From the active pen of Ben Witherington comes another substantial book, clearly intended to complement his studies of Pauline correspondence, a felicitous project for one who views Acts and the letters themselves as fully complementary. In short, Witherington represents a classical conservative school of thought. Whoever wishes to find mere paraphrase of Ramsay or Bruce will, however, be disappointed. Witherington is independent, and his agendas extend beyond conventional apologetics.

The subtitle promises two emphases, of which rhetoric is the more fruitful and innovative. Witherington utilizes ancient rhetoric for both the analysis of the various speeches and for reflection upon narrative exposition, opening the door to literary analysis. A noteworthy feature of the speeches is the frequency and quantity of narratio, although one would expect missionary sermons to be deliberative. This phenomenon signals two qualities highlighted by Witherington: the integration of speech into the narrative and the author's goal of legitimating the Christian movement in its Gentile manifestation. Speeches carry, expound, and expand the story rather than just comment on events.

The social dimension of this commentary is mostly of the descriptive sort, with limited attention to social-scientific methods. The distance such methods can provide might have helped Witherington avoid what M. I. Finley calls the "teleological fallacy": the presumption that current values about slavery, gender, and race, for example, have
always existed and that ancient writers and society must either be excoriated or applauded for their stances.

The foregoing raises the question of intended audience. In some ways *The Acts* appears to woo the elusive "educated general reader." There are illustrations, catchy subtitles, and free resort to popular phrases and idioms. Yet the work abounds in detailed, elliptical discussions beyond the grasp of the uninitiated. In his excursuses Witherington sometimes bridges the gap between general and technical. Otherwise, the attempt seems likely to irritate or frustrate.

There is a good deal about this book that frustrates: uneven style, repetitions galore, too many gratuitous observations, and numerous errors. Some minor points receive minute analyses while a few weighty issues get less than their due. Much is bald (or tendentious) paraphrase of Acts. Inconsistencies abound. Many of the theological excursuses are preliminary studies of words and concepts. There appears to have been little proofreading, less editing and revision. With able editorial assistance this book could have been substantially shorter, and that to its advantage. One wonders who selected the illustrations. One shows "the theater in Ephesus where Paul faced the mob" (p. 594) [!], while another displays four types of Roman whip (p. 696). To a degree these blemishes indicate that this is a commentary for the 1990s with major emphasis on the questions of contemporary scholarship rather than an allegedly timeless piece.

Witherington would demonstrate harmony between Acts and the epistles, together with a defense of Luke's accuracy. Unlike some who espouse these views, he dates Acts at ca. 80 CE, thus allowing, in theory, error and anachronism. One new proposal is to understand *porneia* in the "Apostolic Decree" of Acts 15 as prohibiting participation in polytheist worship, with its attendant orgies (1 Corinthians is in view). Had this been the object, the text might well have stated it more clearly. Such orgies as occurred were largely limited to the initiates of certain cults.

Historical accuracy is not necessarily linked to genre, but one is not surprised to find Witherington's Luke ranked with such historians as Thucydides, Polybius, and, a welcome relative novelty, Ephorus. The mendacious Josephus simply will not do. Once more the teleological fallacy emerges, for it is not possible to posit a stable understanding of "fact" and "fiction" over cultures and centuries. Ancients distinguished between the two, but not always as we should, nor uniformly among themselves. Ephorus supplies a *kata genos* orientation (which is not really like Luke's arrangement in scope or focus) and the impact of rhetoric, which justifies the use of hyperbole. More importantly, rhetoric demands narrative arrangement and structure. Part of Witherington's mind clings to the venerable image of Luke the photojournalist. Another, equally venerable, image envisions Luke as a painter of portraits. This commentary overlays the two. I do not know if this is a cake that can be consumed yet retained. Events cast into an artistic plan...
may reveal more "truth" than do bald chronicles, but neat schemes corrode confidence about detailed accuracy.

The genre discussion (pp. 376-81) includes refutation of this reviewer's *Profit with Delight* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987). To show that I view Acts as essentially fiction he refers to p.122, which, in fact, states: "I hope that it is by now clear that relating Acts to ancient novels is hardly a means for writing the book off for being fiction, least of all, pure fiction." The title rejects his claim that *Profit* promoted entertainment as the "main aim" of Acts. (See also pp. xii and 169 n. 1.) Demonstrating that Acts is not a romantic novel is utterly otiose.

Although it is true that this commentary finds little or no theological particularity in Acts, it is equally true that this is not Witherington's interest. He regards the theologies of Luke and of Paul as essentially identical and in accord with the general theology of the emergent Church. Some will approve of this and kindred theses. Others will disapprove, but all who work through this lengthy commentary will benefit from a number of insights generated by the author or culled from the many resources consulted. As a grateful dissenter who agrees with his view of the purposes of Acts, I note two general criticisms. Witherington the historian and theologian too often rests content with what is possible. Granted that all is possible, the task of the historian is, in my view, to elucidate what seems most probable. Related to the foregoing is a lack of methodological consistency. Witherington picks up whatever approach will support his immediate argument, without regard for its broader implications or for its congruity with methods applied elsewhere. This is a useful commentary. I hesitate to call it a truly critical commentary.