

Consensus

Volume 22

Issue 2 *Essays Ecumenical and Historical*

Article 12

11-1-1996

Filling up the measure: polemical hyperbole in 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16

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Recommended Citation

Humphrey, Edith M. (1996) "Filling up the measure: polemical hyperbole in 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16," *Consensus*: Vol. 22 : Iss. 2 , Article 12.

Available at: <http://scholars.wlu.ca/consensus/vol22/iss2/12>

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Paul's language will not suffice in the modern world because "the consolatory genre, for all of its benefits, construes maturity in androcentric terms" (103). The ancient world understood grieving, weakness, and loss of self-control as attributes of women. Males who exhibited these characteristics were denigrated as immature. Women, then, in order to be faithful Christians had to read themselves into the text as males. An understanding of this sex role stereotyping is useful for the modern world as it understands that Paul's words still have power and as it seeks to live in a more egalitarian world.

This book is welcome at a time when pastors and laity seek to understand what is of edification for the church within the biblical tradition and what needs to be critiqued if the church is going to continue to be a dialogue partner which is taken seriously in society. While too difficult for study groups at church, it would be useful for seminarians and pastors. All too often we have studied Paul's letter in the context of Judaism and forgotten that the Greco-Roman world was the foreground in which the drama took place.

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Filling up the Measure; Polemical Hyperbole in 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16

JSNT Supp. 98

Carol J. Schlueter
Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994
219 pp. \$41.00 hardcover

In this revision of her doctoral thesis, Carol Schlueter reconsiders the long-standing puzzle of 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16. Finding inadequate earlier solutions to the discrepancy between this passage and Romans 9-11, she opts for neither harmonization nor pleas of inauthenticity. Rather, she considers these "abrasive statements" against the Jews as polemical hyperbole which castigates the opponent, embraces the reader, and polarizes the issue(s) at hand. With Montefiore *et al*, she understands the early Christian movement within the context of Judaism, and the passage within a lively internal debate; our discomfort should be further eased because Paul's most intense vituperation was "reserved for insiders", specifically, opposing Christians.

Here is a welcome addition to other recent treatments of the Pauline epistles, which marry historical concern to a close reading of text, through the vehicle of rhetorical criticism. Schlueter's presentation of hyperbolic

amplification in the Graeco-Roman tradition is captivating, if cautious: she will not declare Paul competent in these conventions, but assumes "that general patterns of rhetoric would have been known by many people at the time" (196). Another important contribution, considering the current polarized treatments of NT rhetoric, is her refusal to make Graeco-Roman and Jewish rhetorical patterns mutually exclusive. Nevertheless, this reader would have liked to see an appeal to a broader tradition of Jewish denunciation literature (i.e., prophetic absolutism) rather than a cursory reference to "the religious language of eschatologically minded sects" appended to the end of a chapter on classical rhetoric.

Once the reader accepts the premise that hyperbole is a fruitful category here, the monograph's demonstration of triadic patterns and rhetorical flow is convincing. One wonders, however, whether Paul's theological concerns are not in danger of being swallowed up by a political description of his method: "...for censure Paul *selects* religious themes [and]...*uses* topics which may arouse hostility" (106, my emphasis). It may be that, although Schlueter aims to "take the passage on its own terms" (i.e., historical context), the problem has still been shaped by the long-standing Lutheran agenda: what was Paul's *real* attitude to Torah and Israel? Hence, an analysis that ostensibly finds hyperbole through observation seems driven by the desire to distinguish between Paul's sober position, and rhetorical exigency. Moreover, the attempt to probe the *real* facts of the case sometimes issues, ironically, in the "solemn, flat" readings which the author herself eschews: to demonstrate hyperbole is like trying to explain a joke! Be this as it may, the readings are worth consideration, and present helpful details whether or not one is convinced by the foundational thesis. Of note, too, is the thought-provoking discussion of 2 Corinthians 11, although it tends to direct the reader excursively (*obscurum per obscurius?*) rather than serving as a test of Schlueter's hypothesis.

Finally, it seems that the search for hyperbole in Paul has drawn the author into her own minimization or augmentation of the data: Is the point of 2 Corinthians 11 "to cast [Paul] in a good light and others in a completely bad one", or does the 'fool's speech' not satirize Paul's *own* 'defence' as well? Does Paul "glorify" the Corinthian church as "a pure bride" (11:2) in terms of conduct, or is this eschatological language? Does Romans 1-2 present an exaggerated picture of depravity (again, in terms of conduct) or the prophetic assessment of human sin central to Paul's proclamation of a radical gospel? These questions presuppose that to understand Pauline passages in context means not to divide up his writings into "theology" or *ad hoc* reaction, but to see Paul doing theology *all the while* he is grappling with opponents and concrete issues in the early churches.

This being said, Schlueter provides us with a fruitful combination: rhetorical analysis, close exegesis and a fresh approach to an old (but evidently not obsolete) dilemma.

Her monograph will be of interest especially to New Testament specialists but also to those who are concerned about the Pauline epistles in the

light of rhetorical conventions and/or Jewish-Christian relations.

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The Man in the Scarlet Robe: Two Thousand Years of Searching for Jesus

Michael R. McAteer and Michael G. Steinhauser

Etobicoke, Ont.: The United Church Publishing House, 1996
xii + 172 pp. Paper

“Why, in this high-tech secular age, when humans are probing the very heavens and unlocking the secrets of DNA, do people continue to discuss, talk about, even argue about, a man who died a shameful death on a Roman cross so long ago?” Thus authors McAteer (until recently religion editor at *The Toronto Star*) and Steinhauser (New Testament professor at Toronto School of Theology) pose the question this little book seeks to illumine. Pointing out that some 70,000 “biographies” of Jesus of Nazareth have already been written, they seek here to present a summary of the “search for the historical Jesus” over the years, with particular focus on the so-called “third quest” of the past decade, especially the work of John Dominic Crossan, Robert Funk, and other members of The Jesus Seminar.

The book is directed to the non-professional, Christian or otherwise, and surely succeeds in its authors’ intent. I’d not be surprised to see it listed in a good many bibliographies for “New Testament Introduction” courses.

In eight brightly written chapters McAteer and Steinhauser include discussions of: the contradictions and problems that are evident in the canonical Gospels, especially as contrasted with the Pauline letters, when Jesus’ nature, his self-understanding, and his expectations about the end, are studied; the development of doctrine concerning Jesus in the early church, the political defeat of Arianism and its “heretical” view of Jesus, and the mysteries involved in how the New Testament canon gained acceptance; the importance for Jesus-research of the hypothetical “Q” document, of other “Gospels”, and of the discovery of the Nag Hammadi library; the history of dissent concerning the orthodox, or official, view of Jesus during the renaissance, the reformation era, the age of reason, and in the “old”, “new” and, now in North America, especially, “third quest” for the historical Jesus; the great diversity of “pictures” of Jesus among various “third questers”—and the likelihood that various agendas, such as frustration with church officialdom, etc., have more than a little influence on these pictures.

In their last two chapters, which bring the survey closer to the daily struggle for faith, the authors examine the quite different statements that