

## CRITICAL BOOK REVIEWS

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*Cross-Cultural Paul. Journeys to Others, Journeys to Ourselves*, by Charles H. Cosgrove, Herold Weiss, and Khiok-Khng Yeo. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005. Pp. vii + 293. ISBN 0-8028-2843-4. US\$ 25.00.

In this book the three authors present interpretations of Paul through the eyes of six diverse cultures, namely Anglo-American, African-American, Argentine/Uruguayan, Chinese, Native American, and Russian. The volume begins with an introduction (pp. 1–32) in which the authors briefly discuss the notion and origin of culture. Although Paul did not think cross-culturally in the modern sense of the word he did appear to struggle with “the powerful human dynamics of ethnicity, nationalism, and cultural identity” (p. 3) and left writings which are instructive in the practical business of living the gospel within cultural diversity. This is followed by an outline of the approach of the book with each of the three authors writing a chapter on Paul from their own cultural backgrounds and then from the viewpoint of three other cultures. The authors are very aware of the fact that one never gets rid of cultural baggage and that there is no clean-room environment when studying culture. Therefore, all three authors provide a somewhat unusual autobiography, leaving the reader with a clear understanding of where they are coming from. This in turn is often consciously and unconsciously reflected in their subsequent chapters.

In chapter one, Herold Weiss explores the cultural markers of the River Plate area of Argentina. It is easy to see that he is an insider. His tone is warm and intimate, often quoting poetry and literary figures to explore three cultural markers. He begins with the themes of fate and destiny (pp. 34–39) which is perceived as “pervasive determinism” that informs “the culture of the River Plate” (p. 39). Weiss then focuses on two personality cults that operate above the rule of law (pp. 42–50). He traces the historical emergence of the “Caudillos” and “Vivos” who are admired for their “ability to evade the law in every way possible” (p. 45). The third cultural marker involves the relationship between life and death in River Plate. Weiss traces the historical roots of this “obsession with the dead and the passions it arouses among the

living" (p. 61). Snatches of poetry make this section poignant. Throughout, Weiss compares and contrasts Paul's writings and theology with these three cultural markers. He does not, however, provide a general conclusion or outlook, as the conclusion is only one paragraph (p. 67).

In the introduction to chapter two Cosgrove claims that little has been done to relate Pauline theology to American culture and that most readings have been "Eurocentric" (p. 68). Given the attempts by the authors to be inclusive and careful in terminology, I found it a little strange that the term "American" was assumed to mean the mainstream culture of the United States of America without any further qualification or explanation. Cosgrove chooses to examine Paul's writing in the light of American individualism. He focuses in this part of the study on self-reliance (in particular economic), human rights, and freedom, and then concludes with reflections on the purpose of life. Of particular interest to me was the sub-section of the right to freedom of religion (pp. 83-85). Unfortunately, in Cosgrove's discussion of the application of Paul's writings, he never establishes what Paul meant in terms of the political realities of Paul's own time. This would add substantial weight to one of the three interpretations proposed. Cosgrove ends by stating that there seem to be unconscious hermeneutic attempts to interpret Paul and the New Testament in "terms compatible with basic assumptions and goals of American individualism" (p. 103) which are often contradictory. Cosgrove's arguments are well formulated and generally critical of American individualism. However, I sometimes perceived an over-interest in contextualizing Pauline theology for the current situation, as opposed to Paul's world.

Yeo begins chapter three by stating that Christianity entered China from the West and has always been confused with and entangled in Western politics and imperialism. He starts by examining cross-cultural hermeneutics in Chinese church history and underlines the embeddedness of Confucianism in most of the Asian cultural identities. Yeo provides an interesting perspective, which may be new for western thinkers, on hearing and remembering versus ancestor veneration (p. 111) which will certainly ring a bell with many traditional African cultures. The perspective on western-style denominationalism from an eastern point of view was sobering. Yeo points out that this has undermined Christian witness as it flies in the face of "values of community and harmonious interpersonal relationships" (p. 115) which are central to Chinese cultural identity. It was also interesting to read Yeo's rather critical evaluation of Watchman Nee (p. 116). Yeo emphasizes the holistic nature of Chinese religion as opposed to the western tendency toward compartmentalization (p. 121). This is followed by a comparison of the Chinese cosmology of Dao De and Pauline Theology, the dialectical relationship between theology and eth-

ics, and Confucian versus Pauline ethics. Of particular interest is the author's personal life application of the question of ancestor veneration based on a Chinese reading of Paul (pp. 138-40).

Crosgrove examines Paul and peoplehood from an African American perspective in chapter four. He begins with a definition of names, and a brief look at the historic use of Paul in African American scholarship. Then he examines the themes of freedom and slavery, self-chosen separation and independence, the beauty and dignity of "blackness," the unity and equality of all peoples, and the suffering and the cross of Christ. Throughout, Cosgrove attempts to interpret these themes by "taking cues from African American interpretations of Paul" (p. 149). He concludes by affirming the right of "African American Christians to interpret their centuries-long quest for racial justice as a vocation that has served and continues to serve not only themselves but all people" (p. 178).

In chapter five Yeo attempts to see Paul with new eyes and sets out to "discuss how Native American cultures can best engage in meaningful dialogue with Pauline theology" (p. 183). He briefly outlines his limitations, task and the challenges in view of the baggage of the violent history of Native American contact with Euro-American culture. Following this, Yeo compares and contrasts Native American and Euro-American culture with regard to creation and redemption. Here the core environmental ethics in Native American culture, coined "eco-justice," is introduced. The author then returns to the history of interaction between the two cultures in political and missionary contexts and compares the two cultures' worldviews. Given the wildly contradictory nature of the two cultures I feel that a working definition of worldview should have been given (p. 191). Yeo has the longest conclusions of the individual chapters (pp. 215-18), in which he proposes that his study has "raised more questions than it has answered" (p. 215). One of these questions includes the incompatibility of Paul and Native American views on creation. The author suggests some possible and current attempt at accommodation of this incompatibility and asks the important question of how the gospel challenges any culture (p. 217). Sometimes in his discussion, however, the relation and comparison between Euro-American, Native American and Paul's culture becomes entangled to the point where it is not clear whether Paul's culture and the Euro-American culture are synonymous.

In the last chapter Weiss attempts a look at the traditional values of pre-1917 Eastern Russian Orthodoxy which undoubtedly still influence current Russian society. However, it may have been more useful to study the enormous impact of communism on Russian Orthodoxy. Weiss compares the role

of Scripture in western Catholicism and eastern Orthodoxy and discusses the Russian perspective on personhood and freedom. He makes extensive use of the early church fathers and the Eastern Church fathers, their commentaries on Paul, and application of their writings to the political and social contexts of the time. Next, Weiss examines the incarnation, deification (of Jesus and humanity), ascetic life, question of suffering, mysticism, role of sacred objects, and, the Russian way of knowing God. He concludes that "Eastern Orthodoxy has consciously defended its more mystical, intuitive, subjective way of being a Christian in opposition to Western Christendom" (p. 253).

The volume ends with a comparatively long general conclusion (pp. 254-76) in which the authors do not attempt to formulate a comprehensive synthesis of the different studies but rather make observations and raise questions about the identity and coherence of Pauline theology in relation to the cultures discussed (p. 254). Included are several indexes (modern authors, subjects, and biblical and non-biblical texts). The main objective of the three authors is to probe nonwestern approaches to Paul. The writers are generally more critical of their own cultural perspective than other cultural perspectives. Although the authors have tried to create a workable methodology, it still appears to be more fluid than I would like. The book is a good example of the (postmodern) blending of the personal and the academic. It tries to avoid some of the dangers of postmodernism by not rating all interpretations as equally good in a "moral or theological sense" but on the other hand does not claim any one reading of Paul as the correct interpretation of Paul (pp. 8-9). Doubtless, this would prove somewhat frustrating to readers of cultures which would perceive this as a meaningless undertaking, since no "correct" answer or consensus is reached. The lack of clearly defined paradigms for comparison also highlights the danger of a cultural hermeneutic that makes everything in biblical hermeneutics fair game and subjective. Despite this criticism, I found the book highly readable and think that it reaches its goal of encouraging "readers toward their own cross-cultural engagements with Paul" (p. 5).

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*Cult and Character. Purification Offerings, Day of Atonement, and Theodicy*, by Roy E. Gane. Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2005. Pp. xxi + 394. ISBN 1-57506-101-5. US\$ 44.50.

This well-crafted literary artifact follows the publication of Gane's 1992 Ph.D. dissertation in 2004 under the title *Ritual Dynamic Structure*. Having