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Ancient Rhetorical Theory and Paul. Revised Edition (review)

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Anderson Jr., R. Dean, *Ancient Rhetorical Theory and Paul. Revised Edition.* Leuven: Peeters, 1999. Pp. 340. ISBN 90-429-0705-3. 1180 BEF/30 Euro.

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This is a revision of the book's first (1996) edition. Anderson has now included translations of extra-biblical Greek and Latin citations, and an update of (some of) the bibliographic references. A glossary of rhetorical terms that appeared in the first edition has, by contrast, been omitted, to be expanded and published as a separate volume. What remains is divided into seven major sections. An introduction orients recent scholarship on the early Christian scriptures to modern rhetorical criticism; a second section gives an overview of the ancient sources for rhetorical theory; a third relates rhetoric to epistolography. Sections 4-6 deal with Galatians, Romans, and First Corinthians respectively; a seventh section gathers general conclusions.

In the current millennial avalanche of publishing, which continues unabated even in traditional paper format, one's principal question for any new book should be: are we, finally, better off with it than without it? Yes, certainly, in Anderson's case. He has considerable philology, and has done a massive amount of research in preparing this book. There is much to be grateful for here. That said, in a second edition one would have liked to see some more far-reaching -- even radical -- revisions, on a variety of levels. Anderson's ethos as a scholar, not to mention the actual usefulness of his book, would have been substantially enhanced had he curbed one pervasive tendency of his writing: the peremptory dismissal of the work of other scholars with whom he disagrees when meanwhile his own logic and purposes themselves seem obscure and obstinate. Two instances of this are singled out for brief comment below.

First, at the macro-level. It was a confluence of developments that brought rhetorical criticism to the fore of scholarship on the early Christian scriptures; in rehearsing the historical effects of these, Anderson's first section well emphasizes the significance of James Muilenberg's famous presidential address to the Society of Biblical Literature in 1968, of *The New Rhetoric* (1969) of Chaim Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca, and of Burton Mack's *Rhetoric and the New Testament* (1990). One boggles, however, at Anderson's majestic appraisal of George Kennedy's place in this lineup: 'Kennedy's approach to this discipline is unsatisfactory' (30). Now it is pretty safe to say that 'this discipline,' as such, would simply not exist without Kennedy's groundbreaking *New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism* (1984). A review of subsequent scholarship in the field (including Anderson's own) will demonstrate the extent to

which Kennedy's little book virtually determined the shape this discipline would assume in the years following its publication.

Anderson might have taken this opportunity to refine his approach on a more detailed level as well. For instance: the issue of whether the apostle Paul had formal rhetorical training is far from settled among experts. Anderson argues (288-290) that he did not, dismissing out of hand the evidence adduced by C. J. Classen and others. Anderson is anxious to 'set Paul's writings off against the background of the Graeco-Roman culture in which he lived and worked' (290), but in this context he omits to acknowledge that Paul [a] was born (as opposed to becoming) a Roman citizen, which carried with it measurable social, economic, and political perquisites; [b] was a Pharisee, which positioned him amongst the Jewish elite of his day, thus making him a highly plausible candidate for rhetorical training; and [c] hailed from Tarsus, where there was at the time an important rhetorical school. None of this, of course, is conclusive evidence. Couple it, however, with the level of argumentational sophistication and stylistic polish to be found in Pauline Greek -- even excluding the elegant Epistle to the Hebrews, which few today would attribute to Paul -- and it really requires a hypothesis more satisfactory than the suggestion that Paul had casually picked up some technical rhetorical terminology by 'hearing it used by a friend' (289).

One could multiply such examples extensively, but I think the point is made, and I do not want to obscure the very real value of the book, which -- used with attention and caution -- should figure significantly from now on in the study of early Christian rhetoric in general, and of Pauline rhetoric in specific.

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