

REVIEW

Charles H. Cosgrove, Herold Weiss, and K. K. (Khiok-Khng) Yeo, *Cross-Cultural Paul. Journeys to Others, Journeys to Ourselves*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005. 293 pages. \$17.00. ISBN 0-8028-2843-4.

This book contains six studies of the Apostle Paul. The three authors interpret Paul from their own cultural background, but also give a second study of Paul from another cultural background that is not their own. The choice of Paul springs forth from their shared interest in Paul as an inter-, or rather cross-cultural apostle: being a Jew himself, he proclaimed the gospel to all nations, crossing borders of culture and religion.

In the introduction, the goal of the book is stated and each author gives a short biography. The main purpose of the book is to raise appreciation of the various ways in which Scriptures can be interpreted in different cultural contexts. The authors try to find common interests between Paul's theology and the cultures they study. They are well aware of the somewhat artificial way in which their cross-cultural study is undertaken, since for all of them the "other" cultural background is mainly learned from books and by face-to-face conversations and not by experience. However, their aim is only to raise awareness of the various ways in which Paul's message can be read.

Weiss sheds light on Paul from his own Argentine-German background and from a Russian Orthodox point of view. For his chapter on Argentine interpretation Weiss takes the culture of the River Plate region and the experience of "fate" of the gaucho as a starting point, and looks for analogies and differences with Paul's theological concept of predestination. His second contribution focuses on pre-revolutionary Russia and the Orthodox vision on Paul.

Cosgrove gives an interesting overview of the differences between the ideals of American individualism on the one hand, and Paul's theology of corporal unity (the believer being part of Christ's body) and God's sovereignty over our lives on the other. Cosgrove's second chapter approaches Paul from an African American perspective and chooses the topic of "African peoplehood." Among other things, Cosgrove deals with the topic of freedom versus slavery, and discusses separatism in the light of Rom 11, the temporary breaking off of Israel's branches from the olive tree.

Yeo describes Paul from his Malaysian Chinese background and focuses on aspects of Paul's theology that are conflicting with Confucianist morality. One of the examples he gives is the difference between Paul's view on the enslaving power of sin, the need for reconciliation and the believer's faithful response to divine grace, over against the Confucianist cosmic-ethical concept of grace given to all creation. Yeo's chapter gives an interesting overview on the history of Christianity in China, describing the various degrees in which Western churches and missions adapted themselves to Chinese culture. The differences in approach between Catholics and Protestants were also visible in their translations of the New Testament: there was no common term for God. These denominational disagreements were sharply opposed to the Confucianist ideals of concord and

harmony and resulted in the Chinese looking at Catholicism and Protestantism as two different religions.

Yeo's second chapter is a study on Paul from a Native American point of view, in which he deals with the contrasts between Native and Christian worldviews: Native American thinking has a positive view on creation; in Christian thinking creation is seen as "fallen." However, Yeo also sees many possibilities for positive connections between Paul and Native traditions, and underlines that just as in Western theology there is freedom for hermeneutical mediation, there should also be between Paul's cosmology and Native cosmologies.

What is interesting about the book is that it makes the reader once more very much aware of the fact that Western European Christian theology is but one possibility out of many. In this respect, the authors certainly achieved their aim. The value of the book as a whole for translation is secondary, maybe with the exception of Yeo's chapter on Confucianist ethics. Yeo, who was involved in the Today's Chinese Version Study Bible project, shows quite clearly what the dangers are when Catholics and Protestants are not able to cooperate either in mission or in Bible translation and end up being looked at as representatives of two separate religions.

However, one could raise questions about the optimism with which the authors see certain analogies between Paul's message and the cultures they describe. Yeo states that the letters of Paul are in many ways open to more than one interpretation, not only for present readers but for ancient readers as well. It is true that today we struggle with the interpretation of Paul's letters, but for me it is doubtful that Paul really *intended* his letters to be "multi-interpretational." On the contrary, each letter seems to me to be more a clear attempt to guide and lead the readership in a certain direction. Therefore, it is doubtful that, as Yeo assumes, we can leave open the possibility for Paul to have thought in terms of cyclic time; all the evidence in Paul points to a linear way of thinking. The tension between a historically sound approach to the Bible and the new contexts in which the Bible is read, remains a topic that needs ongoing attention by churches, missions, and the world of Bible translation.

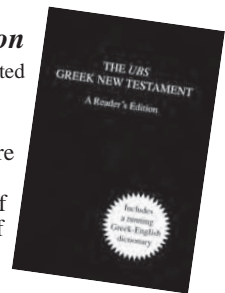
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