



BOOK REVIEW

A Review of *A Discourse Analysis of 1 Peter*

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Starwalt, Ervin Ray. 2020. *A Discourse Analysis of 1 Peter*. Fontes Press. 174 pp.

Starwalt's *A Discourse Analysis of 1 Peter* is a revised version of his dissertation, completed in 2005 under Dr. Robert Longacre. It consists of four chapters and an appendix. Chapter one contains a general introduction, a literature review, the method he used for determining the structure of 1 Peter, and the contributions of his study to Petrine studies. This chapter is commendable both for the scope of discussion concerning literature on the structure of 1 Peter and concise evaluation of the state-of-thought on this topic.

Chapter two presents Starwalt's analysis of the semantic structure of 1 Peter and contains over 50% of the total pages in the book. He uses the paragraphs identified in the UBS 4 as his smallest level unit of analysis and proposes three high level divisions in the book, namely 1:1–2:10; 2:11–4:11; 4:12–5:14. These three larger units are held by many Petrine scholars; Starwalt contributes to the current discussions through his erudite treatment of how each paragraph fits into the structure of 1 Peter and contributes to its overall argument. He moves the reader beyond viewing 1 Peter as a string of passages, the manner most commentators present it, by showing its semantic structure, development of arguments, development of tension, peaks, and global climax.

The following three points are significant in his analysis of 1 Peter. Starwalt (a) identifies 2:4–10 as the global “didactic peak” because of its dense intertextuality with the Septuagint, (b) states that 3:8–12 is a “local peak” for its unit, and (c) demonstrates that 4:12–19 is the global peak and climax of Peter's argument concerning how Christians should think and behave amid unjust maltreatment.

Chapter three presents a literature review of the “imperative participles” in 1 Peter, a subject that has been debated by commentators and grammarians for some time. After reviewing the evidence and discussing relevant linguistic theories, he concludes that the participles under question (2:18; 3:1, 7, 8–9, etc.) are indeed imperatives but take the form of a participle to mitigate their pragmatic force and subordinate them to the command “honor all” in 2:17. Chapter four presents a summary of his study and its implications for the interpretation of 1 Peter, concluding that, contrary to much Petrine

scholarship in previous eras, 1 Peter is “a carefully crafted text that slowly builds to a concluding climax.” Finally, there is an appendix of his semantic outline of 1 Peter.

This concise volume provides two valuable contributions to the study of 1 Peter relevant to translators. First, it presents an invaluable analysis of the semantic structure of 1 Peter. The complexity of this letter’s structure has led to over a century of discussion regarding the letter’s nature, and scholars are still far from consensus. Determining the letter’s structure has challenged scholars due to the use of asyndeton—omitting conjunctions—to signal paragraph breaks between 2:11 and 5:11. Peter does not specify the logical relationship between sections and thus leaves it up to the audience to determine how the smaller units fit into a larger argument. Starwalt uses Longacre’s linguistic method for determining the semantic contribution of each part of the discourse to propose an argument structure for 1 Peter. His reliance on up-to-date linguistic frameworks for analyzing New Testament Greek, which are often underutilized by commentators, has the potential of adding clarity to current discussions on the structure of 1 Peter. Additionally, the discussions of peak marking and the tension around the concept of suffering that builds until the climax in 4:12–19 is especially valuable for performance translations, as these features are rarely discussed in commentaries. In short, his analysis sheds light on aspects of 1 Peter pertinent both to biblical studies and Bible translation.

Second, the discussion of the imperative participles (and adjectives) adds to the field of Koine Greek linguistics and will benefit any serious interpreter of Scripture. Starwalt concludes that Peter used participles as commands to slightly decrease the directness of the commands and thus present them in a more polite form. In addition to mitigating the commands, the form of these imperatives *as participles* also allows for Peter to indicate what commands he considers more salient. Starwalt argues that the imperative participles for “submit” in 2:18, 3:1, 3:7, and adjectives and participles in 3:8–9 are all elaborations on the general command to “honor all” in 2:17. Thus, the participles are a key component in how Peter signaled section breaks and the relationship of the pericopes from 2:18–3:13 to the commands in 2:17. Starwalt’s conclusions apply to other books in which participles and/or adjectives may have an imperative force. Bible translators should be aware of the pragmatic and structural function of such participles and communicate both aspects in their translations.

Though the volume significantly contributes to biblical studies and Bible translation, two aspects make understanding it more challenging. The primary drawback to the volume is that it employs an eclectic set of technical terms from Longacre’s and related paradigms, and yet the volume contains no detailed explanation of the terms and notation. To understand Starwalt’s terminology, one must look to Longacre’s (1996) *The Grammar of Discourse*

(second ed., published by Springer). Even a two-page introduction within Starwalt's volume would sufficiently orient newcomers so they could benefit from the remainder of the book. Second, the structure in the appendix indicates hierarchy primarily through indentation. This approach makes it difficult to identify the hierarchical levels of units that span multiple pages—it would have been more useful to have each section presented in a hierarchical list (e.g., 1, 1.1, 1.1.1). However, readers can clarify any ambiguity by consulting Starwalt's summary of his analysis in *Discourse Analysis of the New Testament Writings* (ed. Todd A. Scacewater, Fontes Press, 2020).

It is also worth noting that the volume is a publication of his dissertation, completed fifteen years earlier, and thus does not interact with the latest Petrine scholarship. While this drawback could make the book useless if it covered another topic, the debates on the structure of 1 Peter have not progressed much in the last two decades, and so Starwalt's scholarship remains a valuable contribution to the field (cf. Horrell and William discussion of 1 Peter's structure in *1 Peter: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary* published in 2023 by T&T Clark).

In all, the contents of the volume are more than worth the relatively low effort it takes to understand the theory that underpins it (i.e., Longacre's semantic analysis method) and the terminology of that theory. All commentators on 1 Peter would benefit from engaging with Starwalt's work on this crucial aspect of the letter. Starwalt's exploration into the structure of 1 Peter stands as a lighthouse amidst the foggy debates surrounding the text's organization, shining light on the structure for translators and scholars alike.

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