A STYLISTIC ANALYSIS OF CHAPTER 4 OF THE EPISTLE TO DIONEUTUS

1. Ἄλλα μήν τὸ γε περὶ τὰς βρόσεις αὐτῶν ψυχοδέως καὶ τὴν περὶ τὰ σάββατα δεισδαιμονίαν περὶ + acc. FOOD
   καὶ τὴν τῆς περιτομῆς ἀλαζονείαν καὶ τὴν τῆς νηστείας καὶ νομηνίας εἰρονείαν gen only SABBATH
   καταγέλαστα καὶ οὐδενὸς άξια λόγου gen only CIRCUMCISION
   οὐ νομίζω σε χρήζειν παρ᾽ ἐμοῦ μαθεῖν.

2. τὸ τα γὰρ τῶν ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ κτισθέντων εἰς χρήσιν ἀνθρώπων FOOD
   ἡ μὲν ὅσοι καλῶς κτισθέντα παραδέχεσθαι kal. gen only CIRCUMCISION
   ἡ δ᾽ ὅσοι ἄχρηστα καὶ περισσά παρατείνουν
   πῶς οὐκ ἀθεμίστον;

3. τὸ δὲ καταγελάσθαι θεοῦ SABBATH
   ὅσοι καλῶντος ἐν τῇ τῶν σαββάτων ἡμέρᾳ καλῶν ti poiein
   πῶς οὐκ ἀστεβές;

4. τὸ δὲ καὶ τὴν μείωσιν τῆς σαρκὸς μαρτύριον ἐκλογῆς CIRCUMCISION
   ὅσοι διὰ τοῦτο δεξαμενῶς ἡγαπημένους ὑπὸ θεοῦ
   πῶς οὐδὲ χλευῆς ἄξιον;

5. τὸ δὲ παρεξηγῶντας αὐτοὺς ἀστροὺς καὶ σελήνη τὴν παρατήρησιν DIVISION OF CALENDAR
   τῶν μηνῶν καὶ τῶν ἡμερῶν ποιεῖσθαι acc. gen. gen. acc.
   καὶ τὰς οἰκονομίας θεοῦ καὶ τὰς τῶν καρδιῶν ἀλλαγὰς
catadiaprin
   πρὸς τὰς αὐτῶν ὀρμάς ἀς μὲν εἰς ὡρτάς
   ἀς δὲ εἰς πένθη
   τίς ἐν θεοσβείας καὶ οὐκ ἀφροσύνης πολὺ πλέον
   ἡγήσεσθαι δείγμα;
The purpose of this article is twofold: firstly, to demonstrate the structural unity of chapter 4 of the Epistle to Diognetus; secondly, to employ the analysis in interpreting section 6 of this chapter.

Chapter 4, an analysis

This chapter has been divided into 7 construction units (or cola), constituting a number of commata. In colon 1 the author sets out 4 topics or themes, viz. (i) the Jews' scruples about food, (ii) their superstition about the Sabbath, (iii) their pride in circumcision, and (iv) their division of the calendar year into times of mourning and feasting. In the following 4 cola each of these topics recurs consecutively and is discussed in detail: colon 2 deals with the first topic in colon 1; colon 3 with the second; colon 4 with the third and colon 5 with the fourth. Thus colon 1 serves as an introduction to four themes and in the following 4 cola more light is shed on each of them.

Moreover, the orderly arrangement of the 4 topics in colon 1 is striking. Each of the themes occurs in the middle of a comma and is embraced by an article + noun with which the author intimates his disapproval. However, the complementary phrases linked with the 4 nouns are constructed differently. In the first 2 commata περὶ + accusative is used and in the next 2 commata the genitive case only is employed. Note too that in the first 6 cola, which form one unit, as I shall indicate, the matrix is at the end of the sentence. While cola 2, 3, 4 and 5 are in the form of rhetorical questions, cola 1 and 6 are statements — thus colon 6 counterbalances colon 1. This counterbalance of cola 1 and 6 also appears from many other devices: colon 1 serves as an introduction, colon 6 as a résumé. In colon 1 the author says, 'I do not suppose that you need to learn from me that . . . ', but in colon 6 he says, 'I think that you have learnt sufficiently that . . . ' (This was a well-known stylistic device among ancient authors where the writer does exactly the opposite of what he says his intention is). Colon 1 begins with 4 commata, each containing 4 words which convey a negative meaning, to imply the author's disapproval, and each has the matrix at the end. Colon 6, too, has an identical pattern as well as meaning. In colon 1, as indicated, the first 2 commata are similarly constructed with περὶ + accusative, and the last 2 commata with the genitive only. In colon 6 the first and the third commata are of similar construction (noun + its description), while the second and fourth commata are
nouns only. Thus there can be no doubt that colon 6 counterbalances colon 1. The first 6 cola form a unity since colon 1 serves as introduction, mentioning 4 themes, which are successively discussed in cola 2 to 5, and colon 6 is the résumé.

The interpretation of section 6 (colon 6) can now be discussed. It is generally agreed that the 4 verdicts in colon 1 refer to the Jewish form of worship. However, the interpretation of section 6 is controversial. Meecham says that εἰκοστότητας and ἀπάτης refer to Greek worship, whereas πολυπραγμοσύνης and ἀλαζονείας refer to the Jewish form. Funk states that κοπή refers to both Greek and Jewish religion; Lightfoot-Harmer and Lake hold that all four faults relate to the Jews. Discourse analysis can help solve the question. Since colon 6 counterbalances colon 1 and is nothing but a résumé of the previous cola it, like cola 1 to 5, refers only to the Jews.

A closer look at cola 2 to 5 reveals that these 4 cola not only all end with rhetorical questions, but also begin in similar fashion: they begin with either τὸ ἔ or τὸ ἔ in contrast with a number of commata in these cola which begin with ὡς, introducing a quality that exists only in the Jews’ imagination. Some of the commata are similar in construction but opposite in meaning e.g.:

\[
\begin{align*}
\delta \mu \nu \omega & \chi \upsilon \omega \kappa \lambda \omega \xi \tau \theta \varepsilon \tau \eta \chi \iota \delta \gamma \chi \iota \chi \\
\delta \delta & \omega \chi \iota \epsilon \rho \chi \theta \iota \\
\end{align*}
\]

and

\[
\begin{align*}
\omega & \mu \nu \epsilon \iota \varsigma \theta \omicron \tau \omicron \zeta \\
\delta \delta & \epsilon \iota \varsigma \tau \nu \nu \\
\end{align*}
\]

Chiasms, too, are found:

\[
\begin{array}{cccc}
A & B & C & D \\
\text{Acc.} & \text{Gen.} & \text{Gen.} & \text{Acc.} \\
\text{τὰς οἰκονομίας θεοῦ καὶ τὰς τῶν καιρῶν ἀλλαγὰς καταδικαίειν} \\
\end{array}
\]

Colon 7, the last in the chapter, forms the nexus between this pericope (which deals with the Jews) and the next (which deals with the Christians among the Greeks).

Chapter 4 of the Letter to Diognetus is an organic whole; once the significance of colon 6 within this unit is perceived, it allows of an unambiguous interpretation.

Notes

1. See e.g. H.G. Meecham, The Epistle to Diognetus, 103.
3. For a full discussion of the different interpretations see H.G. Meecham, op. cit. 106.
4. See previous note.
5. The appearance of stars marked the beginning of holy days. The moon had similar significance. For the meaning cf. Gal. IV:10.

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