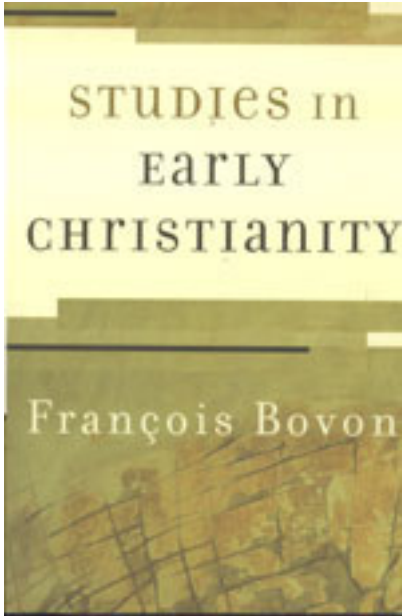


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Bovon, François

Studies in Early Christianity

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This is the paperback edition of François Bovon's collected essays that were originally published by Mohr Siebeck in Tübingen in 2003. The volume contains a selection of twenty-two essays, a good number of which were written in French and in German. Most of these had already been translated into English by several of Bovon's students for the 2003 publication. Three others that appeared there in the original German version have now also been translated (nos. 3, 8, and 9). The oldest essay dates from 1967 (in the Festschrift for O. Cullmann), but the majority of them were written between 1993 and 1997. The volume opens with an essay that had not been published before 2003. It deals with "The Apostolic Memories in Ancient Christianity."

Bovon is best known for his work on Luke and Acts and on the apocryphal Acts, which respectively constitute the first (nos. 2–8) and a good part of the third sections (nos. 14–22), but the five essays of the second section demonstrate that he has also always had an interest in issues of New Testament theology.

The section on Luke-Acts opens most appropriately with the research survey Bovon published in 1995 in continuation of his major survey "Luke the Theologian" (1987). It deals with six topics (traditions and sources, the text, the structure of the Gospel, Luke

and Judaism, the theology of Luke, and the early history of the reception) and reads as a programmatic statement, for several of these topics are extensively dealt with in Bovon's own work on Luke-Acts. One aspect that is missing from this list, yet has always received Bovon's attention, is his interest in the material and cultural world of ancient Christianity. In the essay on Luke 12:54–56 he frames his literary-critical analysis of this passage with a careful discussion of the problems in reconstructing the Q version, with sections on (ancient) meteorology, including a training session at the World Meteorological Organization in Geneva! A similar interest in background issues can be found in the essay on miracles and magic in the apocryphal acts (no. 18).

Aspects of Luke's theology and his position toward Judaism are discussed in the essays on the role and status of the law and the Scriptures (nos. 5 and 7). With regard to the former, Bovon argues for, and admires, Luke's "realistic" approach of the matter, which he aptly formulates as follows: "He [Luke] recognizes its usefulness for Jewish-Christians, and he outlines its spiritual meaning for pagan-Christians" (73). In some way, one could say that Bovon defends a similar position in assessing Luke's use of the Hebrew Scriptures, which he characterizes as "a vital relationship ... that refuses both haughty rejection of them and servile dependence on them" (111).

The longest essay in this first section deals with the passion narrative. Bovon proposes a double reading of Luke 22–23, one synchronic, the other diachronic. In the latter Bovon tentatively suggests, on the basis of the observation that Luke likes to alternate blocks of Markan and of Q material in other parts of his Gospel, that Luke may have made use also of a special source besides Mark in composing his account of the passion (102: "only a hypothesis, remaining as uncertain as the suggestion of a regular alternation between this source and Mark"). Bovon proposes two possible ways that could help verify the hypothesis. He does not go into the first one (looking for grammatical and stylistic indications that would point to the use of a unified document) and focuses on the second (looking for traces of this source in early Christian literature). He does not seem to realize sufficiently, however, that the evidence he thinks can be found in this literature—none of it decisive, it would seem—at best indicates that these later authors may have relied on para-Synoptic traditions but not for that reason on a more or less identifiable source of some extent.

In the introductory essay Bovon points out how his research on the apocryphal Acts has been motivated by his skepticism "against the opinion of a strong exegetical school of scholars [from Overbeck to Bornkamm], which holds that in the first Christian generations there was no religious interest in the fate of the apostles" (4). He argues, on the contrary, that the book of Acts testifies to such an interest from the earliest period on and that this interest continued over the time. Hence an important part of his work in

this field has to do with the reception history of the canonical writings (see, e.g., nos. 14–15 and 22, of which the first half of the title is “The Apocryphal Reception of Luke’s Gospel...”). But Bovon has also widened the approach by asking how some orthodox or mainstream Christians have received or handled these apocryphal writings (see, e.g., no. 19, on a citation of the *Acts of Paul* in Origen, and the second half of the title of no. 22, “... and the Orthodox Reading of the Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles”). This second phenomenon most certainly helped to some degree to assure the transmission and preservation of this literature. The essay on the citation in Origen shows, however, that it is not always easy to identify this kind of material. All editors and translators of Origen’s *De pascha* have regarded the passage in 36.6 as a citation from 1 Cor 7:29. Bovon, on the other hand, argues that it stems from *Acts of Paul* 5. But the evidence may not be as conclusive as he thinks (268: “certainly”). The author of the *Acts* was obviously inspired by the same text from 1 Corinthians, as Bovon correctly observes (270), but that makes it all the more difficult to decide whether Origen depended on the one or the other. There is of course the agreement on μακάριοι and on the absence of ὅσιν, but the latter is missing in the rest of the series of “macarisms” that follows in 1 Cor 7:30–31, for that is how these verses can best be described, and this may also be the reason why Origen and the author of the *Acts* have both found it appropriate to add the former, which was, after all, fully in line with Paul’s own idea, as can be seen in 7:40. Alternatively, one could argue that these agreements indeed prove that Origen read the *Acts of Paul*, but does it also prove that he had “a respect for this noncanonical work” (270)? Or is it just another instance where he has simply mixed up things, as he most probably has done elsewhere in similar circumstances (see his comment on 1 Cor 2:9)?

The above are but a few illustrations of the fact that reading Bovon is always instructive and often challenging.