

Humanities 2

Lecture 9

St. Paul: 1 Corinthians and Romans: Making Christian Doctrine and the Rhetoric of Religious Authority

Review:

St. Paul develops the major doctrines and structures of the Church in the earliest years of Christianity.

His Epistles codify the basic teachings of Jesus in order to foster communities of believing and belonging

He himself participates in a personal journey of conversion and renaming:

Saul's blindness on the road to Damascus

His revelation

His sight returned

His new name is Paul

The key features of Paul's Christian doctrine:

Primacy of Original Sin

Difference between Christians and Jews

Establishment of the divinity of Jesus

Development of the idea of symbolic transformation in the eucharist

Christianity as a religion of beliefs rather than of practices

Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians

Establishment of his authority:

The Greeting

The thanksgiving

The development of particular points of doctrine

Relationships between men and women parallel to relationships between

Chapter 7: defining human sexual and social relations as an extension of Christian belief and behavior

Now, new stuff:

Paul redefines “love” as a form of spiritual faith; human love is a refraction of love of the divine.

Thus, chapter 13 defines love as “agape” (from the Greek; modern English ‘charity’). This chapter offers a set of definitions; it is a kind of dictionary of love.

Paul then moves to discussion of the Resurrection (15):

Key points here:

Paul must affirm the fact of the Resurrection

He must affirm the sources for the Resurrection

He must create a logical argument that the Resurrection implies
the potential resurrection of all people

He shows that belief in the Resurrection is, in itself, a key to salvation

“I show you a mystery: we shall not all sleep but we shall all be changed”

The ending (valediction): first off: I’ll be back (16:5); second, if you all behave you will be a model for other Christian groups (16:19); third, following this letter will make you blessed

Paul and Allegory

13:12 “For now we see through a glass, darkly, but then face to face; now I know in part; but then shall I know even as I am known.”

The interpretation of this phrase has preoccupied theologians and scholars for 2000 years.

Key issues: the Greek Word Esoptron can mean both a mirror or a lens; the word “glass” in the King James probably means a mirror rather than a pane of glass. This word is translated, in the Latin version of the scriptures, as “speculum,” mirror. So the idea of life in this world is that everything is a reflection; we live in a world of enigmas (Greek ainigmati).

LIFE IS FIGURAL; THE EXPERIENCE OF THE WORLD INVOLVES BOTH THE EXPERIENCE OF LITERAL, PHYSICAL EXPERIENCE, PERCEIVED THROUGH THE SENSES; BUT AT THE SAME TIME THE EXPERIENCE OF FIGURATIVE, SPIRITUAL UNDERSTANDING PERCEIVED THROUGH THE MIND.

Rhetorical devices in First Corinthians

The list of definitions

The definition of a thing according to what it is not

The syllogistic reasoning, esp. in the section on the Resurrection (Now, but, if, then, since, for, else, but, etc.)

The theory of allegory in First Corinthians: through a glass darkly

ROMANS

written in mid to late 50s AD; primary goal in writing to the “Romans” is in large part to write to the Jews and to distinguish Christian belief from Jewish practice

Opening Salutation: Paul establishes his authority as an apostle on a mission to preach the G

Definition of Christianity: “The just shall live by faith” (1:17)

Focus on original sin, the judgment of God, and the larger argument against Judaism as a religion of practices (his critique of circumcision); Paul spends a lot of time on circumcision because he wants to argue that it is irrelevant to Righteousness. (2:25-29)

Paul distinguishes, broadly, between “law” and the tenets of Christian faith: That is: he wants to argue that being a good Christian is not about strict adherence to a body of laws, but rather to a set of basic beliefs.

Thus, the so-called “Exhortations to Christian Living” (ch.12) is a guideline to Living a good Christian life, and in the process assuring redemption.

KEY POINT: belief in the Gospel and the teaching of Jesus transforms the believers

The Rhetoric of the Exhortations: the “jussive subjunctive” is a rhetorical device that gets someone to do something by creating the impression that if you do it, something else will happen. Let there be light: a jussive subjunctive; the saying = the doing. Let love be without dissimulation. This is the rhetoric of the divinity, a melding of word and deed. This is an important device for Paul and a key feature of his language and his mission.

Looking ahead:
Paul to Augustine

Key things to remember from Paul:

- the authority of the Apostle
- the language of preaching
- the rhetoric of the letter
- the use of the “jussive subjunctive” as the marker of religious language

The establishment of Christianity as grounded in:

doctrine: basic teachings that lead to basic behaviors

institutions: the apostles as the core of a “church,” a group of institutionally validated representative authorities of the religion

method of reading: allegorical interpretation as the template for understanding the texts of the Old Testament, the signs of creation, and the experiences of everyday life

the reward for belief is salvation: eternal, blessed life and potential resurrection of everyone

Paul defines Christianity, therefore, as a belief-driven, salvation-directed, institutionally-organized faith

Preparing to read Augustine, Confessions

Three lectures on the Confessions (5/4, 5/9, 5/11)

Handout posted on the Humanities website.

I will focus on some key episodes and characters:

- The young Augustine

- His father and mother

- His reading of the Aeneid and the Old Testament

- Scenes of reading and the conversion through the book

- The transformation of erotic desire into spiritual love

I will also focus on some key historical and cultural contexts

The transition from the Classical world to “Late Antiquity”

In the early centuries of Christianity, several things have changed:

- The Roman Empire expands dramatically, from the British Isles through Europe, from the Middle East through North Africa.

- Christianity does not become the “official” religion of the Empire until the Emperor Constantine converts in 312

With the increasing reach of Empire, colonial leaders rise in power.

Several of the Emperors in the second and third and fourth centuries are not Roman:

E.g., Philip I, known as Philip the Arab, Emperor 244-249; born near Damascus; Roman father; probably non-Roman mother

Aemilianus, Emperor 253, born in North Africa, non-Roman

Constantine I, Emperor 306-337; born in what is now Serbia; non-Roman

Julian (known as the Apostate), Emperor 361-63; born in Constantinople; Greek heritage.

The important point of all this is that “Roman-ness” is increasingly a construct of the mind, of society, of education, and of sensibility. It is less and less a matter of being ruled by “Romans.”

It is important to understand the emerging world of the centuries between Paul and St. Augustine as a world of multiple colonial, religious, and what we would call ethnic identities.

So, when you approach St. Augustine:

he is the son of a Roman colonial official and (most likely) a woman of Berber heritage.

he is educated in language and literature different from the home

he is a product of a colonial world in which education is the means for social, economic, and political advancement

he is a Christian in an Empire that has only been officially Christian for half a century

Augustine's mother is the truly believing Christian

The Confessions is a story of the self – it is a story of an inner life, not just of a social world.