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God, Israel, and the Gentiles: Rhetoric and Situation in Romans 9—11

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In this dissertation, completed under the supervision of Paul Achtemeier at Union Theological Seminary in 1999, Johann Kim proposes that Paul's message in Romans 9—11 is unlocked when one discovers why he declared in 9:6a that "it is not as though the word of God had failed." K. believes that present research fails to evaluate the argument within the context of Greco-Roman rhetorical conventions, and he sets about correcting this shortcoming.

Kim combines the insights of George Kennedy and others on the use of classical rhetoric for interpretation of Paul's letters. K. judiciously notes that his appeal to the classical handbooks is not made to prove Paul's dependence upon them, but to guide the interpreter in describing Paul's arguments. He concludes that the rhetorical situation concerns "identifying the interests of the rhetor in changing the situation," that situation being rooted in its historical situation (p. 49). In an excursus K. notes that "highly conjectural arguments based on the supposed expulsion of the Jewish people from Rome under Claudius, mentioned by Seutonius, suffer from a lack of support from within the text itself, and so they should not be used for reconstructions of the historical situation of Romans, let alone its rhetorical situation" (pp. 50-56).

Kim begins his investigation of Romans by articulating the rhetorical aims of Paul's larger argument, such as the rhetorical exigence, speaker, and audience detected in the letter's formal opening (*exordium*: 1:1-13, 15) and closing (*peroratio*: 15:14—16:27). These units should relate to each other, the opening preparing the reader, setting the tone and establishing the writer's *ethos*; the closing providing a summary and intensification, strengthening his case, and undermining any opposition.

Kim finds that "Paul presents himself as a Jewish apostle in thoroughly Jewish terms." (pp. 89-90). Paul attributes his authority to God, and his rhetorical approach inscribes the audience within his apostolic domain. The audience that Paul targets consists of gentiles who are already included in the people of God and familiar with Jewish Scriptures, although Jewish people would also be expected in the actual setting. The exigence provokes Paul's emphasis upon "the obedience of faith" among these Gentiles, which is closely related to his intention to proclaim the gospel among them.

Kim then examines how chapters 9—11 fit into the overall letter and presents a rhetorical analysis of this unit, with particular attention to *stasis* theory as well as matters of invention and style. The writer of this unit comes across as "a Jew who is profoundly concerned about his kinsfolk's salvation. To his Gentile audience this is a striking message: God sent Paul to be the Apostle to them, yet even his apostleship is fundamentally Jewish in the thoroughly Jewish scheme of salvation. . . . indeed Paul's ministry is eventually for their salvation" (p. 103). As for the exigence, K. argues that "what Paul is most concerned with here is the defense of God's character, rather than his own gospel or the 'equality of Jew and Gentile in the plan of God'" (p. 111). This observation is telling for his conclusion that this unit represents forensic rhetoric, for it offers a defense for God. The rest of K.'s analysis of Paul's text hangs upon this classification. Yet that the matter is the defense of God, or that the rhetoric is forensic in nature are less than clear in K.'s discussion of the particular elements of the discourse (pp. 111-114).

Kim recognizes that the exigence involves censuring gentile pride toward the stumbling of Israel, reminding Gentiles of their debt to Israel instead. Moreover, while the formal letter-frame emphasizes that Paul's apostleship and gospel are directed to the Gentiles, they nevertheless remain strikingly Jewish. Why, then, does K. conclude that these Gentiles seek assurance of God's faithfulness to Israel in order to ensure their own fate? Does 9:6a imply a defense of God or of Israel, the latter presently stumbling but still God's own according to promise? Does Paul imply that the Gentiles are worried about their own vulnerability because it appears that the word of God has failed toward Israel, or is it that they have (mistakenly) thought this indicates their own triumph by God's design? If Paul's point is the latter, then the assumption that these Gentiles lack assurance of God's faithfulness to themselves is questionable. Does not the rhetoric imply their continuing need to have their minds renewed to grasp the reality of God's mysterious way of working out his plan, acknowledging that God's word to Israel is forever instead of gloating and behaving inappropriately on the basis of how things might presently appear? In that case it is less likely that Paul would employ forensic rhetoric here, and this would significantly effect K.'s rhetorical approach to the interpretation of this unit, including the basis of the *stasis* theory and the manner of its application. K.'s observations about the *exordium* in 9:1-5, combined with his recognition that the next element of a forensic unit, the *narratio*, is missing, and his appeal to 8:31-39 and 9:1-5 as statements amply introducing the scope of the problem do not strengthen his case either.

There are many fine observations about the nature of classical rhetoric and the text of Romans in this clearly written argument, and interpreters will learn from K.'s examination of both. There are, unfortunately, no indexes to facilitate that task.