



An Exemplary Man: Cornelius and Characterization in Acts 10

Bonnie J. Flessen

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Synopsis: While most scholars focus on the character of Cornelius as a model Gentile, Bonnie Flessen argues that Cornelius is also a model male figure for Luke's audience. When analyzed closely, the characterization of Cornelius reveals a multifaceted rhetorical strategy regarding both gender and empire. This strategy lifts up a rather surprising portrait of an exemplary man who represents the Roman Empire and yet nevertheless manifests the virtues of submission, piety, and generosity. Flessen also proposes a hermeneutic of masculinity as a means to exegete Acts and other New Testament texts. This critical lens provides interpreters with a way of thinking about gender when female characters are absent or sparse. Although constructs of gender are embedded in texts, interpreters can use recent scholarship on masculinity along with extrabiblical evidence as tools to excavate the contours of the male figure in antiquity. Endorsement: "A compelling study about men during the Roman Empire that does not reinforce male dominance and androcentric reading habits. It skillfully fuses historical-literary methodologies with a hermeneutic of masculinity and presents Cornelius, the male centurion in Acts 10, as a model man whose 'alternative' way of being masculine challenged men of the early Christian communities to relinquish androcentric domination, authority, and power. Of course, this challenge does not merely belong to the first century but has urgent relevance even today!" -Susanne Scholz Associate Professor of Old Testament Perkins School of Theology
Author Biography: Bonnie J. Flessen is an adjunct instructor at Carthage College in Kenosha, Wisconsin, and at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago.

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