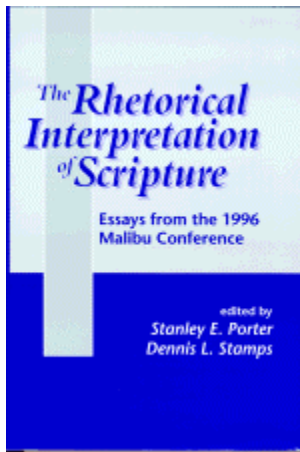


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**Porter, Stanley E. and Dennis L. Stamps, eds.**

***The Rhetorical Interpretation of Scripture: Essays from the 1996 Malibu Conference***

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This Festschrift for Thomas H. Olbricht includes both methodological essays and examples of how different rhetorical approaches work. Part I, *The Theory of Rhetoric and Biblical Interpretation*, includes essays by Erika Mae Olbricht, J. D. H. Amador, Dale Patrick with Allen Scult, Gustavo Martin-Ascensio, Thomas Olbricht, and Duane Watson. Part Two, *Rhetorical Interpretation of Luke's Gospel and Acts*, consists of essays by Kota Yamada, L. Gregory Bloomquist, and Ira J. Jolivet, Jr. Analyses from

Stanley E. Porter, Dennis L. Stamps, Glenn S. Holland, Anders Eriksson, and Lauri Thuren comprise Part Three, *Rhetorical Interpretation of Paul's Writings*. Two discussions of the *Rhetorical Interpretation of Hebrews and Ignatius [of Antioch]* by Timothy W. Seid and Mary W. Patrick constitute Part Four, the final section of the book.

In his deconstruction of the idea(ology) of interpretive unicity in a given Biblical text, Amador argues that rhetorical critics must be more critical, rather than glossing over points where an argument is poorly constructed, unclear, or otherwise ineffective. There are multiple intentionalities behind every text, including the intentionality of the critic(s) in the process of analyzing a text.

In quite a contrasting vein, Patrick and Scult critique the “intrinsically polemical” nature of ideology critique in contrasted with “an understanding of textual rhetoric guided by its possible truth” (p. 76)—a stance which presumably is not “intrinsically polemical.” Implying that deconstruction and ideology critique are “disrespectful” treatments of the

text (pp. 82f), this essay is essentially a plea that critics assume good intentions on the part of the Biblical authors whose texts they analyze.

Gustavo Martin-Asensio argues for an “emphasis on the function of texts in their social contexts” (p. 90; orig. emphasis), he presents Michael Halliday’s “functional grammar” as a solution to the present methodological woes of NT rhetorical critics. While clearly written and presenting an interesting thesis, the essay includes repeated references to “the present volume” which turn out to be erroneous—presumably a holdover from a previous version of this article.

Thomas Olbricht surveys the various uses of rhetorical criticism by NT scholars since the 1960s. Hans Dieter Betz showed that the sophistication of the rhetoric can provide evidence for the character of the audience, and that the *peroratio* in Galatians provides the key to the agenda of Paul’s opponents. Robert Jewett showed that the rhetoric of 1-2 Thessalonians can help track the influences on beliefs and the changing situation among believers. Abraham Smith offers three important rhetorical cues for reconstructing the audience of NT texts: repetitive composition, exemplification, and ethos. While each approach is helpful, Olbricht concludes that “to recreate an audience employing classical rhetoric, then one should employ the whole classical canon, that is, invention, arrangement, style and delivery.”

Duane Watson supports this basic stance of Olbricht, arguing that use of Greco-Roman rhetorical theories can elucidate the rhetorical situation of a Pauline epistle, thereby providing insight into its historical situation. Once the rhetorical situation has been established, the historical situation can be reconstructed by adding the historical, cultural and social data pertinent to that particular letter and audience.

Kota Yamada demonstrates how such a “rhetorical historiography” works, using Luke 1:1-4 as a case study. Arguing that the Lukan preface is typical of Hellenistic-Roman historical works, Yamada shows that this accounts for many of the *hapax legomena* and rare words typical to Luke. The preface also presents Luke’s rhetorical intention: to re-write and improve upon the received tradition (esp. the Gospel of Mark), augmenting it with other sources and traditions, arranging all these them ‘in order,’ and presenting them in such a way that the implied reader will be persuaded of the certainty of these teachings.

L. Gregory Bloomquist uses Luke 21 to begin developing an analysis of ‘apocalyptic rhetoric.’ Intertextual analysis shows that Luke directs his teaching to the people (not simply the disciples), “heightens the initial sense of impending doom that pervades Mark and, at the same time, introduces significant moments of hoped-for salvation” (p. 184). Analysis of the hortatory enthymemes in 21:7-36 illumines certain assumptions about future scenarios that will involve the readers, and which Luke believes they will

understand. In ways such as these, socio-rhetorical analysis helps to overcome the fragmentation of NT studies while exposing “what is really at stake” in the text (p. 208).

Ira J. Jolivet, Jr. presents the stasis theory of II<sup>BCE</sup> rhetorical theorist Hermagoras of Temnos, and argues that Paul’s defense speech in Acts 26 is an example of antestasis, the ‘issue of comparison.’

Recognizing this legal strategy accounts for the discrepancies between the account of Paul’s conversion in Acts 9 and the last one in Acts 26, where strategic embellishments argue that Paul’s actions are a response to a divine imperative rather than an antagonistic attitude.

Stanley Porter compares Paul the letter-writer (depicted in his own epistles) with Paul the rhetorician (depicted in Acts), and argues for the primacy of epistolary theory (v. rhetorical theory) in analyzing the Pauline texts. While Paul is presented in Acts as a rhetorician, the speeches there do not provide “firm data for close analysis . . . as clearly Pauline rhetoric” (p. 248). Paul the rhetorician cannot be found in either the letters or Acts, although Luke’s rhetorical strategies are imbedded in the latter.

Dennis L. Stamps explores the nature of Christian rhetoric and argumentation in Pauline discourse to develop “an understanding of Pauline theological rhetoric” (p. 249). Stamps concludes that the distinctive feature of Christian rhetoric is its “appeal to the significance of Jesus Christ [which] becomes a theological foundation and argument for constructing a world of meaning and becomes a theological basis and argument for persuading others to faith” (p. 259).

Glenn S. Holland takes the locus of Rom 7:7-25 as the point of departure for an analysis of Paul’s rhetorical strategy in Romans 7 and in the letter as a whole. Paul uses the first-person singular in this passage to invert the traditional topos of *paradeigmata* and uncover the “moral futility and impotence” of human attempts at self-mastery (p. 270). Paul’s identification with “the ‘wretched I’ . . . evokes a fellowship with a common wretched past and a common blessed present, a fellowship strengthened by mutual forbearance and mutual support” (p. 271)—a paramount objective of this letter.

Anders Eriksson contends that early Christian rhetoric is not a fourth rhetorical genre, but rather is distinguished by its *endoxa*, “the reputable opinions shared by both” the rhetor and audience. There are topics peculiar to early Christian rhetoric because the orator was expected to use such *idioi topoi* to construct the proofs for a particular line of argument. The special topics in early Christian rhetoric “were directly derived from the proclaimed kerygma” (p. 276), as Eriksson illustrates through an analysis of Paul’s inductive and deductive arguments in 1 Cor 8-10.

Lauri Thuren argues that one must “derhetorize” Pauline texts before analyzing their theology. Paul’s aim was to modify the recipients’ behavior, and the persuasive features of his letters “may have affected the way in which Pauline theology is expressed” there (p. 304). Galatians is an example where Paul’s description of his opponents and of their theology is stereotypical and exaggerated for rhetorical effect; to take it as providing reliable historical data is to misread the letter. On the other hand, looking at the style and rhetorical techniques of the letter reveals its theology.

Timothy W. Seid suggests that Hebrews evinces a repeated pattern of synkrisis and paraenesis. Heb 7:1-25 is one example of this pattern which advances the author’s theology of Christ as the superior priest whom the audience should accept and emulate.

In the final essay, Mary W. Patrick uses a rhetorical analysis of Ignatius of Antioch’s Letter to the Philadelphians to derive answers to two related historical questions: What disturbed Ignatius enough to prompt the letter? And who were his opponents in Philadelphia? The occasion for Ignatius’ letter was the lack of hospitality in Philadelphia. His opponents were not “Judaizers” but Christians there “who argued against his christocentric interpretation of Old Testament prophets” (p. 375).

Different methodologies are debated and applied in this set of essays on the rhetorical interpretation of the NT. Many, though not all, of the methods are complementary. All of them share the characteristic of revealing more clearly how the NT authors attempted to persuade their audiences. In the end, they also provide further historical information about the contexts of the texts, and important correctives to prior readings which did not account for the rhetorical strategies used therein. The collection is a useful introduction to rhetorical analysis of the NT.