

Khiok-Khng Yeo, *Rhetorical Interaction in 1 Corinthians 8 and 10: A Formal Analysis with Preliminary Suggestions for a Chinese, Cross-Cultural Hermeneutic*. Biblical Interpretation Series 9; Leiden E. J. Brill, 1995. Pp. xvi + 275.

The *Biblical Interpretation Series*, the first offering of which appeared in 1993, seeks to provide a forum for the discussion of the use of new methods and approaches in interpreting the Bible. Dr. K. K. Yeo's contribution fits into this forum in two ways. First, he employs a rhetorical critical method in assessing texts related to the issue of idolatry in 1 Corinthians. Second, his goal in doing so is to explore the relevance of Paul's rhetorical technique for the question of cross-cultural hermeneutics. His work, *Rhetorical Interaction in 1 Corinthians 8 and 10*, is the revision of his doctoral dissertation (Northwestern University, 1992) written under the supervision of Robert Jewett (Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary). In terms of form and structure, it retains the character of a dissertation. Eleven chapters (including introduction and conclusion) are followed by a very thorough, categorized bibliography of 46 pages in small font (1000+ items not all of which are interacted with in the text and notes) and indexes of biblical references and modern authors. Each chapter closes with a helpful conclusion or summary. Whatever limitations the dissertation format might carry for the reader, it allows the author freedom to access and interact with the highest level of scholarship on a number of interrelated and often complicated topics. The result is an extensively researched work clearly most suited to more advanced students and scholars.

The first eight chapters essentially provide the background necessary for treating the texts of 1 Corinthians 8 and 10. Chapter One introduces the strategy and aims of the study. A twofold thesis is proposed. First, Paul's rhetorical technique is one that engages the different groups within the Corinthian audience interactively in dialogue which intends to edify through supplying a theologically superior interpretation of knowledge and love. Second, one of

the implications to be drawn from Paul's technique (of particular relevance to the issue of a cross-cultural hermeneutics) is that the uniqueness of an audience and sensitivity to the various elements of its context are essential to the communication (hermeneutical) process.

Chapter Two surveys approaches to the interpretation of 1 Corinthians 8 and 10. Yeo introduces four categories (Theological, History of Religion, Sociological, Rhetorical). Although each approach sheds some light on the interpretative problems related to these passages (e.g. the social setting of the Corinthian church, the nature of the idol-food issue, the "strong" and the "weak," the literary relationship of the two chapters, the nature of the Spirit-enthusiasm in Corinth), none of them gets adequately beyond discussing the content of Paul's theology to considering his technique of communication. The result is a distortion of Paul's message.

In the next two chapters, the author proposes an alternative method (his "rhetorical-hermeneutical approach") and defines how he will approach the task of rhetorical criticism. In the course of navigating the very difficult waters of the modern study of hermeneutics, Yeo concludes in Chapter Three that the hermeneutical process must be understood as triangular, involving the text (Paul), the interpreter, and the intended audiences. The nature of language and the goal of communication to an audience that is "situated" in a particular context necessitate a hermeneutic that is aware of the dialogical process in which the original writer was engaged and seeks to promote and extend it sensitively into other contexts. Only through dialogue can the gulfs between contexts be crossed. An important element in the process is the interpreter's awareness of his/her own situation: Yeo identifies his as being defined by a Chinese world-view and a specific interest in cross-cultural hermeneutics.

Chapter Four lays out the author's approach to rhetorical criticism. Yeo delineates his method by surveying developments in rhetorical criticism of the NT. He follows but also modifies the approach of George Kennedy (see Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation Through Rhetorical Criticism* [Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1984]); modifications include a greater sensitivity to the Jewish and Christian influences upon Paul's rhetoric and to the role of audience in Paul's communication technique.

Some justification has to be supplied for treating 1 Corinthians 8 and 10 as units which can be separated from ch. 9. To do this (Chapter Five), the author adopts R. Jewett's redactional theory of the Corinthian correspondence. Thus, on the basis of the questions Paul treated, chs. 8 and 10 are to be seen as

deriving from one Pauline letter and most of ch. 9 from another. Furthermore, closer analysis reveals that 1 Corinthians 8 and 10:23-11:1 are distinguishable from 10:1-22 on the basis of the techniques Paul employs and the audience he addresses.

Chapters Six and Eight aim respectively to reconstruct the social situation and identify the audience Paul addressed. Relying on the work of Meeks, Neyrey, Malina and Theissen (among others), the author concludes that Paul addressed a complex "multi-frontal" situation in which social, ethnic and related status diversity provoked and aggravated tensions and disputes in the church. The labels "strong" and "weak" derive, apparently, from the Corinthians' own vocabulary, being related to an assessment of social status in the community. The "strong" were those with social power, which in the Corinthian church's context was based on possession of "knowledge" that carried authority with it but also overlapped with economic standing. The "strong" eat idol meat (1) because they believe that idols have no existence, (2) because meat is therefore the food of the mature, and (3) because they associate the eating of meat with freedom. The "weak" were those of lower class, who were unaccustomed to eating (idol) meat for economic reasons and refused to eat (idol) meat because of weak consciences stemming from their persistent belief in the existence of idols (or the gods behind them). Having evaluated the various interpretations of the Corinthian enthusiasm (Chapter Eight), Yeo defends a proto-Gnostic identification, arguing that the community was thoroughly steeped in the theology of Hellenistic-Judaism. He maintains further that the size of the church and the diversity that existed among groups led to separate meetings, a certain degree of isolation of these groups and a consequent tendency for each to form its own theology.

The complex religious context of the Corinthians responsible for the Corinthian world-view is discussed in Chapter Seven. The influence of the mystery religions upon the Corinthian interpretation of, e.g., tongues-speaking and participation in the Lord's Supper, is thought to be heavy; in general, this influence prepared them for "acceptance of the proto-Gnostics' conception of freedom and right[s]" (p. 119).

Chapters 9 and 10, then, concentrate on the texts related to idolatry and the eating of idol food. Yeo first applies his rhetorical critical method to 1 Cor 10:1-22 to examine Paul's technique and message. Paul combines midrash with Greco-Roman rhetorical devices, with the former Jewish element being the more dominant in this passage, in the effort to persuade the Corinthian "gnostics" (the primary audience in this section) to be faithful to God. Paul's

argument exerts a compelling force through the application of the OT paradigm that is effectively transferred to the Christian community through the christological interpretation of the rock (v.4). Vv.1-13 and 14-22 are to be taken together as carrying forward a unified message that aims to adjust an erroneous and dangerous outlook.

1 Corinthians 8:1-13 and 10:23-11:1 deal with the related dimension of the problems caused by the eating of idol meat in the community but employ rhetorical devices that are different from 10:1-22. What Paul achieves with his technique in these two passages is a "community discourse." Rather than speaking to the "strong" and "the weak" (the audience addressed here), Paul creates an event of dialogue ("whereby all parties can talk and listen to one another" p. 209) that is christocentric and, because it is christocentric, seeks to bring about mutual edification the "weak" being built up, the "strong" being instructed in the building up of others.

Yeo suggests that we are possibly to understand 1 Corinthians 10:1-22, which is presumed to come from an earlier letter (B), as having failed to achieve its goal with regard to idolatry and the gnostics, and that this failure required a later effort (in 8:1-13 and 10:23-11:1; letter C) in which Paul took another literary tack. He allows that this is only a possibility, but that either way Letter C takes an approach (characterized by "the rhetoric of knowledge and love") that is clearly designed to encourage and foster dialogue and understanding between all parties involved. What must be seen is not simply the differences in approaches taken in the two letters or passages, but the fact that Paul "creates a rhetorical event [in 8:1-13 and 10:23-11:1]...whereby the gnostics, the 'weak,' and Paul can engage together in the dialogical process of edification" (p. 211). The apostle's technique of mobilizing the community in this way draws its members into a process patterned after the redemptive Christ-event.

Chapter Eleven suggests one important application and draws some conclusions. In a preliminary way, Yeo applies the insights gained from examining Paul's techniques to the question of cross-cultural hermeneutics. The Pauline approach contains several important implications. From particularly 1 Cor 10:1-22 it becomes clear that Paul's typological approach creates a communication event in which differences between unique groups are acknowledged while a point of commonality allows horizons to merge and new levels of understanding to be reached. But insights drawn from Paul's "community discourse" in 8:1-13 and 10:23-11:1 shed some helpful light on the specific task of crossing over to the Chinese horizon. First, Paul exhibits

in these passages a concern for dealing sensitively with people in their social and communal situation. Second, the centrality of the dynamics of knowledge and love provides a specific point of contact with Confucian thought which shares this center. Pauline love and Confucian *jen* seem to overlap in that each is to find expression above all in a life characterized by devotion and service to others. And Paul's (like Mencius') rhetorical goals correspond by seeking not simply a display of sophistry but supremely to expound truth for the sake of transforming the audience's behavior.

The issue of Chinese ancestor worship offers a well-defined case to explore the relevance of Paul's technique for cross-cultural hermeneutics. Yeo suggests that this relevance is best seen in Paul's own tendency to resist absolute prohibitions, which runs contrary to the intolerance shown by the majority of both Protestant and Roman Catholic missionaries who tended to prohibit the practice on the basis of 1 Corinthians 8 and 10. In the author's opinion, this amounts to a misappropriation of Pauline teaching, resulting from a failure to understand the content of the teaching within the context of Paul's rhetorical technique content is taken out of the context which gives it meaning. On the contrary, careful observation of Paul's method will lead to dialogue motivated by love; acceptance of the audience's perspective is not the automatic result, but a coming alongside of those practicing ancestor worship will make it possible to see the matter from another point of view. The apostle's concerns took into account the real needs of the Corinthian audience(s), and our attempts to dialogue with Chinese ancestor worshipers must realize that the practice seeks equally to meet specific needs in people. The author suggests that the "strong/weak" categories and knowledge/love elements in Pauline thinking may have immediate parallels in Chinese thought which will guide the task of cross-cultural hermeneutics. But however close the analogy, it is the Pauline commitment to communication which produces and encourages dialogue and understanding among all parties involved that promises a process that will be interactive and useful.

Yeo concludes that only rhetorical analysis brings Paul's technique to light and allows the interpreter to see how his theology is central to his rhetoric in 1 Corinthians 8 and 10; for by this means the interpreter can get beyond the content of his theology to Paul's own hermeneutical operation in which theology finds meaningful application in the communication event. This operation and event are essentially the mechanics of a cross-cultural hermeneutics.

It is not possible in this format to do more than react with the broadest of strokes to this very stimulating study, and it might be most helpful to do this with the overall aims of the book in view. Unavoidably, a project such as Dr. Yeo's which must pass through several fields of academic specialization will

not be able to satisfy every reader. And some points should be raised. But first the success of the work should be underlined. In my mind, there is no question that the author has made an important contribution to the discussion of the process of constructing indigenous theologies, which must include taking biblical teaching across historical and cultural horizons. His contribution may be seen on two levels. First, specifically, his use of rhetorical analysis on 1 Corinthians 8 and 10 puts Paul's communication process into a fuller perspective. Paul is seen as one who is very much involved in contextualizing the gospel for the edification of those he addresses; his sensitivity and concern to "dialogue," as well as to move the parties forward in their understanding, rather than simply to allow them to remain where they are, come equally into view through Yeo's presentation. He has at least made reasonable cases for the explanations he offers to the notoriously difficult questions related to the Corinthian background and situation (social, theological, religious, etc.) and for the equally problematic literary relationship between the passages he treats to provide a reasonable support for his rhetorical analysis. Moreover, I would agree with him that his particular approach opens to the interpreter a window onto this Pauline process with its patterns and intentions that has perhaps been closed to other approaches past or present. On a second general level, Yeo's work on 1 Corinthians 8 and 10 and his reflection on the Pauline rhetorical technique provide a model which might be applied to other biblical texts and with other problems of contextualization in mind.

Some questions remain. First, although it may be more the residue of the "dissertation" process than an accurate reflection of the author's actual confidence, I wonder, given the complexity of the problem of religious-social-economic backgrounds and the question of the genesis and development of Gnosticism (see the commentaries and special studies he cites), whether the tone of some conclusions is sufficiently judicious: e.g. "We have shown that the 'knowers' are proto-Gnostics who are steeped in Hellenistic-Jewish theology" (p. 155, reviewer's emphasis). Here he follows a line of interpretation already argued (Horsley, Pearson, et al.), but the state of play on this question probably recommends more caution. He has made a case for such a background, but some room for discussion probably ought to be left lest the entire project be made to rest on a support which might not be able to hold the weight. More balanced is his admission in the introduction to the discussion of the equally difficult question of redactional theories: "neither the unity nor the partition and redaction arguments can be proven absolutely" (p. 81). In any case, at a number of points the interpretation is certainly open to challenge this includes the reconstruction of the background (in its various dimensions). But whether

the Corinthian enthusiasts' claims to knowledge were based more on an overrealized eschatology than proto-Gnostic tendencies, the discovery of Paul's interactive approach is probably unaffected. My concern is that Yeo's valuable contributions not be disregarded because of claiming more than can be proved about, e.g., backgrounds.

A second question pertains to the task of developing a Chinese hermeneutic from the model provided by Paul. If it is granted that the issue of idolatry and the themes of knowledge and love establish points of contact between Paul's teaching and the situation of Chinese worship of ancestors, are there not also significant differences in the two situations (the one Paul faced and the one Yeo faces) which might affect the contextualization process? For example, Paul addressed proto-Gnostics (perhaps) or at least pneumatics and also the "weak" believers, but they shared with Paul a basic, if distorted, Christian world-view, which made it possible for Paul to commence and sustain a dialogue that is christocentric. Chinese ancestor worshipers will not necessarily share this in common (unless Yeo has in mind Chinese Christians who are in the process of coming to terms with ancestor worship but this does not seem to be the case). What effect does this have on the process? How would Paul have addressed Corinthians outside of the church on the issue of idolatry? What would be the effect on Paul's rhetoric (esp. 1 Cor 8:1-13 and 10:23-11:1) if the christological center were removed or somehow veiled in order to establish connection with a non-Christian audience? That is, in the final analysis the situation Paul addressed in 1 Corinthians is not in every respect parallel to the Chinese situation Yeo envisages. Therefore, in learning from Paul's "cross-cultural hermeneutic" and technique, what adjustments will need to be made in our application?

Finally, a work such as Dr. Yeo's which is on the cutting edge of an important area of scholarship could have been made still sharper had it gone through one more proof-reading. This is a minor complaint which I direct to the editors. There are some difficult sentences, perhaps a bit more jargon than is absolutely necessary, and some rough edges which might have been smoothed out.

But the questions I have raised are mainly the type that this kind of work will generally seek to raise as it continues a dialogue. The task of constructing indigenous theologies, of communicating God's word with diverse cultures through effective dialogue and elenchtics, must certainly continue to be an item high on the world-wide church's agenda into the next century. Dr. Yeo has set before us a model to be tested and a challenge to be taken up. Careful

attention to his discussion of the issues involved in the task of cross-cultural hermeneutics and to his investigation of Paul's technique will provide valuable guidance to those who will join in this work.

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