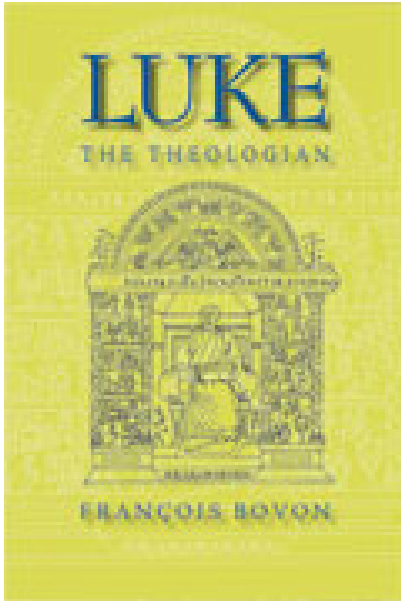


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Bovon, François

***Luke the Theologian: Fifty-Five Years of Research
(1950–2005)***

2nd edition

Waco, Tex.: Baylor University Press, 2006. Pp. xiv + 681.
Paper. \$34.95. ISBN 193279218X.

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It is actually rather difficult to review a book such as Bovon's, because, in the face of such knowledge of Lukan research, one feels very humbled. Such a wide summary—fifty-five years of studies on Luke's theology—is a noteworthy work of research and review.

The book is organized thematically in ten chapters. The first seven correspond to the first edition of this book (1976) and survey Lukan research from 1950 to 1975. They are divided thematically: (1) "The Plan of God, Salvation History and Eschatology"; (2) "The Interpretations of the Scriptures in Israel"; (3) "Christology"; (4) "The Holy Spirit"; (5) "Salvation"; (6) "The Reception of Salvation"; and (7) "The Church." Each chapter contains a thematic bibliography, an introduction by Bovon where he summarizes the theological issue being studied, then an introduction to the development of the theological debate reviewing the books of the main scholars who wrote on the subject. Even if in his review of the publications Bovon expresses some comments, his ideas on the subject are to be looked for in the short conclusions of each chapter, where he shows to the reader, after having contributed to the scholarly debate, what was Luke's theological thinking. In these sections Bovon is very good in outlining the development of the scholarly research, the issues at stake, and why and how the scholars defend their theses.

Chapter 8 was an addition to the English translation of the original French. This clearly has the feeling of an insertion, because these pages are not integrated into the rest of the book. It is a translation of an article by the title “What about Luke” (1983), where Bovon discusses new issues in Lukan studies around that year: there were already seven years of research to review! The books and most important articles are listed and reviewed, but without the thematic order of the previous chapters.

Chapter 9 is, similarly, the reproduction of a 1992 paper, almost ten years after the one in the previous chapter. Here Bovon faces more general issues concerning the Gospel of Luke, such as “traditions and sources behind Luke-Acts” or general problems concerning the presentation of Luke’s theology. Here also he has some updates on the research of the years preceding 1992. I find it interesting how Bovon sets the research on Luke within the larger field of the formation and the transmission of the apocryphal Gospels (here his expertise on the field comes out), which present very similar problems and whose study can be very helpful to understand Luke’s reception and transmission by the church.

Finally, chapter 10 updates the research from 1980 to 2005. The related bibliography is given in appendix A. It should be noted that, while the first twenty-five years (1950–1975) are presented in 462 pages, leaving aside the two articles reprinted, the last twenty-five years (1980–2005) occupy “only” 119 pages (comprehensive of bibliography!). In this chapter the research is presented according to the same topics as the first seven chapters, making the comparison between the two main parts of the volume easier.

Appendix A, as noted above, is devoted to the bibliography on the books issued between 1980 and 2005; appendix B concerns the bibliographical index to Luke and appendix C the books on Acts, both divided according to the chapters of the biblical text. Appendix D offers a bibliographic and thematic index on Luke-Acts (1980–2005). Indexes of references, authors, and subjects close the volume. As Christoph Stenschke notes in his review (RBL: http://bookreviews.org/pdf/5690_6006.pdf), there are some titles missing in Bovon’s list.

When we look at the substantial work being done in this book, it is clear we are dealing with a tool for research, not with an essay where we can find Bovon’s thinking about Luke. We surely get glimpses of that, but a clearly expressed summary of his interpretation of the Third Gospel’s theology is missing. This evidences a problem lying in the structure of the book itself: it clearly misses a general rewriting that could give more uniformity to the different sections of the book, which gives the impression that it is still “under construction.” In some way, besides the research on Luke, these pages show us also the developments of Bovon’s own research on Luke!

This is, if readers want to know Bovon's thinking, they need to go to his commentary. In this book they will find "only" an impressive help in selecting a bibliography or in understanding how research developed in the last fifty-five years. This is no little thing, since the academic world produces an incredible (but always necessary?) sea of paper where such a compass can prove to be indispensable. As a reflection on this massive production of essays and articles, I close with an interesting thought by Lucio Troiani:

We should free ourselves from the theory, as tight as a cage, according to which a list of writings of other scholars is a requisite necessary to give an "academic" dignity to our studies.... It is rather scary listening someone pronouncing over a book that it does not know this or that very "fundamental" contribution of this or that scholar. The history of research is a story of personal problems. Studying is a hard discipline of thinking and rethinking autonomously and personally, which cannot be revealed by a list of titles. (Lucio Troiani, ed., vol. 5 of *Apocrifi dell'Antico Testamento* [Brescia: Paideia, 1997], 13)

A good suggestion, I think, to be used *cum grano salis*: Bovon's book can be a good help in choosing the right reference books, in order to avoid stuffing a book with hundreds of titles; a bibliography should be a guide to the books with which an author has seriously confronted himself or herself.