

# Commentary offers substantive look at Luke

*The Gospel of Luke*, by Luke Timothy Johnson; The Liturgical Press (Collegeville, Minn., 1991); 480 pages; \$29.95.

**By Father Sebastian Falcone**  
Guest contributor

In 1966, the noted New Testament scholar W.C. van Unnik wrote with rare insight: "... Luke's writings have become a storm center and will remain so for a long time ..." Twenty-five years have given the insight a prophetic quality. The metaphor retains an apt, if stark, beauty.

A significant contributor to this surge of Lucan studies is Luke Timothy Johnson, professor of New Testament and Christian Origins at the University of Indiana. Two earlier publications explored the Lucan theology of possessions. This 480-page commentary on the Gospel of Luke constitutes his fifth major published work. It appears as volume III of the Sacra Pagina series of multi-volume New Testament commentaries under the general editorship of Daniel J. Harrington, SJ.

Though full-scale, Johnson's current work avoids the massive scope of the two-volume commentary on Luke by

J. A. Fitzmyer (1981, 1985) and by J. Nolland (one volume so far, 1989). It shuns the technical features of the commentaries by L.H. Marshall (1978) and C.F. Evans (1990). It steers clear of the deliberate slant taken by F. Danker (1988) and C.H. Talbert (1982).

The Sacra Pagina format and focus follow a proven pattern. The format consists of a general introduction, with succeeding sections of a fresh translation, verse notes, interpretation, and a brief bibliography. (The inversion of notes and interpretation varies the Anchor Bible sequence): The focus calls for literary analysis and theological exposition. Format and focus make for a predictable presentation of different types of information.

The perceptive reader quickly detects Johnson's overriding bias: a heavy prophetic emphasis. The influence of the Yale school of Lucan interpretation is unmistakable here. This emphasis runs through the general introduction, and recurs time and again in the notes and interpretation sections. It is reflected in six of the titles of the Gospel's seven major divisions, and also in a number of minor section headings. One normally looks for such an emphasis in a subtitle to the work,

but there is none. Even so, the present reviewer demurs at the degree, not the direction, of this focus.

The material is compact and clear, it reads easily enough. Cross-references to other sections of the Gospel and Acts are plentiful; less so to other sections of the New Testament, the Hebrew Scriptures, Greco-Roman writers, and to Christian writers and apocryphal gospels of the second and third centuries.

Overall, the result is a commentary of substantial quality.

At the risk of seeming to nitpick, some critical remarks are in order. The translation varies in quality. It overuses short sentences. Four sentences, for example, are used to translate 1:15, 1:63, 2:25, 3:16 and 15:24; five, to translate 12:27 and 18:11; and seven, to translate 12:24. Some renderings are too colloquial: e.g., "No one lights a lamp and sticks it in a hole ..." (11:33). Some are strained: "Hail, Gifted Lady!" (1:28). Some are plainly confusing: "But the second and the third (brother) married her, and in the same manner also the seven." (20:31) Some expressions are too literal: e.g., "to send off the oppressed with liberty." (4:18) The intent to produce an inclu-

sive language rendering is highly commendable.

In the interest of brevity, but to its own detriment, the Introduction does not include a unit on prayer, the Holy Spirit, and the Infancy Stories in the Lucan scheme of things.

Inconsistencies occur between the Abbreviations and the sectional bibliographies. The introductory bibliography on pages 25-26 needs careful proofreading.

But all of these are relatively minor blemishes.

For whom is this new commentary intended? For all serious readers of the Gospel: clergy, religious, religious educators, college and graduate students, seminarians, serious readers, anyone and everyone who is committed to grasping the Lucan message.

We eagerly await the author's Sacra Pagina commentary on *The Acts of the Apostles*. The publishers promise that work by November, 1992. Whether sooner or later, one will be thankful for the rare phenomenon, by a single author, of back-to-back, first-rate commentaries on Luke-Acts.

And so the Lucan surge goes on!  
Father Falcone is professor of New Testament Studies at St. Bernard's Institute.

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