

doing so (or not), and call on churches to continue to do so. *Becoming the Gospel* presents a clearly articulated, comprehensive, and challenging missional exegesis of Paul that both effectively integrates historical analysis and draws out implications for how churches may live as missional communities today. It would be well at home in the hands of scholar, pastor, church leader, and seminary or graduate student and conveys a needed missional message for many contemporary Christian communities and readers of Paul.

LESLEY DIFRANCICO
Loyola University Maryland

A Modest Apostle: Thecla and the History of Women in the Early Church. By Susan E. Hylan. New York: Oxford University Press, 2015. 182 pages. \$74.00. doi: 10.1017/hor.2016.68

Susan Hylan's book argues that feminist scholarship has drawn too sharp a contrast between First Timothy and the Acts of Thecla, and has not sufficiently taken into consideration the complexity of social norms of modesty regarding the behavior of women. The strengths of this book are considerable: it advances scholarship through reappraisal of conclusions that often go unchallenged, and it culls data about women from numerous sources, including papyri. In addition to textual analysis, Hylan rereads in between the lines of key texts of First Timothy and Thecla, emphasizing what is *not* stated explicitly but is presupposed in the light of Greco-Roman cultural norms and values. Historians and social scientists have long engaged in this practice, of course, but the value of this book lies in its rereading of these texts in ways that challenge predominant readings that have at times caricatured marriage as a restriction on women. Hylan argues convincingly that marriage was an advance for social influence, increased social status, and access to resources for most women. Marriage was associated with freedom (84), since slaves could not form a licit marriage. The evidence shows, she argues, that celibacy did not grant women greater freedom, nor did it provide a more egalitarian situation.

Hylan advances her arguments while evenhandedly acknowledging that gender hegemony was part of Roman culture, and that women were constrained by social expectations of deference to men of greater or equal rank. She concludes (121): "The interpreter should both acknowledge the limitations and structural barriers that women experienced alongside the specific kinds of actions and circumstances in which women's agency was not only allowed but also expected."

In all, this is a substantial contribution to the discussion on early Christian women. There are some problems, however. First, there are unsubstantiated

claims. Despite laudable efforts to locate data on non-elite women, particularly through the use of papyri, the data Hylen uses on women comes predominantly from information on elite women even when Hylen claims she is presenting data on non-elite women. Despite asserting (23) that “non-elite women also participated in patronage in ways that were similar to their male peers,” the endnote (21) provides as evidence data that concerns elite women, such as Cicero’s wife, Terentia. As a result, Hylen’s claim that women in general (“many women,” 28) engaged in “active leadership” is undercut to some extent, because she has not established that public leadership and social influence extended beyond elite women. Similarly, the claim that “most widows were *sui iuris*” (67), that is, independent upon the death of the father, depends on whether the widow is a Roman citizen, which is difficult to determine from our sources for any but the elite. However, since the women in the texts under examination, such as the Thecla narrative, are often elite, this point does not invalidate Hylen’s analysis. Second, at times the book makes a claim that is not quite accurate. Thus Hylen states that “Terentia’s wealth becomes visible because she uses it to support her family during Cicero’s exile” (24); but Terentia was far more elite than Cicero, a new man, and her wealth enabled him to enter the Senate in the first place. Hylen also claims that 1 Timothy 2:15 “makes childbearing essential to the Christian life” (89); but that text more accurately relates *salvation* (*sōthēsetai*, “she will be saved”) for women to childbearing/rearing. Third, there are some strained readings. Few will agree (61) that 1 Timothy 3:12 applied to men and women *diakonous* (helpers/servers), since, as Hylen acknowledges, the verse refers to the “husband of one wife,” using the noun *anēr* (“male”). Fourth, Hylen never acknowledges the complex text-critical situation of the Thecla narrative. Her analysis relies solely on the Greek text of Lipsius. Fifth, Hylen repeatedly refers to texts as “read” when the evidence indicates that audiences heard texts—not a small point in a study that concerns rhetorical analysis. Finally, although the book engages a wealth of scholarship, the lack of engagement with Elisabeth Esch-Wermeling (*Thekla—Paulusschülerin wider Willen? Strategien der Leserlenkung in den Theklaakten* [Münster: Aschendorff, 2008]) is puzzling.

Even with these caveats, Hylen’s important contribution to scholarship on early Christian women is recommended particularly for graduate students. Hylen’s appeal for more complex analysis will require scholars to be more careful about what they assert about gendered social norms.

VINCENT T. M. SKEMP
St. Catherine University