

Humanities 2

Lecture 8: St. Paul, his Epistles, and the makings of Christian doctrine

REVIEW:

Mark and Luke: oral vs. written idioms and forms
collection of stories vs. literary structure
parables, like similes, are the vehicle for expressing key relationships between the observable world and the figural, spiritual, or social world at large

Luke:

the focus on the whole life of Jesus – the creation of Jesus' life as a narrative fulfillment of Old Testament genealogy and spirituality
the focus on Christianity as a religion of the town, the institution, the home
the emphasis on women as the occasion for bringing out the personality of Jesus and the domesticity of his ministry
the focus on everyday things, named places, and real times to stress a potential sacrality to the times and places of the world: that is, every thing is both real and allegorical, physical and spiritual
the emphasis on written authority, the interpretation of scripture, and the literate, literary quality of Luke's own Gospel
the creation of an ideal audience for reading, not just listening

Key parables and stories in Luke

The Good Samaritan : how to behave in the social world; “neighbor”

The Prodigal Son : how to understand the nature of divine forgiveness

The Road to Emmaus : how to have faith and retell its story

TODAY

St. Paul

Key biographical points:

Born c.5-7AD in Tarsus; named Saul; Jewish

Tarsus is the southern coast of modern Turkey, near Syria; a center for Greek studies in the Roman colonial world; a center of Stoic philosophy; KEY POINT: PAUL WILL USE STOIC PHILOSOPHICAL IMAGERY AGAINST ITSELF, TO MAKE BROADER CHRISTIAN POINTS ABOUT KNOWLEDGE

Narrative of Paul's life as keyed to "conversion"; datable to the early 30s AD the road to Damascus; the story is told in the New Testament book of Acts. key points:

spiritual knowledge as granted in the space between: the road between two places; compare Luke and the road to Emmaus
revelation and the institutions of religion; synagogue
revelation and the name: the calling of the name "Saul" and the potential redefining of the self
blindness as insight

While I was on my way and approaching Damascus, about noon a great light from heaven suddenly shone about me.

I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?”

I answered, “Who are you, Lord?” Then he said to me, “I am Jesus of Nazareth* whom you are persecuting.” Now those who were with me saw the light but did not hear the voice of the one who was speaking to me.

I asked, “What am I to do, Lord?” The Lord said to me, “Get up and go to Damascus; there you will be told everything that has been assigned to you to do.”

Since I could not see because of the brightness of that light, those who were with me took my hand and led me to Damascus.

‘A certain Ananias, who was a devout man according to the law and well spoken of by all the Jews living there, ¹³came to me; and standing beside me, he said, “Brother Saul, regain your sight!” In that very hour I regained my sight and saw him.

Then he said, “The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know his will, to see the Righteous One and to hear his own voice; for you will be his witness to all the world of what you have seen and heard.

And now why do you delay? Get up, be baptized, and have your sins washed away, calling on his name.”

From the New Testament book, Acts

NAMES AND NAMING

Sum pius Aeneas: announcement of the heroic self with epithet

Infelix Dido: address to the tragic self with epithet

Theophilus: address to an individual reader whose name is transparent

Specific namings in Luke: a world of the everyday places, people, and things

Saul > Paul: NB: the Bible does not tell us how or when Saul's name was changed to Paul. Acts simply identifies Saul as one who is also called Paul: Acts 13:9, "Then Saul, who also is called Paul"

Issues in renaming: Paul, historically, may well have converted his Jewish name to a non-Jewish Gentile equivalent so that the Gentiles would accept him more readily

BUT, within the allegory of Christian belief and conversion, the new identity requires a new name

Compare the Old Testament: Abram becomes Abraham; Sara becomes Sarah: renamings at times of new covenants with God

Paul's status and importance

one of the earliest major converts

preacher and writer

theoretical architect of Christianity as a religion

Paul's Epistles: 13 individual letters attributed to him

rhetorical performances: that is, texts written as if they were letters, designed to evoke the feeling of a present speaker, and designed to elevate the audience to the status of a worthy set of listener/readers

syntheses of story, doctrine, and philosophy: the goal is to codify sets of beliefs drawing on a variety of sources and, in the process, produce documents of formal doctrine

but these are very much "Roman" kinds of works: that is, products of an educated colonial, who knows Latin and Greek (they are written in Greek), keyed to particular techniques of speechmaking, argument, and philosophy. They create Paul's authority as an authority in language

Thus they key point, esp in 1 Corinthians 1:10-18 is the establishment of a unification of belief and hegemony of belonging. There is one teaching.

Major points Paul stressed throughout his work:

Primacy of Original Sin

Separation of Jews from Christians

Establishment of the Divinity of Jesus

Development of the idea of symbolic representation in the transubstantiation

Salvation keyed to belief in Jesus rather than adherence to practices
(e.g., the dictates of Jewish law)

Development of an ecclesiastical hierarchy and an administrative
bureaucracy to articulate and monitor the beliefs of members.

Another way of putting it is to say: the Gospels present stories of belief;
Paul helps to create a religion.

How does he do it? 1 Corinthians and Romans are good examples

First Corinthians:

this is a document designed to get a potentially fractious and dissenting group of early believers into line

it gets them into line by establishing Paul's own authority, arguing for the nature of a correct canon of beliefs, using rhetorical devices such as the "jussive subjunctive" (let it be, let there be), and lists of things to do and believe

Written between 53 and 57AD to the group of early Christians at Corinth:
a town in Greece where Paul had founded a church

Structure and arguments:

The Greeting: Paul establishes his authority as coming directly from Jesus (1:1-3)

The Thanksgiving: Paul gives thanks to God in order to
establish a relationship with God's grace
a definition of God as an object of faith and the subject of fellowship (1:4-9)

The situation in Corinth: This is the bulk of the Epistle; it outlines what people in Corinth disagree about and why
get with the program: "ye all speak the same thing and that there be no divisions among you . . . Joined together in the same mind and same judgment" (1:10)

Key issues: there are still devotees of the pagan gods; so Paul needs to reaffirm the holiness of Jesus, the nature of revelation, the fact of his crucifixion: in other words, Paul needs to reaffirm the fundamental uniqueness of Jesus and his relationship to salvation

Paul needs to reassert the nature of apostolic authority: that Jesus had he is one of them. “I write not these things to shame you but as my beloved sons I warn you.” (4:14)

apostles;

Assertion of God as love: “shall I come to you with a rod, or in love, and in the spirit of meekness?” (4:21)

ALSO: there are apparent immoral behaviors going on in Corinth; Paul wishes to affirm that morality, especially in sexual behavior, is central to Christian faith. (chapter 5)

Thus: “fornication” is bad; people should be married; better to marry than to burn (what exactly does this mean??): the whole of chapter 7 is concerned with defining human sexual and social relations as an extension of Christian belief and behavior.