

Krzysztof Mielcarek

"An Exemplary Man: Cornelius and Characterization in Acts", Bonnie J. Flessen, Pickwick 2011 : [recenzja]

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Bonnie J. Flessen, *An Exemplary Man: Cornelius and Characterization in Acts* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011). Pp. x + 195. Paper. \$ 20. ISBN 978-1-61097-294-9

KRZYSZTOF MIELCAREK

Institute of Biblical Studies, The John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin
address: Aleje Racławickie 14, 20-950 Lublin, Poland; e-mail: krzysztof.mielcarek@kul.lublin.pl

Bonnie J. Flessen has produced a gender type study focused on the character of Cornelius presented by Luke in the second volume of his work (Acts 10). The American biblical scholar who teaches at Carthage College in Kenosha and at Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago proposes to the reader a hermeneutic of masculinity as a means of the New Testament exegesis. To her Cornelius is not only a model Gentile who wholeheartedly receives the Gospel, but he is also a model male figure for Luke's audience. Flessen claims that the description of Cornelius reveals that the third evangelist has employed a multifaceted rhetorical strategy having in mind both the perspective of gender and empire.

To fulfil the aim of her study Flessen turns to narrative criticism, masculinity studies and some material remains from antiquity. The first method allows her an appropriate strategy for interpreting the account of Acts. Examples of the contextual approach give the author possibility to focus on specific aspects of characterisation, rhetoric and gender. While historical evidence used in the course of her study is treated as a comparative background to Luke's plot objectives.

The book has got four main parts. The first chapter contains Flessen's discussion over previous studies of Acts 10 with a special focus on narrative, rhetoric and gender. The author points to some gaps of former analyses of Cornelius and proposes a fusion of narrative and masculinity approaches in the case of Acts 10. Flessen ends this chapter with a comparison of positive examples of masculinity in Acts 1–9 and the figure of Cornelius.

Review of the contemporary masculinity researches in the field of the New Testament fulfil the second chapter. Flessen points there to three classicists who paved the way to many biblical conclusions (M. Gleason, C. Barton and C. Williams). Their findings shed light on certain aspects

of elite Greco-Roman masculinity (especially self-control and domination). Following their examples scholars like C. Conway and S. Moore discussed imperial models of masculinity in comparison to biblical ones, but military masculinity has not been very extensive yet.

Chapter three contains a detailed investigation on the specific words and phrases used by Luke to characterise the piety of Cornelius. Since according to C. Conway piety and masculinity are interweaved, the figure of Cornelius can be matched with some Roman or Greek man of virtue. In Hellenistic and Roman literature one can find many terms like εὐσεβεία, δικαιοσύνη or some examples of generosity that probably functioned as a common ideal of a virtuous man. Luke intentionally uses these terms, but he also reconfigures them in order to shift the attention of his audience from personal honour toward God. In this way Cornelius, a Gentile and a military man becomes a model of piety toward God of Israel for the third generation of non-Jewish Christians.

The last chapter is devoted to some historical evidence on military figures. Flessen privileges sources from I-II century AD and quotes mainly Josephus, *Res gestae divi Augusti*, Seneca, Suetonius, Meander and Plautus. Comparing the given examples the author spots many similarities and dissimilarities. Interaction with civilian groups and giving orders to people belong to the first feature, while obedience to God and conformity toward Peter as a Judean makes Cornelius different from Greco-Roman exemplary man.

Flessen's study is certainly well thought and structured. She takes a very good care of the reader signalling in advance her steps of research and making short clear conclusions on the end of each part of her study. However, she seems to focus on the Hellenistic and Roman sources neglecting some valuable Biblical traditions. One may wonder if Luke really thought mainly of pagan world rather than Jewish one while writing Acts. There are only few passages in his two-volume-work imitating classical literature while his text as whole resembles very much the Septuagint. Is it not a sign that one should consider it more than some extra biblical examples? Second, the episode in Acts concerning centurion is a very short one and a description of both centurion's character and his attributes is even scantier. Nevertheless, the American scholar from Chicago seems to elaborate a lot on the matter. How much of it does belong to Luke?