, M. Douglas, A. van Gannep), the concept of prototypicality (M.A. Hogg, Z.P. Hohmann, J.E. Rivera, E. Rosch, E.R. Smith, M.A. Zarate) and social memory theory (M. Halbwachs, J. Assmann, B. Schwartz, S. Condor, M. Cinnirella). In the narrative theory parthe touches on classical works (Aristotle) and its modifications (P.C. Hogan), Russian formalists (L. Trotsky) and new criticism (K. Wimsatt, R. Wellek). He also gives some detailed analysis of narratology issues drawing from S. Chatman, W. Iser and D. Slater.

These two separate ways of approach are combined by Baker on the basis of social memory theory. The author acknowledges that some other scientist did such a study before (D. Rhoads, Gowler, J. Darr, W. Carter, P. Esler, R. Piper). However no one has ever ventured “to gain insight into how the text of Acts affirms or contests social memory and identities present in the audience in an effort to construct and reconstruct its identity”. Since Luke shows two main figures as prototype members of Christian community (Peter and Paul), Bakers decides to focus on them in his analysis.

Second chapter of Bakers book is devoted to “the historical and cultural context of the real and narrative worlds”. It starts with an attempt of identifying the author of Luke-Acts. Baker indicates four main details that according to him contribute to readers understanding of the author. He is a non-eyewitness male of relatively high Greco-Roman education and of good geographical knowledge of Western Asia Minor. Being well acquainted with Septuagint Luke could possibly be of Jewish diaspora origin. Further, Baker gives his readers some evidence on dates of certain events in Acts and thus concludes that Luke wrote his second volume in Asia Minor in the middle of nineties CE. The author is also convinced that Luke’s implied audience are well acquainted with Jewish customs and scriptures as well as early Christian traditions about Jesus and his followers. However, the early Church group consisted of both Jewish and non-Jewish elements and such situation posed a real challenge of reconciliation. In Baker’s opinion in order to unify Christ followers the author of Acts proposed a new model of Christianity by recategorising opinions about Peter and Paul and making them prototypes of a new superordinate identity.

The first two chapters are followed by a careful employment of the previously presented methodological approach to some narrative blocks that Baker considered as useful for his goal. The material as a whole has been divided into four chapters. Each of them consists of narrative blocks with one kernel and some satellite narratives drawn from the text of Acts (taken from S. Chatman).

The first kernel episode: the coming of the Holy Spirit on the disciples on the day of Pentecost (2:1–4) is related to Acts 1:1–8:1a. The second: severe persecution against the Christians in Jerusalem which caused a general dispersion of believers (8:1b) rules the section of Acts 8:1b–12:25. The third one: setting apart of Barnabas and Saul in Antioch to proclaim the gospel in new places (13:1-3) applies to Acts 13:1–19:20. Finally, the last episode: Paul’s resolution to go to Rome (Acts 19:21-22) introduces the last section of Acts (19:21–28:31).

The gift of the Holy Spirit from the risen Lord and the proclamation of the gospel in Jerusalem are the main themes of the third chapter. To Baker these events also cause a double fold conflict. An external one: Church – Jewish leaders and an internal one: Hellenists and Palestinian Jews. The whole section is governed by the figure of Peter who plays a prototypical role within this section (1:1–8:1a). He is recognised as a new leader of the Church and Luke consciously pictures him as the model of Christ (Jesus heals the paralysed man through him). Peter is able to recategorise the whole community in his Pentecostal teaching by pointing to the necessity of having faith in Christ and of undergoing two rites: baptism and being filled with the Holy Spirit. Further important markers are giving up one’s own possessions and living together within the fellowship of the disciples under the authority of the twelve. The fourth chapter devoted to the second narrative block (8:1b–12:25) presents a dynamic notion of the gospel spreading both geographically (Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, Syria) and ethnically (Philip’s missions in Samaria – 8; gentile Pentecost in Caesarea – 10; and mixed community in Antioch – 11). In this narrative block Peter again functions as a prototype of further process of recategorisation. At this point Paul as another prototype comes into scene who is transformed from one of the fiercest opponents of Christ into one of his most dedicated followers. However, the reader must endure to the next chapter to see Paul playing the key narrative role in Acts (13:1–19:20). After the meeting in Jerusalem Peter disappears entirely from the narrative and it is Paul who takes the lead in proclaiming the good news. Nevertheless, the further recategorisation takes place in Jerusalem, where some detailed conditions about belonging to the Church are decided. The key markers are still valid for every Christian (baptism and receiving the Holy Spirit), while further markers for an ingroup are lifted. Finally, the last narrative block is again focused on Paul. Baker sees its goal in refuting the charges that the Apostle has abandoned the Jewish customs (19:21–21:38). The recategorisation taking place in the last section continues in order to convince disciples of Christ that circumcision and Torah observance aren’t necessary markers of Christ community which should be focused on messianic identity of resurrected Jesus.

The study closes with a synthetic conclusion of the work done in the main bulk of the book. Baker repeats his observation about two rituals (baptism and receiving of the Holy Spirit) necessary for becoming a member of the Church. He also draws some additional conclusions. The fusion of social memory studies and narrative ones have proved to be helpful in understanding the role of the memory of key figures in the early community. The widely debated “anti-semitism” of the Lucan work is a result of sketching by the evangelist the ingroup against the background of the outgroup. The awareness of Luke’s audience of the conflict over inclusion of Gentiles may be a possible sign of their acquaintance with the letters of Paul. Baker is also convinced that his effort might be of some theological help to contemporary Christians who struggle with divisions amongst themselves. The very end of the study contains a short appendix on the date of composition of Luke-Acts, bibliography, and three indices (ancient sources, authors, and main topics). Few authors quoted extensively by Baker provide a clue on what has been the main basis for his book.

The reader may ask if the goal mentioned in the introduction of the book has been achieved. Has the author managed to investigate “the anticipated impact of the narrative on Luke’s audience” expressed in *identity-forming* characters: Peter and Paul (s. XVI). Baker believes that through his study he has successfully established a model for reading biblical texts as identity-forming documents within their historical and cultural context and thus he has filled at least some of the gaps of former researches.

Baker’s study is indeed a well thought and balanced analysis combining narrative questions with the social ones. This particular feature of the book is of great value. As it was stated above, merging these two methodologies is not a Baker’s invention, but the American exegete does provide a very valuable model of further biblical surveys especially in case of narrative texts.

As a reviewer I would like to make at least one little critical point. All authors have their rights to limit their study to a chosen field. This time two great apostle-figures are in the centre of the book. However, the Baker’s choice seems to make him forget other important characters and narrative threads within the Acts of Apostles. Lucan work is far more complicated in terms of its scenario to reduce it to the narrative function of these two exceptional men.