Normally so slender a volume as this one does not merit a book review, but this book is an exception both because of its author and its subject. Luke Timothy Johnson is a key figure among American New Testament scholars, and the speeches in Acts have attracted considerable attention and offer special challenges to the exegete. Johnson clarifies these challenges, offers a way forward, and provokes further questions.

The picture Johnson paints regarding the speeches in Acts conforms to the prevailing view but probes beyond it. He insists throughout the treatise that “all the speeches in Acts are Luke’s speeches” (8, 47). Johnson further contends that “Scripture for Luke—and for all the New Testament writers—was not the Hebrew but rather the Greek LXX” (51). It is through Luke’s hermeneutical method in the entire set of speeches, taken together, that his presentation of God’s action in Christ is most clearly seen. Johnson argues that Luke employs a midrashic technique, similar to the *pesher* method found in the Qumran texts, relying on the readings of the LXX rather than the MT. Much of this conforms to current thinking concerning the speeches in Acts.

Two areas call for special comment: midrash and text.

In New Testament studies it has become fashionable to refer to arguments from scripture as “midrashic.” But often the term is loosely defined. Even Johnson’s phrases, “a king of haggadic midrash” (46) or “a sort of midrashic argument” (47) betrays discomfort at the use of such a protean term. But Johnson is not vague in his investigation. Rather he illustrates Luke’s detailed application of scripture, akin to that of Qumran. Especially notable is his treatment of the phrase (43-46) Δώσω ύμῖν τὰ ὅσια Δαυδ τὰ πιστά (Acts 13:34; Isa. 55:3 LXX). He shows, like Stendahl had fifty years before, how detailed exegetical work can sharpen our focus in the use of terms like midrash and *pesher* when applied to the New Testament.

Johnson is to be commended for his conviction that issues of textual criticism are integrally linked to those of interpretation, especially when treating the use of the Old Testament in the New. He notes that the wild fluctuation of N.T. manuscripts at Acts 15:18 “probably reflects an equivalent confusion in the minds of scribes concerning what the phrase was meant to be” (19). At this point Johnson footnotes studies elsewhere (his own and others) for detailed discussion of textual problems. His study of the use of Joel 3:1-5 in Peter’s speech in Acts 2:17-21 penetrates further. He notes the three significant differences of Luke and the LXX, and the “recent tendency in New Testament Textual Criticism toward eclecticism, which means refusing to follow a single tradition as standard” (21). He raises the various possibilities that may have produced the tangle of variations in the O.T. and N.T. texts, and concludes that Luke “deliberately made the alterations to the Joel citation that we observe in the text of the Greek N.T.” (22).

But we are still left asking, *which* text of the Greek N.T., the B text or the D text or some combination? Perhaps the best explanation is that of W.A. Strange, in his *The Problem of the Text of Acts* (1992), who suggests that Luke wrote a first version (B) and added his own marginal notes (D), which later found their way into the text. But still questions remain. What can explain the phenomenon that the normally more expansive “Western” text of D and allies is the *shorter*
text in this quotation in Acts 2? This feature is reminiscent of the “Western non-interpolations” at the end of Luke’s first volume.

So Johnson makes a valiant beginning in textual criticism. But then he apologizes. “Even at the risk of boring my readers beyond endurance, I have chosen to pay some attention to textual criticism” (22). Far from apologizing, he should have probed more in this most fascinating and fruitful area of New Testament research. He should have kept boring. He might have struck gold. The textual variants in the N.T. are a gold mine of material for discovering the earliest Christian discussions on theology, ethics and ascetics.

The little volume explores some old questions with new perspective and imagination. Would that other writers on Acts could accomplish so much in so few pages.
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