

BOOK REVIEWS

A History of the Criticism of the Acts of the Apostles, W. Ward Gasque, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1975, 344 pp., hard cover, \$20.00).

Some reviewers err on the side of being too gentle; others are too critical. I tend toward the latter. Recognizing my failing, it is a relief to review a book as excellent as this.

Originally written as a doctoral dissertation under the supervision of Prof. F. F. Bruce at the University of Manchester, this study has been mulled over and revised until it has assumed its present shape. Gasque, who lectures at Regent College, has focused most of his attention on the period since 1800, and has wisely avoided detailed discussion of the exegesis of many individual verses in favour of examining the central problems of criticism and interpretation.

Another strong point of the work is that although Gasque has given the German scholars their due, he has not failed to assess the equally important contributions of American and (especially) British scholars. The one major weakness, acknowledged by the author himself, is the brevity of the assessment of Roman Catholic writers.

Gasque has avoided the danger of schematizing the work on Acts into neat periods (e.g. the periods of *Tendenzkritik*, *Quellenkritik*, *Formgeschichte*, and *Redaktionsgeschichte*), not only because they falsely magnify the German contribution, but also because the periods are oversimplified and therefore misleading. Instead, after an initial chapter which rapidly surveys work on Acts up to F. C. Baur, Gasque devotes three chapters to the Tuebingen school, its critics, and its radical descendants. The next chapter discusses German criticism at the end of the last century. The sixth and seventh chapters are primarily given over to British contributions, and the eighth to Americans. Chapter nine assesses the influence of Martin Dibelius, and the last major chapter penetratingly surveys "Luke the Historian and Theologian in Recent Research". A brief concluding chapter offers a judicious selection of lessons the writer feels he has lear-

ned, the most important of which is, perhaps, the observation that much of the best work on Acts has been done by people who paid special attention to the history, language, geography and literature of the Graeco-Roman world.

I have quibbles about a few details. I think Gasque at one point reads something into Calvin which the reformer would disown (p. 11). Moreover, despite the fine level of English, the writer does offer two or three tortuous sentences. But these are minor blemishes.

The book ought to be found in every College and Seminary library. The high cost will keep it out of many pastors' libraries; but it would make a grand gift. It is not designed to give the reader a lot of spiritual insight into the text of Scripture, but pastors need to read this sort of material from time to time both to learn where biblical criticism has gone and to keep a sense of perspective. Kudos to the author.

D. A. Carson

Vancouver, B. C.