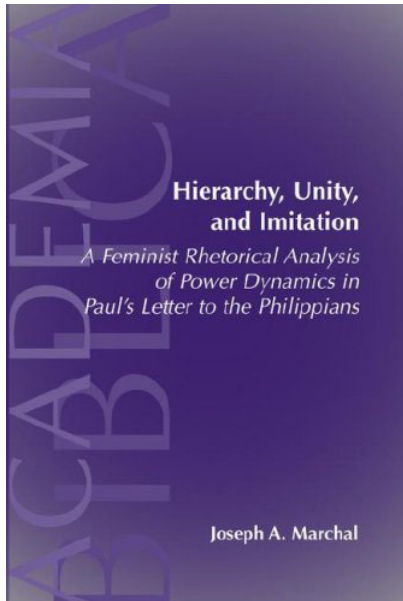


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**Marchal, Joseph A.**

***Hierarchy, Unity, and Imitation: A Feminist Rhetorical Analysis of Power Dynamics in Paul's Letter to the Philippians***

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Jennifer Bird  
Vanderbilt University  
Nashville, Tennessee

This rhetorical analysis of Philippians is an engaging and forward-looking dissertation. In addition to the expected history of scholarship on the relevant aspects of the letter and the “one thing new” that a dissertation is “allowed” to do, Marchal dives into the implications or usefulness of Paul’s rhetorical savvy and highlights some of the sociopolitical dynamics often overlooked in discussions on friendship and military imagery in this letter. In addition to those who are normally interested in feminist analyses of biblical texts, those who would benefit most from this book, in my estimation, would be anyone interested in rhetorical studies in biblical scholarship (ch. 4 in particular) or in Pauline studies in general.

Marchal’s brief introduction, setting the context, purpose, and procedure of the monograph, summarizes various rhetorical approaches applied to biblical studies; explains his feminist rhetorical approach, which includes the seven steps of Schüssler Fiorenza’s “dance of interpretation”; and of course touches on some of the major issues related to working with Philippians. Marchal draws upon the rhetorical analytical work of Antoinette Wire, Elizabeth Castelli, and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza. In concert with their approaches, one of the primary assumptions behind Marchal’s rhetorical analyses is the claim that “the letter as argumentation makes the most sense in a context where

authority is still a contested issue and the issues discussed are not settled dogma but living concerns” (13). Thus, the reader who posits Paul’s authority for the Philippian communities and the early church in general as “a given” may take issue with Marchal, but if she or he pushes through, I think the reader will find many helpful insights can be culled from this book. It is divided into two parts, “Setting the Stage” and “How Philippians Implements These Rhetorics,” with two and three chapters, respectively.

In chapter 2, “Critical Overview of Scholarship on Prominent Images,” Marchal begins with an initial survey of the scholarship on friendship and military imagery, the two sets of images scholars address most often. It is in his “feminist reassessment” that Marchal highlights the political, gendered, and class dynamics and hierarchical/kyriarchal social structure of friendships at the time, noting the connection with patronage systems. A critical engagement with some of the dynamics under the surface of military imagery, including issues of settlement and occupation of various colonies, produces a similar reconfiguring for baseline assumptions about the use of military language and the effects it may have had on the initial audiences. These two aspects of society, friendships and the military, were part and parcel of the kyriarchal social structures. As such, scholarship that deals with these realms, Marchal suggests, would benefit from considering the exploitation and domination that such language engenders and at times prescribes. Two “cues” from this critical engagement direct the remainder of the book: scholars are charged to pay attention to the “potentially oppressive power relations reflected in the letter” (71) and to recognize that, even if one can delineate multiple rhetorical strategies at work, they may be “interrelated and mutually supporting in the argumentation” (72) in oppressive or possibly liberating ways.

The third chapter, “Situating the Rhetorics of Philippians,” is relevant to the overall purpose but, ironically, is not situated well within the flow of the book. Given the previous chapter’s dual foci of friendship and military imagery, I was somewhat blindsided by a discussion of women in cultic life and in the early Jesus movement in Philippi. Those topics plus his succinct appraisal of unity rhetorics in ancient civic speeches and the colonial status and military situation at Philippi do indeed demonstrate the need for a “multi-factored analysis and an analytic of domination” (112) of not just the situation in Philippi but of the content of the letter and of the scholarship on it.

In part 2 of the book, “How Philippians Implements these Rhetorics,” chapter 4, “Evolving Rhetoric: The Interaction of Arguments as They Develop,” provides a section-by-section analysis of the developing or evolving rhetoric of the letter, and chapter 5, “Prevailing Rhetoric: The Major Arguments,” analyzes the way the rhetorical devices function in the overall effect of the letter using Olbrechts-Tyteca and Perelman’s

rhetorical categories (arguments of dissociation, quasi-logical arguments, arguments based on the structure of reality, arguments establishing the structure of reality).

I found chapter 4 more helpful than the next in giving an analysis of the rhetoric of the letter, with a nod toward the implications of such language. In both of these rhetorical analyses, Marchal makes much of Olbrechts-Tyteca and Perelman's unique contribution to rhetorical studies: the "interaction of arguments" that their "flexible and interdependent conceptualization of argumentation" (118) allows. While thoroughly versed in the rhetorical scholarship related to New/Second Testament studies, Marchal has gone beyond simply noting the rhetorical moves to suggesting the implications of them from a position that does not need to produce a positivistic interpretation.

The conclusions Marchal can and does draw from this project have significant implications in light of previous scholarship, specifically within the realm of analyzing potentially oppressive aspects of the text through the rhetorics of both the letter and its interpretation. He has provided an entrée into several other avenues for feminist and liberationist interpretations of this text, starting with a fuller evaluation of the charge to Euodia and Syntyche to "think the same" as Paul. The sameness rhetoric when paired with authority, divine or otherwise, taps into numerous other realms of discourse, such as issues of identity and experience, colonization and neocolonialism, class and gender concerns, and so forth. Ultimately, Marchal would have us take into account the interconnectedness of all of these possible approaches to Philippians.

The book also has an appendix of Marchal's outline of the argumentative techniques used in Philippians, a thirty-page bibliography, and indexes of ancient sources and modern authors.

The work as a whole left me wanting more in the following four ways. (1) The work on friendship and military language could have been threaded into the rhetorical analysis in some way, especially given the power dynamics of such imagery and its role in constructing social relations/reality, as Marchal notes in chapter 2. (2) For those who are not completely familiar with Olbrechts-Tyteca and Perelman's four categories, a more thorough explanation or discussion of dissociative rhetoric would benefit the reader, as this is a distinctive aspect of their work and is pivotal to Marchal's evaluation of the rhetoric in Philippians. (3) A smoother transition into and out of chapter three would be helpful, in particular as he discusses "unity rhetorics" and the military situation of Philippi. The thesis could have been strengthened by making clear the connection between these issues and the systematic analyses of Paul's rhetoric. (4) On a more personal note, I did miss the flair that I know Marchal to have in other scholarly settings, but that, I suppose, will have to wait for his next book.