Litwak, Kenneth Duncan


Bart J. Koet
Catholic Theological University Utrecht
Utrecht, The Netherlands 3508 TC

It is well known that Michelangelo made the ceiling of the famous Sistine Chapel for Pope Julius II. Maybe it is less known that a generation earlier Pope Sixtus IV, who was also a (patristic) scholar, asked the famous painters of his time (e.g., Perugino, Pinturicchio, Rosselli, Botticelli, and Signorelli) to make twelve great compositions for the same chapel: at one side there are six dedicated to events of Moses’ life; at the other, six dedicated to Jesus’ life. These pictures exemplify a long tradition. In the churches of the fourth, fifth, and sixth centuries, the walls were often decorated with what was called *sacrae historiae*, holy stories. On the walls there were mosaics of important stories from the Old Testament and from the New: these stories belonged together and were meant to show that there was a continuity between the Testaments (e.g., in the Santa Maria Maggiore, there were scenes from Genesis, Exodus, Joshua, and the New Testament).

That there is a continuity between the Old Testament, or the Scriptures of Israel, and one of the largest parts of the New Testament, Luke-Acts, is one of the central messages of the book under review. From the beginning it is clear that Litwak presents his study as different. He stresses that other scholars often reduce Luke’s use of the Scriptures of Israel to a relatively small number of isolated phenomena but that he will show that these Scriptures pervade Luke-Acts from its beginning to its end: Scriptures play a hermeneutical role in shaping Luke-Acts.

In the first chapter he defines basic terminology, reviews previous research, and presents the aim of his study. Because Luke could not have used the designation “Old Testament” (or “First Testament”), Litwak proposes to label this collection of books “Scriptures of Israel.” Litwak focuses on the way in which Luke shaped or “framed” his account. A
“frame” is, for Litwak, those cues and markers that an author uses to indicate for readers the context of an utterance or text and the hints for interpreting such a statement. If a character or event in Luke-Acts is described or presented in the same way as in the Scriptures of Israel, Litwak calls this “continuity.” Litwak chooses to focus on the Scriptures of Israel because, he argues, although Luke and his audience may have known other Jewish or non-Jewish texts, he quotes explicitly only passages from the Scriptures of Israel (with the exception of Acts 17:28).

After this he reviews literature in recent scholarship on Scripture in Luke-Acts, focusing only on hermeneutical issues, without giving too much attention to what he means by hermeneutical (8). He sees three different groups: authors who argue that Luke uses the promise-fulfillment, or proof-from-prophecy schema; those who stress the imitation or continuity theme; and those who argue that typology is Luke’s model. In a final section Litwak deals with intertextual studies. Litwak argues that these studies mostly focus on the christological function of the quotations and stresses the fact that the majority opinion of Luke’s use of Scripture is some derivation of a promise-fulfillment/proof-from-prophecy schema (30).

For understandable reasons, Litwak focuses on strategic verses within the Lukan narratives. Because Luke’s use of Scriptures is much broader than direct quotations and obvious allusions, examining this broader usage is critical for Luke’s use of the Scriptures (31); he accuses earlier studies of artificially limiting their range of evidence. Litwak seeks to listen for many echoes of Scriptures of Israel. In this context, Litwak also deals with the question: Why does Luke stress continuity? Litwak rightly contends that Luke stresses continuity to legitimate the early Christian movement (32–33), concluding that in this way (for Luke) the first Christians are shown to be the true Israel (33). This is a challenge to other groups; Litwak gives only the Qumran community as an example of such Jewish groups.

In a second chapter Litwak explains his assumptions, for example, that Luke-Acts is a unity of genre, authorship, and narrative. He also presents the approach of his study. He wants to examine the full range of intertextual connections between Luke-Acts and the Scriptures of Israel, be they quotations, common traditions, “echoes,” or allusions. Although he uses the term “intertextuality,” he does not follow Julia Kristeva’s views (48–49). He agrees with Charlesworth’s critique of intertextuality, which states that it is inappropriate for a researcher to mould a specific text into a new form by using abstract “systems” or theories that do not arise from the text itself. Litwak discusses some other authors who criticize Kristeva. Somewhere among these remarks, he reveals his own view of intertextuality, which includes echoed wording and whole images (52–53). He stresses the fact that there is an intertextual spectrum, including many forms of
intertextual relations, such as intended echoes, or those that are an unconscious part of sharing in a particular textual tradition. Although it is important for Litwak to listen to the echoes and to recognize transumptions of traditions, he argues that it is even more important to show how these echoes contribute to Luke’s narrative. For this, Litwak uses a concept borrowed from Deborah Tannen, “framing in discourse.” The wording used to introduce and to tell a story offers clues to the audience about how to interpret the narrative. An example of framing is repetition, because repeating often presents a narrator’s interpretation of a story. An important issue in this context are the criteria for identifying echoes. After discussing and dismissing Hays’s criteria, Litwak argues that, following Brawley, he uses only two criteria to identify echoes: volume (i.e., the text uses the echoed intertext enough to validate the echo) and availability. However, he augments the notion of volume by arguing that multiple intertexts may be echoed without any of their context being explicitly quoted.

After sketching these important preliminaries, Litwak looks for intertextual relations that frame the discourse in Luke’s beginning. In chapter 3 he focuses on the echoes in Luke 1 of biblical annunciations, of the Abrahamic covenant, and of deliverers, prophets, and commissioned individuals among Israel. In chapter 4 he argues that Peter uses the quotation from Joel to show that those who called on the name of the Lord formed a new community. In his last chapter Litwak stresses that the end of a narrative is crucial and that Luke presents to us Paul, who as prophet uses the Scriptures of Israel to show that this new community, the followers of the Way, are the true remnant of Israel.

Although (or maybe because) Litwak has written his book with passion and defends his theses with ardor, for several reasons I find his book difficult to read. One important reason is the way Litwak describes previous research. Sharp judgments, such as “not correctly, in error, failure” can be fun, but because Litwak’s criticisms are sometimes too easy and incomplete, his sharp ardor does not help me to enjoy this book. While Litwak’s language is larded with negative judgments on previous research (e.g., to heap up possible verses with some undefined relation to a passage in Luke-Acts; see 69), he typifies his own movements and results as perfect and precise (see, e.g., 69; cf. p. x). But the negative assessments are related to different presuppositions from Litwak’s. Litwak often criticizes people because he cannot live with the limitations they have chosen for a workable project. Why attack D. L. Bock because he chooses as his subject Lukan Old Testament Christology? Many scholars who took for their research allusions or quotations know well that there is more. Litwak himself chooses different limitations, but, as with all limitations, it is also possible to criticize them. We can find an example in chapter 3; already the first sentence of this chapter does mention Luke 2 as part of the real prologue, but Litwak does not defend his choice to investigate only Luke 1 (yet he argues, e.g., at 126 n. 35 that he showed that Luke used the “framing in discourse” in

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Luke 1[–2] [sic], which is, of course, not true, because he deals only with Luke 1). Further, the concept “framing in discourse” is not altogether clear. Of course there are relations among the annunciation stories of Israel’s Scriptures. However, is it possible to evaluate the relations between different annunciation stories? Is Gen 18 as important as 1 Sam. 1–3? Litwak does not deal methodologically with these questions

Another reason I find this book difficult to read is that Litwak’s own statements are sometimes more passionate than accurate; some sentences are even hard to understand. I shall give only one example: dealing with the use of Isa 40:5 in Acts 28:28, Litwak states, “While it is possible that this phrase [the salvation of God] is not an echo of Isa. 40.5, I think the evidence suggests the Luke is echoing Isa. 40.5” (191). There are many repetitions. That his study departs from other studies is repeated several times (see, e.g., x, 1, 47, 69). In the conclusion to chapter 3, he twice starts quarrelling with other studies. Is a conclusion not sharper and more valuable when just the results are listed?

There are sometimes weird, small mistakes. Again one example: although Litwak seems to know that, according to Luke, Jesus reads Isaiah in Nazareth (Luke 4:16–30), he twice argues that it happened in the synagogue of Capernaum (111 and 186).

One of the main points under attack in Litwak’s book is the statement that Luke uses a proof-from-prophecy model. Instead of this model, Litwak repeatedly stresses that the function of Luke’s use of Scriptures is continuity. Of course, continuity is an important theme; this is not really a new observation (see, e.g., R. Brown, The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in Matthew and Luke, 269). My question is, Why would Luke need to stress this point? Litwak argues that through this continuity in his preface Luke validates or legitimates “the things accomplished among us” (x; cf. Luke 1:1–4). In chapter 4 it is argued that Joel 3 is used to depict the formation of a new community (see, e.g., 169). Chapter 5 focuses on the use of Scriptures at the end of Acts. There Isa 6:9–10 is used to show that part of Paul’s audience is rejected (190); the other part is the basis of the new community. Could it be that Luke stresses the continuity because he wants to legitimize the new situation? Jesus’ mission (and that of his disciples) is not for Israel only but also for the Gentiles. By means of references to the Scriptures, Luke tries to prove that this new move is legitimate because it is rooted in Scriptures. Sometimes Litwak seems to emphasize that the continuity between the Scriptures of Israel and Luke-Acts is more than just continuity (e.g. 32–34). However, in the conclusion of his book he gives so much attention to the failures of other writers that he seems to forget to present a coherent view of the way Luke uses continuity. What is meant, for example, by the claim that Luke used the Scriptures in an ecclesiological role (207)?
This issue is related to that of Luke’s views on the Jews; Litwak says (183 n. 11) that he does not deal with this issue. Is it really possible not to deal with this issue, when one wants to talk about the Scriptures of Israel and about continuity? Without dealing specifically with the position of the Jews, in chapter 5 as well as earlier in the book, he deals with issues that are directly relevant to Luke’s views on the Jews. Although I agree that Luke seems to differentiate between Jews and Jews, I am not sure that the characterization “remnant” is appropriate. Litwak stresses the fact that Jews often reject Paul’s message (e.g., 197), but he does not mention the successes (see Acts 6 and 17:12). I miss a thorough evaluation of the position of the Gentiles. This theme is explicitly mentioned in Acts 28:28. It is already alluded to in Simeon’s prophetic words (2:28–32). The mission to the Gentiles is, to a certain extent, a new move within a community that uses the Scriptures of Israel as its inspiration. As I argue elsewhere, Scriptures and dreams are used to show that this new move also comes from God (see “Trustworthy Dreams? About Dreams and References to Scripture in 2 Maccabees 14-15, Josephus’ Antiquitates Judaicae 11.302–347 and in the New Testament,” in Persuasion and Dissuasion in Early Christianity, Ancient Judaism, and Hellenism [ed. P. W. van der Horst et al.; CBET 33; Leuven: Peeters, 2003], 87–107). It is not uncommon in Jewish praxis to use Scripture to actualize biblical topics, but these actualizations have to be rooted in Scriptures. The old dreams and visions are still important, but with an appeal to some specific parts of the Scriptures they are actualized and enlarged. Thus, there is continuity and discontinuity. This element is not totally ignored by Litwak. He himself uses the concept of actualization (179). Could it be that actualization is a better umbrella to cover Luke’s use of the Scriptures?

Other Jewish groups did live together with different interpretations: Litwak compares the Lukan community with the Qumran community. It is interesting to note that Litwak focuses his arguments on the Qumran community and does not deal extensively with other Jewish groups (40): in this context Qumran is the exception and not the rule. The fact that, for the Qumran community, the Temple Scroll author(s) read(s) the Scriptures of Israel correctly implies that the religious leaders in Jerusalem are not reading correctly. Luke legitimates Jesus and his first followers as the true descendants of God’s people in the past, opposing other groups who have the same claim.

Litwak thus compares Jesus and his disciples with one of the most sectarian movements in the multiple Judaisms of the Second Temple period. He even argues that for Luke the claims of the author of the War Scroll are invalid. Of course this example is hypothetical, but for Litwak it is so real that he uses this black and white model as a presupposition throughout his study. He does not consider the possibility that Luke defends the mission to the Gentiles as law-abiding, without accusing all other groups of Jews of lawlessness. A prime example of this possibility is, of course, Gamaliel in Acts 5. Like some other
important Jews, Gamaliel can be considered a kind of “godfather” of the movement of the Way (Acts 5:38–39). This attitude gave him such a special place during the Middle Ages that he was given a statue among the saints in an abbey in Arles in the south of France. But more important than such a statue is the fact that, it seems to me, Luke does not know the concept “true Israel” (33). Is it really necessary to use such a heavily loaded designation as “true Israel” without any real basis in the text itself?

Connected to the former issues is the question of how to define relations between the Scriptures of Israel and interpretation of those Scriptures in Second Temple Judaism. It seems to me that more and more authors are aware of the fact that Luke may have used the Scriptures of Israel but that he read them in the context of other (Jewish) interpretations of the first century. The possible meanings of the Scriptures were mediated by other Jewish writings of the last four centuries B.C.E., which shaped, elaborated, and made explicit certain ideas that were often only implicit in the text of the Bible itself. We do not always have these interpretations, and the textual situation of such an important interpretation as the LXX is not always clear. However, it is quite probable Luke had access to other traditions or was part of a common tradition. Again only one example: when dealing with Luke 1:17 Litwak does not refer to Ben Sira: in 48:10 there is a connection between Elijah and the relation between father and son. This fits the description of John in Luke 1:17.

It also becomes clearer that a network of different contexts has contributed to the origins of the New Testament. Luke-Acts may even be the most complicated case. Quite a few recent exegetical studies concentrate on only one aspect of Luke’s background. It may be too early to make a more detailed map of Luke’s interpretive activities. Such a quest is too large an undertaking for a single approach. More and more I believe that making such a map may be possible only if international scholars of biblical literature, of Greco-Roman antiquity, of Hellenistic and rabbinic traditions, and of the early church tradition really share their knowledge and wisdom.

There are many further questions: What is the difference between using biblical stories as models (or to frame a discourse) and using biblical quotations? Is a quotation more powerful than an allusion or not? Can we really say that it is the general wording, not necessarily the exact wording, that is of the greatest import here? Litwak argues that he is the first one who sees that Luke presents Jesus as interpreter of Scriptures in Luke 4:1–13. However, other studies were often historical-critical oriented; because Luke probably took this passage from Q, they left it out when describing Luke’s own perspectives. Litwak does not reflect on this issue. Is there a difference between an echo of Scripture also found in Matthew and an echo of Scripture found only in Luke (e.g., Luke 4:16–30)?
Litwak's book seems to me clearly a first one: its tone is enthusiastic, but the content is not always ripe. I miss quite a lot of (older) literature dealing with the Old Testament in Luke-Acts. I am also not always convinced that he summarizes older literature fairly (see, e.g., 76 n. 34). I like the word “echoes” in the title: it evocates nice phantasies. However, as we all know, listening to echoes can be a deceiving enterprise; the less clear the echo, the greater the chance that we are deceived; the less specific the intertextual relation, the less specific the lesson to learn. Of course the annunciation stories of the Old Testament are reflected in the annunciation stories in Luke 1. However, the continuity stressed by Litwak is to a certain extent a discontinuity in disguise. Luke tries to show that the new move toward the Gentiles by Paul is rooted in Jesus’ mission (see Luke 2:28–32) and Israel’s Scriptures (see Isa 49:1–6 and Acts 13:47).

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