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DOI: [http://dx.doi.
org/10.18820/23099089/actat.
v41i2.16](http://dx.doi.org/10.18820/23099089/actat.v41i2.16)

ISSN: 1015-8758 (Print)

ISSN: 2309-9089 (Online)

Acta Theologica 2021
41(2):225-226

Date received:
19 November 2021

Date published:
15 December 2021



Published by the UFS
<http://journals.ufs.ac.za/index.php/at>

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BOOK ANNOUNCEMENT

D.F. Tolmie, *Pointing out persuasion in Philemon: Fifty readings of Paul's rhetoric from the 4th to the 18th century*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 383pp.

During the second half of the previous century, the ancient practice of rhetoric experienced a revival of interest. The seminal text by Perelman and Olbrecht-Tyteca – *The new rhetoric* (org. 1958) – emphasised that rhetoric should be understood as “the art of persuasion”; it is about argumentation and not about stylistic ornamentation. Soon the bibliological disciplines embraced this “turn to rhetoric” as an interpretational strategy. The South African New Testament scholar Francois Tolmie became interested in rhetoric and published a volume on the rhetorical analysis of Galatians in 2005. He employed a specific approach, namely reconstructing the argument from the text itself and not forcing ancient or modern models on the text. Tolmie has now published another major work – *Pointing out persuasion in Philemon* – a seminal study examining how commentators reconstructed the argumentation in this Pauline letter over a period of 1,400 years. The book was published by the prestigious German publisher Mohr Siebeck.

Tolmie's interest lies in how the Letter to Philemon has been interpreted from the first extant commentary by Ambrosiaster (4th century) to the first modern one by Baumgarten (18th century). The *Wirkungsgeschichte* that he describes in this book thus covers the periods of the Early Church, the Middle Ages, the Reformation and the Early Modern Period (16th-18th centuries). Within this time frame, he selected fifty commentators and investigated their work in detail. Some of the well-known commentators include Theodore of Mopsuestia, Peter Lombard, Thomas Aquinas, Martin Luther, John Calvin, and Johann Albrecht

Bengel. Some lesser-known commentators include Florus of Lyon, Bruno the Carthusian, Gulielmus Estius, and Abraham Calovius. Tolmie discusses these fifty commentators in three analytic chapters. He concludes the study with a synthesising chapter, summarising the findings of the research. This final chapter reconstructs the rhetorical situation on the basis of the fifty readings. Tolmie then proceeds to submit a most useful section-by-section reading of the Letter, explaining the rhetorical strategies employed by Paul, as interpreted by the various commentators. In the last part of the chapter, he points to the major findings, to disagreements among the commentators, and to idiosyncratic views.

When reading the book, one cannot but be overwhelmed by the depth of the scholarship on display therein. Primary sources in the original languages were studied. These primary readings are supplemented by outstanding secondary work. One can understand that the study took seven years to complete. Tolmie mentions, in the preface, his use of international libraries in Princeton, Leuven, Heidelberg and Nijmegen, and one can easily grasp the Herculean effort made to obtain primary sources. This is the work of an immensely disciplined, mature, and capable researcher.

The book deserves to be read and studied. It makes a large contribution to the state of scholarship on Philemon. It retrieves biblical interpreters from the past not known, and it captures the main lines of Paul's effective communication. A deeper reading of Tolmie's study may disclose the potential of rhetoric to reveal how language, power, and relationality are interwoven, and ultimately how the Christian faith and the experience of transcendence cannot be understood apart from these.