

## PAUL AND THE CORINTHIANS

From the *Programma Degli Studi*:

In this seminar we will explore, through detailed examination of the letters to the Corinthians, the interaction between Paul and the community he founded in Corinth and how that relationship and its socio-cultural context contributed to the development and exposition of Paul's theology.<sup>1</sup>

What then we are seeking to achieve uses three key methodological approaches to the New Testament. First and foremost we will be using the *Historical Critical Method* which seeks to explore the meaning of the texts in their historical particularity – that is to say what they meant to Paul and the communities to which he wrote. In doing this we will also need to employ some of the insights into *Rhetorical Criticism* – especially what I call historical rhetorical criticism which seeks to understand the way in which people constructed arguments in order to better understand what Paul might be trying to achieve through his particular choices in writing his texts and how his audience might have responded. Thirdly we will need to use a certain amount of *sociological analysis*, to understand the social, cultural and economic factors which influenced the lives – and therefore the thought-world – of Paul and the community at Corinth

We will, of course, in using these methods, be guided by the Pontifical Biblical Commissions document *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (1993)

### **The Social Scientific Approach**

*Pontifical Biblical Commission*

The PBC document *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* has this to say:

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<sup>1</sup> Facolta di Teologia *Programma Degli Studi* 2009-2010 p. 112.

### **I.D. Approaches That Use the Human Sciences**

In order to communicate itself, the word of God has taken root in the life of human communities (cf. Sir. 24:12), and it has been through the psychological dispositions of the various persons who composed the biblical writings that it has pursued its path. It follows, then, that the human sciences—in particular sociology, anthropology and psychology—can contribute toward a better understanding of certain aspects of biblical texts. It should be noted, however, that in this area there are several schools of thought, with notable disagreement among them on the very nature of these sciences. That said, a good number of exegetes have drawn considerable profit in recent years from research of this kind.

#### **I.D.1. Sociological Approach**

Religious texts are bound in reciprocal relationship to the societies in which they originate. This is clearly the case as regards biblical texts. Consequently, the scientific study of the Bible requires as exact a knowledge as is possible of the social conditions distinctive of the various milieus in which the traditions recorded in the Bible took shape. This kind of socio-historical information needs then to be completed by an accurate sociological explanation, which will provide a scientific interpretation of the implications for each case of the prevailing social conditions.

The sociological point of view has had a role in the history of exegesis for quite some time. The attention which Form-criticism devoted to the social circumstances in which various texts arose (*sitz im leben*) is already an indication of this: It recognized that biblical traditions bore the mark of the socio-cultural milieu which transmitted them. In the first third of the 20th century, the Chicago School studied the socio-historical situation of early Christianity, thereby giving historical criticism a notable impulse in this direction. In the course of the last 20 years (1970-1990), the sociological approach to biblical texts has become an integral part of exegesis.

The questions which arise in this area for the exegesis of the Old Testament are manifold. One should ask, for example, concerning the various forms of social and religious organization which Israel has known in the course of its history. For the period before the formation of a nation-state, does the ethnological model of a society which is segmentary and lacking a unifying head (acephalous) provide a satisfactory base from which to work? What has been the process whereby a loosely organized tribal league became, first of all, an organized monarchical state and, after that, a community held together simply by bonds of religion and common descent? What economic, military and other transformations were brought about by the movement toward political and religious centralization that led to the monarchy? Does not the

study of the laws regulating social behaviour in the ancient Near East and in Israel make a more useful contribution to the understanding of the Decalogue than purely literary attempts to reconstruct the earliest form of the text?

For the exegesis of the New Testament, the questions will clearly be somewhat different. Let us mention some: to account for the way of life adopted by Jesus and his disciples before Easter, what value can be accorded to the theory of a movement of itinerant charismatic figures, living without fixed home, without family, without money and other goods? In the matter of the call to follow in the steps of Jesus, can we speak of a genuine relationship of continuity between the radical detachment involved in following Jesus in his earthly life and what was asked of members of the Christian movement after Easter in the very different social conditions of early Christianity? What do we know of the social structure of the Pauline communities, taking account in each case of the relevant urban culture?

In general, the sociological approach broadens the exegetical enterprise and brings to it many positive aspects. Knowledge of sociological data which help us understand the economic, cultural and religious functioning of the biblical world is indispensable for historical criticism. The task incumbent upon the exegete to gain a better understanding of the early church's witness to faith cannot be achieved in a fully rigorous way without the scientific research which studies the strict relationship that exists between the texts of the New Testament and life as actually lived by the early church. The employment of models provided by sociological science offers historical studies into the biblical period a notable potential for renewal—though it is necessary, of course, that the models employed be modified in accordance with the reality under study.

Here let us signal some of the risks involved in applying the sociological approach to exegesis. It is surely the case that, if the work of sociology consists in the study of currently existing societies, one can expect difficulty when seeking to apply its methods to historical societies belonging to a very distant past. Biblical and extra-biblical texts do not necessarily provide the sort of documentation adequate to give a comprehensive picture of the society of the time. Moreover, the sociological method does tend to pay rather more attention to the economic and institutional aspects of human life than to its personal and religious dimensions.

Meeks recognises both of these limitations. In the first place he notes that the Pauline communities “are the best-documented segment of the early Christian movement”<sup>2</sup> and secondly while he acknowledges that his

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<sup>2</sup> Meeks, p. 7

discussion “avoids theological categories” it is “not on that account to be viewed as antitheological” – this, he argues, would fit well with the cultural linguistic approach to theology advocated by Lindbeck,<sup>3</sup> and which, I might note, was also adopted, with some modification, by the late Cardinal Avery Dulles.<sup>4</sup>

From our perspective the aim is to recognise that the development of Paul’s theology and the theology of the early Church did not happen in a vacuum or in some rarefied world of ideas, but happened with real people in real places facing real problems, and the better we understand this the better we can understand, and hence interpret, their questions and responses. As the PBC recognises, therefore, this is really just another dimension of the historical critical method.

### **Rhetorical Approaches**

Another key to understanding Paul is to pay attention to what *Dei Verbum* refers to as the *genera literaria* (12) of the texts. Much contemporary work has been done on this, seeing Paul’s work in the light of the rhetorical and letter writing conventions of his time. By being conscious of such things we can both gain a deeper understanding of what Paul is trying to communicate and how he would have been heard, and we can also avoid falling into certain pitfalls. For example, recognising that Paul in Romans frequently uses ‘diatribe’ – that is to say the rhetorical technique of posing objections to his own argument and then dealing with them, means that we don’t have to conclude that the objections in Romans were actually being raised by the community in Rome – or indeed by anyone else, though it is likely that Paul is drawing on objections he has already come across.

The PBC addresses these questions in *interpretation* (I.B.1) In recent years Hans Dieter Betz has employed this approach fruitfully, especially in his commentary on Galatians. Jerome Murphy O’Conner lays out some of the basic principles in *Paul the Letter Writer*. While Galatians and Romans yield to this method particularly easily, it has much also to contribute to the discussion of other Pauline letters.

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<sup>3</sup> *ibid*

<sup>4</sup> Cf. A. Dulles *The Craft of Theology* New York: Crossroads, 1995, pp. 17-21, drawing on G. Lindbeck *The Nature of Doctrine* Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984

## **Presentations**

The presentations will be exegetical examinations of the passage or theme assigned. There are 16 themes (weeks 4-11). If anybody would like to do a second then feel free to offer. I will cover 'gaps'

*The presentation should last about 20 minutes*

In order for the seminar to be a seminar we need time to discuss the topic. If you are writing out your text in full (not a bad idea!) the normal speech is about 100 wpm, so 2000 words would be about right.

*You should prepare an accompanying sheet for the class*

This will outline your presentation on one sheet of A4, letter or foolscap paper, noting the key debates, and provide a short bibliography, preferably annotated where appropriate.

*You should draw mainly on recent scholarship*

As our particularly approach is relatively recent as a systematic analysis, older commentaries and works may provide some insights but more recent ones will prove far more useful.

The outline of the seminar sessions below provides a general theme and what I refer to as key texts, The aim of the seminar is to try to get 'underneath' those texts so see what the historical and social situation lies behind them. What is the problem and where might its roots be? In this way we hope to be better able to discuss Paul's response as a group. You will need to use a mixture of good contemporary commentaries and specific social analyses to achieve this aim, as well as judicious referral to other relevant texts, primarily within the same correspondence, without ruling out using other Pauline letters. If you do need to go beyond the Corinthian correspondence you should bear in mind that:

- Scholars disagree about whether all the letters attributed to Paul were in fact written by him. At the very least some of the letters (Ephesians, Colossians, 2 Thessalonians and the Pastoral Epistles) appear to display a certain change of outlook, which makes it problematic to use them to reflect on Paul's correspondence with the Corinthians, and thus caution should be observed.

- Even the letters unanimously attributed to Paul were written to different communities under different circumstances (or even the same community under different circumstances), and this needs to be borne in mind.

### **The Elaboratum**

Assessment will be by essay which will be Essay can be a ‘working up’ of your presentation, or any discussion of a Pauline theme you wish to pursue. If you don’t intend to write your essay on your presentation subject, please consult with me first about the theme you do wish to pursue.

The essay shall be fifteen pages long, and conform to the style norms below.

The essay is to be handed in before the start of the summer exam session (i.e. by Tuesday 1<sup>st</sup> June) if you wish to have it marked as part of that exam session.

I am willing to review draft essays provided they are with me by the penultimate session of the seminar (11-12/5)

### *Style*

Essays should conform to Fr. Meynet’s *Norme Tipografiche*. A rough summary of this is given below.<sup>5</sup>

Paragraphs should have the first line indented by 0.5cm. There should not normally be gaps between paragraphs except when you wish to indicate a separation between sections in a chapter without adding a new heading.

- Font: Times New Roman
- Size: Main text 14pt.  
Block quotes and bibliography: 13pt  
Footnotes: 12pt.
- Margins – Top & bottom 40mm, left & right 30mm

Each page apart from the title page should have a header (13pt) with your name, the essay title (abbreviated if necessary) and the page number.

As this is only an essay, and not a thesis, all headings (if you wish to use them) should conform to Meynet’s ‘internal chapter divisions’<sup>6</sup> – ie for first

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<sup>5</sup> MEYNET, *Norme Tipografiche per la compozione dei testi con il computer* Roma 2007. These notes conform to Fr. Meynet’s norms, and so can be used as a guide.

<sup>6</sup> MEYNET, *Norme* 16-17

level divisions bold text with a 6 pt. gap afterwards, second level division in Italics, third division just plain text. Sections should be numbered 1,1.2., 2.3.1. etc.

Meynet requires double sided printing for theses. However this is not necessary for your essay – in fact I prefer single sided.

References should be clear, precise and unambiguous and should stick to a recognised convention. Meynet's modified Chicago system is a good convention to follow.

A bibliography of all books, articles and resources used in the writing of the essay should be provided. Each item should begin at the left hand edge (i.e. no indent), but if it extends beyond one line subsequent lines should be indented by 20mm. The list should be in alphabetical order, with each author identified by Surname in small caps, followed by initials separated by full stops (but not spaces)

Attention will be paid to spelling and grammar, especially when these make the script difficult to comprehend.

### *Submission*

Essays may be submitted in printed form either directly to me or addressed to me at

The Venerable English College,  
Via di Monserrato 45,  
00186 Roma.

They may be submitted electronically to [tony.milner@dabnet.org](mailto:tony.milner@dabnet.org). Ideally electronic submissions should be in PDF format as this ensures all fonts print correctly. If you submit in Word or RTF, make sure you embed fonts when saving, especially if you have used any fonts that are non standard. This includes Biblical fonts. I will always acknowledge receipt of electronic submissions, so if you do not get an acknowledgement it means something has gone wrong somewhere!

### **Chosen commentary**

During the seminar I ask each one to choose one of the works on Corinth and 1 Corinthians from those listed below (marked with an asterisk) and to follow it through the class, reading the section on the relevant passage(s) before class so as to be able to contribute to the discussion.

**Outline of the Seminar Sessions.**

Date <sup>7</sup>	Theme	Key Texts	Presenter
17/2	Introduction: Scope, Methodology, Bibliography, Tasks		Fr. Tony
24/2	Constructing a Story of Paul and his World		Fr. Tony
3/3	Corinth at the time of Paul. The correspondence – unity of II Corinthians & chronology of the Corinthian correspondence.		Fr. Tony
10/3	“Not many of you were wise, not many of you were powerful” – the makeup of Paul’s Corinthian church	1:26-31	
	Not the “lofty words of wisdom” – the religious worldviews in Corinth.	1:18-25, 2:1-6	
17/3	Divisions in Corinth – what and why?	1:10-17 3:21-23	
	Who was Apollos and why was he apparently a problem?	3:1-9	
24/3	Boasting about immorality! Why?	5:1-13, 6:12-20	
	What is wrong with pagan law courts?	6:1-11	
14/4	Paul and marriage	7:1-16. 25-40	
	Paul and slavery	7:21-24	
21/4	Temples, meat markets and diet	8:1-13 10:23-32	
	True Christian Liberty	9:1-27	
28/4	What is so important about hair?	11:2-16	
	The Corinthian anti-eucharist	11:17-33	
5/5	One body in love	12-13	
	What a racket! Conduct in Worship	14	
12/5	The Resurrection of the Dead	15	
	The Collection	16:1-4 2 Cor 8-9	
19/5	General Conclusions		Fr. Tony

<sup>7</sup> These are the dates for the Wednesday sessions. The Tuesday sessions are, of course, a day earlier.

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