



EXPLORING FAITH

Theology for Life

INTRODUCING THE NEW TESTAMENT



YEAR 1 TERM 1

Material developed for the Diocese of St Asaph, the Church in Wales by The St Mary's and St Giles' Trust with St Michael's College, Llandaff and Glyndwr University, Wrexham. 2011.

INTRODUCTION

Aim and General Content

This term's work is designed to provide a thorough introduction to the New Testament, to enable candidates to work with New Testament texts in a critical way and to interpret them for today. The Seminar Day investigates the world of the New Testament and introduces candidates to a critical study of the texts. The following eight sessions of the Course introduce candidates to the Pauline Epistles and to the Gospels. In particular, candidates are required to undertake a detailed study of Paul's Letter to the Galatians, Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians, the Gospel of Mark and the Gospel of John.

Working with New Testament Texts

This term's work introduces candidates to an essentially socio-literary approach to scripture. Although working with the insights from a variety of critical approaches, this term is designed to enable candidates to work with the text as a literary composition, to treat it holistically, and investigate its genre, its context, its intention and its narrative strategies.

Each week candidates are therefore required to

- i) read the texts through out loud. This can generate a more holistic understanding of the work, help candidates to hear the unique voice of each author and appreciate the work's overall structure and rhetorical impact.
- ii) investigate the genre, context, intention and narrative strategies of the text.

This approach leads in turn to an investigation of the key theological themes of each work. In particular this centres on the author's understanding of God, the person and work of Christ, and the life and mission of the Christian Community. This leads candidates to address questions of how this theological thinking may support or challenge (i) their ministry as individuals and (ii) the life and mission of the church today.

Because this approach may be new to candidates, it is supported by worked examples in the supporting literature identified in each session. In particular an exploration of Mark as story is clearly referenced in WR Telford's book '*Mark*' and John as story is referenced in MW Stibbe's book '*John's Gospel*'.

Content

Each session has an introduction that outlines key areas of study and directs candidates to further reading. Candidates are required to prepare for each session by undertaking this reading and by writing a series of notes as instructed in each session on the 'Work Sheets' provided. This is an essential part of the course and must be undertaken carefully and fully.

In every session candidates are required to reflect on how their critical study of each text has impacted upon their current understanding. This process of theological reflection helps candidates to interpret the New Testament texts for the life and work of the church today and is of key importance to their ongoing ministerial development.

Tutors

The Academic Tutor is responsible for teaching on the Seminar Day and the mid-term Seminar Morning and will set and mark the assignment. The Group Tutor will manage the learning of the group for the eight course sessions and provide appropriate teaching and support. The weekly projects require candidates to work together to share their learning and experience.

Bibliography

This module is designed to be completed while reading Ian Boxall *The Books of the New Testament (SCM Study Guide)*.

Suggested additional reading can be found at the beginning of each session. This reading should be used to inform written assignments.

Assignment

The assignment will contain three elements. There will be an essay on the Gospel of Mark or John, an exegesis (critical interpretation) of two New Testament texts and a piece of reflective writing relevant to your study pathway. The assignment will be introduced by the Academic Tutor at the mid-term Seminar.

Reflective Journal

All candidates are required to use the 'Reflective Journal' that is to be found at the back of the material. This will support the process of ministerial review and be directly relevant to the written reviews that candidates are requested to submit as part of their annual assessment.

Worship and Prayer

Please surround each session with worship and prayer. Provision is made for worship at the beginning of each session and for prayer at the end. Please be imaginative and creative.

SEMINAR DAY

INTRODUCING THE NEW TESTAMENT

This Seminar Day is designed to enable candidates to:

- i) explore the New Testament World
- ii) examine the nature and purpose of New Testament writings
- iii) work with New Testament texts in a critical way.

For the Seminar Day

Study the Introduction to the Seminar Day and undertake supporting reading

Book list for this session

Brown RE

An Introduction to the New Testament
New York, Doubleday (1997)

Achtemeier PJ,
Green JB &
Thompson MM

*Introducing the New Testament: its
literature and theology*
Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans (2001)

Barrett CK

*The New Testament Background:
Selected Documents*
London: SPCK (1987)

SEMINAR DAY

Introducing the New Testament

INTRODUCTION

‘To the Jew first and also to the Greek’

When Paul wrote to the Christians in Rome about the universal scope of the Christian message, he told them that the gospel was ‘the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek’ (Rom 1:16). In the world of the New Testament, this distinction between Jew and Greek (‘Greek’ used here as an equivalent for ‘Gentile’) was the most significant division between people. Even Gentiles were aware of it (Tacitus in Barrett, no.132).

The division between Jew and Gentile was not just ethnic, it was religious and cultural, and had deep historical roots. If we are to understand the New Testament, and appreciate why Paul expressed wonder that the gospel brought Jew and Gentile together, then we need to know something of both the Jewish and Gentile worlds of the first century.

THE JEWISH WORLD

Geography of the Jewish world

The Jewish homeland was, of course, Palestine. This homeland was divided into different districts, each with its own character. The heart of the Jewish world was Judaea, the area around Jerusalem, including the hill country (Lk 1:39) and stretching from the Mediterranean on the west to the Jordan and the Dead Sea on the east. Judaea contained the major concentration of Jews ‘zealous for the Law’ (Acts 21:20, see Rom 15:31). Indeed, the English word ‘Jew’ is derived from the Greek *ioudaios*, which means ‘inhabitant of Judaea’.

North of Judaea lay Samaria. Its inhabitants had developed beliefs and practices which diverged from the Judaism of Judaea in several respects. In consequence, Jews and Samaritans kept themselves separate as far as possible (Lk 9:52-3, Jn 4:9), although they could co-operate when it was in their common interest (Barrett, no.133, lines 1-3).

North again lay Galilee. This region was administratively separate from Judaea. Herod the Great’s son Herod Antipas inherited Galilee in 4BCE and ruled the region, under Roman overlordship, until his death in 39CE - in other words throughout Jesus’ public ministry. Galilee seems to have been a relatively prosperous area, whose population had grown in the century or so before the birth of Christ. The Jewish population of Galilee largely lived in agricultural and fishing villages, though there were also some Galilean towns with Gentile populations, notably Sepphoris and Tiberias.

Not all Jews lived in Judaea or Galilee. By the NT period Jews had been scattered by war or had moved for trading purposes around the Mediterranean and further afield. The list of the home countries of the Jews in Jerusalem at Pentecost (Acts 2:9-11) gives an idea of how far this scattering extended. Most cities of any size in the Eastern Mediterranean had a Jewish population within them. The community of Jews beyond Palestine is known as the 'dispersion' and sometimes by the Greek word for dispersion, 'diaspora' (Jn 7:35).

The remarkable thing about the Jewish diaspora was the way in which Jews in these scattered communities kept their identity (Barrett, no.48, 148-152) and retained a sense of connection with Judaea (see Acts 28:21). This was possible because of the distinctive observances and institutions which Judaism had developed (see below).

Historical Developments

Jews in the Hellenistic World

The reason for Paul using the word 'Greek' as a general description for all Gentiles lies in the remarkable career of Alexander of Macedon ('the Great', 356-323BCE). Alexander's military campaigns between 334 and 331 overthrew the Persian Empire, and in 325 his armies reached as far as the River Indus. By the time of his death in 323, Alexander had founded dozens of cities throughout his vast empire, and these cities became centres of Greek language and culture.

Alexander's empire split after his death into competing monarchies, but Greek language and culture endured, forming the common heritage of peoples around the Eastern Mediterranean. This common Greek culture of the post-Alexander period is known as 'Hellenistic' ('Greekified') culture. Because most of the Gentiles they dealt with were Greek speakers, the Jews came to use the word 'Greek' for all Gentiles.

The Jews stood out in this Hellenistic culture because they did not assimilate into it - or at least to a lesser extent than other peoples. Their Greek rulers for the most part tolerated this Jewish separateness, or did little more than offer positive inducements to adopt a Hellenistic way of life. But one ruler tried to do more than this: in 167BCE Antiochus Epiphanes, ruler of Syria, sent an army into Judaea to defile the Temple, to destroy copies of the Law, and to compel the Jews to offer sacrifices of pigs and other unclean animals.

It was an attempt to bring the Jews into line with other peoples of the Hellenistic world, but it failed. Antiochus' action provoked a rebellion, the rising of the Maccabees (Barrett, nos.116-123). Against expectation, the Maccabees succeeded in repulsing Antiochus' armies, and in 164BCE the Jews were able to reconsecrate the desecrated temple (the origin of the festival of Hanukkah).

The Arrival of the Romans

Following the Maccabean success Judaea was able to establish a degree of independence, and for eighty years was ruled by a succession of priest-kings, the Hasmonians, descended from the family of Judas the Maccabee who had initiated the rebellion. But the Jews were not united in support for these Hasmonian rulers, and the ruling elite of Judaea was itself divided into factions, often squabbling for power. It was such factional fighting which opened the door for the Romans to enter Judaea. In 63BCE one faction invited the Roman general Pompey to come to Jerusalem to help them. This he did, finding the city gates opened by his supporters, but the Temple occupied by his opponents, who held out for three months before being overcome (Barrett, no.126). Pompey initially shocked the Jews by entering the Holy of Holies – and surprised Romans by revealing that

it was empty – but had the good sense to order that it be reconsecrated afterwards.

Herod the Great

Judaea was brought into the Roman orbit at a turbulent time: civil war shook Rome's dominions in the middle years of the first century BCE. But order was restored after the victory of Octavian at Actium in 31BCE. The Senate gave him the name Augustus ('the exalted one'), and the title 'leading citizen' (*princeps*), effectively recognising him as the first Emperor of Rome (Barrett, nos. 1-4).

One of Augustus' most useful supporters was a half-Jewish warlord from Idumaea – Herod ('the Great'). As a reward, Augustus made Herod the vassal king of Judaea in 37BCE. Herod was able to add further territories to his domain: Samaria, Galilee and lands across the Jordan. Augustus gave him permission to levy taxes and a wide freedom to govern his lands as he saw fit.

Herod the Great's rule (37-4BCE) had two faces. One aspect was its outward success: he began, for instance, an ambitious rebuilding of the Temple (Jn 2:20) which was only completed in 64CE. He constructed several palaces and fortresses, and even a new port at Caesarea. The other aspect was darker. He was ruthless towards his enemies, even those among his own family (Barrett, no.131). Great public works called for high taxes, and these were resented. The levying of taxes was delegated to tax-farmers, who could profit from their work. A small elite grew richer, but for many ordinary Jews Herod's rule was burdensome.

The Jewish People in the First Century CE

On Herod's death in 4BCE his son Archelaus inherited Judaea, but Archelaus ruled poorly and was deposed by the Romans in 6CE. His place was taken by a Roman prefect or procurator (Barrett, no.133). Although the removal of Archelaus solved an immediate problem, it also brought Romans and Judaeans into direct contact, and so created possibilities for conflict in the future.

In Judaea, people found themselves paying new taxes to the Romans. They had paid a tax on agricultural produce since Roman annexation in 63BCE, but after the Romans took direct control Judaeans were also obliged to pay a poll tax which was profoundly unpopular (Mk 12:13-17). The greed and corruption of the Roman procurators added to the difficulties experienced by the inhabitants and fed a growing resentment towards the Romans.

There is some evidence that economic conditions in Judaea and in Galilee were favourable to the creation of large landholdings. However, many small farmers were forced to sell their possessions to cover their debts, eventually obliging them to sell their land and reducing them to the status of day labourers, if not to outright slavery. It is an economic picture reflected in several of Jesus' parables (Matt 18: 23-35, 20:1-16)

The discontent came to a head in 66CE, when the Jews of Judaea and Galilee rose up in rebellion against Rome. The immediate causes were an apparently minor dispute over land near a synagogue in Caesarea, and the blundering actions of the procurator Gessius Florus (Barrett, no.140). But these were merely the sparks which lit the tinder of Jewish resentment and hostility.

The War began successfully for the Jews, but once the Romans were able to bring the full force of their military power to bear in Galilee and Judaea, the Jewish forces were unable to resist. In 70CE Jerusalem fell, and both the city and the Temple were sacked (Barrett, nos.141-2). Some fortresses held out for a while. The last, Masada, fell only in the Spring of 74CE (Barrett, no.143). The destruction of Jerusalem in 70CE is usually taken to be a major turning-point in the social and religious life of Judaism.

Society and Religion

Diversity in Judaism

After the defeat of the Jews in the war of 66 to 70, Judaism underwent some radical changes. Leadership fell to the scholars and interpreters of the Law, the Rabbis. The form of the religion which emerged is often called Rabbinic Judaism. However, modern scholarship has come to believe that Judaism *before* 70CE looked rather different and was more diverse than the Rabbinic Judaism which developed after that date.

The NT gives us some information about two significant groupings, the Pharisees and the Sadducees. Luke distinguishes them by their beliefs: Pharisees accepted the existence of angelic beings and the prospect of resurrection after death, while the Sadducees rejected both of these (Acts 23:8). The Jewish historian Josephus mentions these groups, but distinguishes them by pointing out the Pharisees' concern with Torah interpretation, and by observing that the Pharisees believed in an overruling providence or fate, while the Sadducees emphasised human free will (Barrett, no.135). It is likely that the two groups were distinguished socially, too, with the Pharisees being drawn from the ranks of the small farmers, craftsmen and merchants. The Sadducees represented the ruling families of Jerusalem.

Josephus also informs us about a third group, whom he calls Essenes, and who, he says, lived a very strict life which included communal living and sharing of possessions (Barrett, no.135). Many scholars believe that the documents found in the caves of the Dead Sea near Qumran since 1947 came from such an Essene community, though this is not proven. These documents, the famous 'Dead Sea Scrolls' certainly reveal the outlook of a group of Jews who were neither Pharisees nor Sadducees (Barrett, nos.210-224).

The Law and Purity

In their struggle against the cultural influence of Hellenism and the political pressures of Roman rule, the Law was of primary importance to the Jews. It was the central expression of God's will, and faithful following of it would ensure the 'holiness' of the people - that is, their being marked out and set apart for God. The devout Jew of the NT period saw the world as divided into 'clean' and 'unclean', 'holy' and 'common'. Because the 'unclean' could contaminate the 'clean' and the 'common' defile the 'holy', it was vital to maintain the boundaries between these fundamental categories. Certain foods (such as meat with blood still in it, Lev 17:10-13) were unclean, and certain activities, such as work on the sabbath, could contaminate 'holy' time or space. People who broke these boundaries were themselves unclean - Gentiles of course, but also Jews careless of the commandments.

The Temple was the physical embodiment of holiness, and Gentiles were warned not to profane it by their presence (Barrett, no.50). Even the non-violent entry of Gentiles called for swift remedial action (Acts 21:26-30), so the violation of the Temple's holiness by the Roman army in 70CE was the most profound blow imaginable to the system of purity.

The Pharisees seem to have been particularly zealous about maintaining these boundaries of purity, on which also the distinctive identity of Judaism depended. They looked to the Law, not just for the explicit rules contained there, but also for principles which could be extended to cover new cases (Barrett, nos. 153-159, 171-173). The regulations with which devout Jews structured their lives were not arbitrary - they were intended to maintain the ordered pattern of purity and holiness. Nor were they intended to be a legalistic burden - they were meant to make the Law comprehensible in everyday life. As these rulings were passed down from one teacher to another, certain 'traditions' grew up which governed how one maintained purity. Paul tells us that he was zealous, in his younger days, to maintain these traditions (Gal 1:14). In the gospels, Jesus is depicted arguing with

the Pharisees about the ‘tradition of the elders’ to do with defilement (Mk 7:1-23). Many followers of Jesus did not mark ‘purity’ or holiness in the same way as the Judaism out of which they had come, and this was something which conservative Jewish Christians, as well as non-Christian Jews, found hard to accept (Gal 2:11-14; Acts 20:20-21; Rom 15:30-31).

THE GENTILE WORLD

Geography and Culture

Hellenism and Local Cultures

The Jews were not the only people to be engulfed by Hellenistic culture and then absorbed by Roman rule. The Eastern Mediterranean into which the Christian gospel spread was a patchwork of local cultures, each with its own characteristics, overlaid by a Greek and Roman cultural and political superstructure. Different languages were still spoken in various places. Greek was the language of exchange, but not everyone could speak it (Acts 14:11; 21:37-38). Although the New Testament was written in Greek, which facilitated its use especially in the cities of the Eastern Mediterranean, it was very soon translated into some of the more significant of these other languages: Syriac (for the people of Syria), Latin (for the Western part of the Empire, including North Africa), and various dialects of Coptic (for Egypt).

City and Country

Alexander’s establishment of Greek cities has been noted above. The distinction between city and country remained significant in the first century. A Greek city was an economic centre, the focus of political administration, a cultural centre, and also the focus of religious cults. Hellenistic Greek cities varied in size from relatively small towns to great metropolitan centres such as Syrian Antioch whose population was around 300,000. A typical city would contain a *gymnasium* – not only a centre for athletic and other training, but a major social focus - a market place (*agora*) and temples, perhaps including a particularly imposing one to a local deity, such as the temple of Artemis/Diana at Ephesus (Acts 19:27). Its other public buildings would have included a theatre which served as a convenient place for public assembly (Acts 19:29).

Even under Roman rule cities retained a measure of independence in managing their own affairs. Philippi, for instance, had special status as a Roman colony, regarded as an outpost of Italy and governed by two ‘praetors’ (‘magistrates’ NRSV, Acts 16:20). Wherever the early Christians went, they found cities, each with its own character and institutions.

The countryside was less politically significant. Rural settlements did not participate in the power structure of the Empire, which was built around the cities. Paul contrasts the city, not with the countryside, but with the ‘wilderness’ (2 Cor 11:26) - the countryside disappears from view. The countryside was the location for the villas of the wealthy such as the ‘leading man’ of Malta, who received Paul and his companions on his estate (Acts 28:7), but otherwise was of little political significance. It is noticeable that virtually all the Christian activity we know from the NT was focused in, or even confined to, the cities. In contrast to the ministry of Jesus in Galilee (Mk1:45), early Christianity was an urban phenomenon.

Communication

The cities of the Empire were connected by the celebrated Roman road system. We should not, though, underestimate the barriers which stood in the way of travel in NT times. Roman roads were built principally for the movement of troops. If they also served the purposes of trade and travel, this was incidental. No police force ensured their safety, and attack by brigands was a very real

possibility for any traveller. There were no banks as we understand them in the ancient world. Travellers needed to carry money with them, and any money to be remitted had to be carried in physical form (Acts 11:29-30; 1 Cor 16:3; Phil 4:18) - a fact which must have increased travellers' vulnerability. In mountainous country, such as Galatia, floods and snow could block roads quickly and treacherously. Paul's list of his hardships in 2 Cor 11:26-27 is probably only too realistic.

Land travel was in any case slow. For merchants, it was also inefficient, since carriage of heavy loads was very difficult. Sea travel was the only way to move large quantities of goods over long distances. The city of Rome drew its grain supply, not from the Italian countryside, but from Egypt - it was easier to transport the great quantities needed across the Mediterranean by sea than a relatively few miles over land. Sea travel, though, brought its own difficulties, as Paul also reminds us in 2 Cor 11:25. It is no wonder that letters were so significant in the early Christian communities. In a world in which travel was far from easy the letter enabled apostolic figures such as Paul to project their presence (1 Cor 5:3) when they were unable to travel in person.

Society and Religion

A Hierarchical Society

For all its diversity Gentile society was everywhere a layered and stratified society. Some people occupied positions of power, influence and prestige, while others were under the influence and control of others. At the head of this hierarchy was the Emperor (1 Pet 2:13). Below him were various structures of authority and power, whether political and delegated from the Emperor, or social and exercised by virtue of personal authority in a particular community. The pervading sense of hierarchy and social subordination is very clear – and indeed is affirmed - at several points in the NT (Rom 13:1-7; Titus 3:1; 1 Pet 1:13-17). But people did not always fit neatly within the hierarchies of power in the NT world.

Women, for example, usually occupied a lower social place than men. But some women achieved a higher status than many men. An example would be Lydia, whose business interests seem to have given her an independence and a degree of freedom which few men could have matched (Acts 16:14).

Similarly, slaves normally occupied the lowest social place. They were entirely subject to the whim of their masters and vulnerable to ill-treatment for which they had no redress in law (1 Pet 2:18-20). Ever since the rebellion of Spartacus in 73-71BCE Roman slave-owners were sensitive about the possibility of slave revolts and runaway or rebellious slaves could expect harsh punishment (note the Emperor Augustus' mass punishment of rebellious slaves, Barrett, no.1).

Yet, despite the restrictions under which slaves lived, some were well-educated and capable people. Numbers of teachers and doctors were slaves, as were the managers of many large estates. The possibility of freedom was a real one, which must have made the yoke of slavery bearable for the fortunate. Some slaves therefore occupied positions of responsibility which placed them higher in the ladder of status than large numbers of free people, and gave prospects for advancement which would have been denied to the majority of the free population.

Gods, Ancestors and Spirits

Gentile religion operated on several different levels. The gods of Greece and Rome are still well known to us through their representation in art, such as the famous Venus de Milo, a statue of the goddess of love (Venus to the Romans and Aphrodite to the Greeks). But they are only part of the

religious picture. People also worshipped gods of purely local significance. Often such worship was quite businesslike and consisted in requesting the deity for help with very practical matters, for instance winning a bet at the races (Barrett, no.29).

These local deities, such as gods of springs or natural features, were frequently identified with the 'major' gods, and were regarded as manifestations of that god. At Ephesus for instance, there was a magnificent temple to Diana (Gk Artemis), which was reckoned one of the seven wonders of the world. Generally Diana/Artemis was regarded as a huntress. However, 'Artemis of the Ephesians' (Acts 19:34) seems to have been a goddess of fertility, whose image, which fell from heaven (Acts 19:35), was probably a meteorite. It seems most likely that here, as elsewhere, a local deity had become identified with one of the major gods, while still keeping some of her original local characteristics.

At a more intimate level, the Romans believed it necessary to respect household gods. A well-to-do household would have a small cupboard, in which were kept statues of the household gods (*Lares* and *Penates*) and perhaps busts of ancestors and of the head of the household (*paterfamilias*) whose spirits (*genius*) would protect the family. Particular significant parts of the house (such as the hearth or the threshold) would have their own protective spirits or minor deities. Regular family rituals would ensure that these various beings were kept favourable to the family.

Civic and household religious observance was generally designed to uphold the order of society by the performance of proper rituals. The most obvious form of this civil religious observance was the requirement to offer sacrifice, typically a few grains of incense, to the *genius* of the Emperor. This requirement did not become general until after the NT period, but when it did, it caused huge difficulties for Christians.

In the NT period many Gentiles were looking for something more in religion than the maintenance of social order or success in day to day affairs. They were concerned for personal salvation. Some Gentiles turned to Judaism (Barrett, nos.197-198, Mt 23:15). It was from among these 'God-fearers' that the Christians had their greatest initial success. Many Gentiles looked to the mystery religions which spread from Egypt and other parts of the East. These religions promised to initiate their followers into a secret or mystery, through esoteric teaching and specific rituals, and so enable the worshipper to escape from Fate to freedom (Barrett, nos 106-115). These mystery religions became rivals of Christianity, and to some pagan observers Christianity itself appeared to be just another form of Eastern mystery religion. To many critics, Christianity seemed to be detaching people from rituals which ensured family piety, civic cohesion and imperial stability. Christian apologetic had to counter these fears (eg Titus 2:5,18,10).

The Gentiles of the NT period lived in a world in which spiritual beings were everyday realities. Recognition of these beings was part of everyday life. But these gods, spirits and ancestral figures were not exclusive, and worshippers who offered respect to a god or spirit in a particular context were not necessarily denying the effectiveness of another god for other purposes. The scandal of the gospel of Christ was precisely the exclusive claim of Christ over against the other 'lords' and 'gods' of the pagan world (1 Cor 8:4-6).

For further information see Brown RE *An Introduction to the New Testament* Section 1 chapters 1-5 and Achtemeier Green & Thompson *Introducing the New Testament* Chapters 1-2.

INTERPRETING THE NEW TESTAMENT

Two Worlds

It is clear from the preceding section that the New Testament was written in a world that was very different from our own. Words and concepts often sound familiar to us, but mean very different things in the very different cultural setting of the New Testament world. Texts also come down to us through many centuries of interpretation and association with doctrine and liturgy and this can further colour the way in which we read and respond to them.

Therefore, in order to be able to understand the New Testament writings and to interpret them for today, it is important to ask a series of questions about the nature and context of the text. When was it written? Why was it written? What kind of writing is it? How is it structured? What sources has the writer used? Who was it written to? What was the intention of the writer?

The reader also needs to ask a series of questions about the present and to investigate the context into which the text is being interpreted. What are my own pre-understandings of this text that may influence my reading? What church tradition do I come from and how might this affect my understanding? What church community am I interpreting this text for and how might this affect the way that I proceed? How might this text challenge my understanding of myself? How might this text challenge me and my church community to action?

Various tools and approaches have been developed to address these questions and are mostly gathered together under the generic heading of 'Biblical Criticism'.

Biblical Criticism

The Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation' defines biblical criticism as 'the attempt to study the bible as rational beings using all the linguistic, archaeological and historical data available' and argues that, in this sense, it has been an integral part of biblical scholarship for 2,000 years.

Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries there had been an interest in uncovering, as objectively as possible, the original historical context of the New Testament text and a hope had been cherished that the Gospels texts would reveal a clearly identifiable 'historical Jesus'. A major presupposition of this approach had been the assumption that the Gospels represented a reasonably accurate account of the events and chronology of Jesus' ministry.

However, scholars began to understand that the New Testament writings were both literary creations and the end-product of a complex process in which traditions about Jesus, initially transmitted orally and influenced by the religious communities that treasured and collected them, were gathered into coherent narratives. They therefore developed a series of literary critical approaches to the scripture that could investigate these areas in a systematic way. Source, form and redaction criticism were chief among these approaches.

Source Criticism

As its name suggests, source criticism is concerned with discovering the sources which an author has used in producing his work. This may involve an examination of the background, thought and ideas that an author brings to the production of a text. It may also involve investigating a previous source that an author has incorporated into his work. This has been a particularly important method for investigating the Synoptic Gospels. In isolating the different strata that make up these and other

texts, source criticism helps to illuminate the living process by which the final form of the text was put together. It also enables us to see more of the living faith and commitment of the people who lie behind the written word.

Form Criticism

Form criticism supplements the work of source criticism by investigating the form or genre of the various sources in the biblical text. It attempts to differentiate the different oral or prose forms (poetry, law, hymns, proverbs, laments, myths, legends, etc) and to define more closely the rules that each type tend to follow. It attempts to explain the origin, preservation and evolutionary development of such forms and illuminate the social settings in which they are set. Form criticism has helped scholars to acknowledge that oral folk tradition is a major component of several biblical works and at least one factor in most of them and to investigate how this has helped shape the final text.

Redaction Criticism

Redaction Criticism is concerned with discovering information about the author from the way in which sources are used and the story is told. It has rather dominated New Testament studies over the past 40 years and, in relation to the Gospels, it has been concerned to discover the contribution that the four evangelists (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) have made to the Gospel tradition. The alteration that each author makes to a tradition is known as a redaction and this has given the discipline its name. Redaction Criticism is however concerned, not just with the way that an author changes his source, but the way he organises his work and the theology he operates with. It has helped illuminate the way in which the biblical writers have struggled with their traditions as they have sought to apply them to the changing situation of their own day.

Literary Criticism

Recent scholarship has tended to stress the literary character of the text and to demand that each writer is taken seriously as an author and that the text is treated holistically. Literary Criticism is therefore based on the recognition that, whatever else the bible might be, it is, at one level, a collection of literature. It is appropriate therefore to study the bible as such. Although Literary Criticism has traditionally shared the concern of Redaction Criticism about the intention of the author, recently it has become more concerned with the text itself and with the reader. Work has been undertaken to investigate the meaning of a text through structural analyses. This has in part led to an interest in the nature of the arguments used by biblical authors to persuade their readers of the strength and truth of their arguments. This is called **Rhetorical Criticism**. In turn, this has led to attempts at describing the sorts of reading skills required by particular texts and to an interest in **Reader Response Criticism**. The act of reading involves the reader in the text and, through its literary conventions and strategies, presents a puzzle that the reader must solve to gain understanding. This creation of meaning changes lives. Each reader will gain different meanings and understandings from a text but these will be interpreted in the context of the Christian community to which he or she belongs.

Sociological Criticism

Sociologists and anthropologists have helped illuminate biblical texts by identifying features of the society and culture which gave them birth. Anthropologists have researched the social history of Ancient Israel and the Early Church and sociologists have helped to analyse what social forces were at work in the communities that produced the texts. Although highly influential in both Old and New Testament studies, the fragmentary nature of the evidence that can be uncovered within the text itself and the difficulty of relating this to extra biblical material, makes it easy to propound theories and difficult to test them.

Feminist and Liberationist Critique

Both feminist and liberationist critique approaches the scriptures through the experience of groups who feel marginalised or excluded. Feminist critique helps reveal the essentially paternalistic nature of much scriptural text and liberationist critique works to uncover relationships of power and oppression.

A Rich Tapestry

All forms of criticism can combine together to illuminate a text from different perspectives, all of which are valuable and informative in their interpretation. As the early Christian writers understood, each text contains a rich tapestry of truth that gives its riches slowly to the seeker and can never be exhausted.

SESSION 1

THE PAULINE EPISTLES

This session is designed to introduce candidates to:

- i) the extent, nature, genre and context of Paul's epistles
- ii) Paul's life and work

Before this session

1. Study the Introduction and undertake supporting reading
2. Read Boxall Chapters 1,3 and 4

Further reading

- | | |
|------------|---|
| Brown RE | <i>An Introduction to the New Testament</i>
New York, Doubleday (1997) |
| Horrell D | <i>An Introduction to the Study of Paul</i>
London: Continuum (2000) |
| Sanders EP | <i>PAUL A very short introduction</i>
Oxford: OUP (1991) |
| Zeisler J | <i>Pauline Christianity</i>
Oxford: OUP (1990) |

SESSION 1

The Pauline Epistles

INTRODUCTION

The Text

Of the twenty seven books of the New Testament, half have Paul's name attached and all of these are in letter form. Seven of the letters ascribed to Paul have never had their authorship seriously questioned. These are often called the *protoPauline* letters and are Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians and Philemon. There is a great deal of dispute among scholars whether the *deuteroPauline* corpus was written by Paul himself or were the product of writers who were applying Paul's thought to later contexts. These are 2 Thessalonians, Colossians, Ephesians, Titus and 1 & 2 Timothy. Most commentaries offer a discussion about the Pauline authorship of these later books. The small chapter in Raymond Brown's *An Introduction to the New Testament* entitled 'Pseudonymity and the Deuteropauline Writings' (chapter 25) is a good introduction to the subject. A brief discussion of authorship also accompanies each epistle in the commentary. The first four Epistles (Romans, 1 & 2 Corinthians and Galatians) have been referred to as the *Hauptbriefe*, the major letters, and these have often been the most influential in forming views of Paul and his theology. However, care needs to be taken to recognize that Paul's thought is developed in a series of letters that are each set in an individual context, deal with a series of concrete problems and are written with a particular intention. Indeed, Paul was a theologian who worked out much of his thinking in response to major debates and disputes in the early church.

Genre

Paul wrote letters, and letters, even official letters, are rooted in a particular context. Each is part of a dialogue between a specific writer and specific recipients. To abstract the message from that dialogue is to lose something of its quality as a response to actual questions or problems. Letters also follow a particular literary pattern and style. In his *Introduction to the New Testament*, Raymond Brown (page 412 ff) discusses the format of New Testament letters. David Horrell also investigates the genre of letter writing in his book *An Introduction to the Study of Paul* (chapter 4). Both find patterns in the format of Paul's letters that aid interpretation.

Context

Each of the Pauline letters is rooted in a particular set of contexts. The first is the historical context that has given birth to Paul's communication. Although it is virtually impossible to reconstruct this context with any degree of completeness, it is usually possible to create a fairly accurate picture of the situation in the community to whom the letter is addressed. Nuances and allusions will sometimes be missed because the reconstruction will be sketchy. Also, although our knowledge of the towns or cities to which the letters are addressed can often be supported from external sources, we are usually reliant on the epistle itself for an appreciation of the context in which the recipients are working out their Christian lives. A full discussion of historical context can be found in the study guide and/or commentary for each epistle.

Paul's letters were also constructed against the issues encountered in the spread of Christianity in the Graeco-Roman world of the first century CE. The great issues for Paul were therefore played out against this broader backdrop. What did it mean for Jew and Gentile to be 'in Christ'? How was a person saved? How should those 'in Christ' behave? What relationship should the church have with the Roman authorities?

Paul

Behind the letters of St Paul stands the missionary and the man. His writing reveals many personal traits and a lot of information about his life. A man full of passion and fire, wit and charm, pride and humility, speaks through the texts. A man not frightened to assert the authority of his own apostleship, or argue the case for his life's work, yet a man acquainted with suffering who stood in fear and trembling before the living God. A Jew from Tarsus in Asia Minor, a Pharisee who once persecuted the followers of Jesus, converted either on the road to Damascus (as in Acts) or in Damascus (inferred from Galatians 1) he answered a call to be the Apostle to the Gentiles. He traveled extensively preaching the Gospel and founding church communities. Much of what we know about Paul's life and travels comes from the Acts of the Apostles. However, caution needs to be exercised in using Acts as if it was an historical guide to Paul's life. Luke's narrative calls upon traditions about the Apostle but weaves them into a theological account of the early church that provides a systematic picture that is sometimes at odds with the way that Paul presents his life and mission in his Epistles.

From an urban and cosmopolitan background, speaking both Aramaic and Greek, Paul was a Roman citizen and was well suited to travel the Graeco-Roman world on his missionary journeys. Although the Acts of the Apostles tells us that he was a tentmaker by trade, it was likely that he was initially trained for ownership or management. E.P. Sanders in his book *Paul* (page 14) therefore describes him as follows, 'Paul combined zeal with sobriety, good judgment and administrative skills; an innovative and challenging theology with social practicality; and religious fervour with concrete planning. He was the ideal apostle for a new religion in the Graeco-Roman world'.

The first three chapters of E.P. Saunder's book *Paul* reveal much of Paul's mission, life and missionary strategy. Horrell's book *An Introduction to the Study of Paul* has a useful chapter on Paul's life (chapter 3) and Brown's *Introduction to the New Testament* has a very well constructed chapter that deals with the general issues in Paul's life and thought (chapter 16).

Paul's Thinking

In order to understand Paul's thinking it is necessary to understand the culture and religious traditions in which he stood as well as the particular issues that he was addressing. The Mediterranean world was permeated by a phenomenon that is often referred to as Hellenism; an essentially Greek culture that had been infiltrated by oriental ideas and practices. Many generations of Jews who had lived in the Graeco-Roman world had been influenced by this way of understanding the world. Even Palestinian Judaism, which saw itself as more conservative, rigorous and faithful to the historic traditions of the faith, was not exempt from its pervasive influence.

Paul was of course a Jew and a Pharisee and he never stopped seeing himself as part of Israel. He simply takes much Jewish thinking for granted. He assumes belief in the one God who creates the world and works in history to bring his plans to fruition. He shared the hope that God's Kingdom would be established, that the old order would be swept away and be replaced by a new heaven and a new earth characterised by righteousness, peace and truth. As a Pharisee he had always believed in the resurrection of the dead. With the resurrection of Jesus, Paul believed that the new age had begun and was working towards its fulfilment.

Paul assumes that God's activity in history is channelled through the agency of a particular people. As a Jew, Paul believed that Israel had been chosen by God to be this channel and, as a convert to Christ, that Jesus was the Messiah who had come to herald in the Kingdom for all the nations. Israel's rejection of Jesus raised problems for Paul, and his mission to the Gentiles made him face some difficult questions about the status of Jews and Gentiles within the church. Should Gentile converts be circumcised as Jews and be made to keep the law? What was the status of the law in the church? Were the followers of Jesus, Jew or Gentile, saved because they kept the Jewish law or because of their faith in Jesus Christ?

Though a working Jew in a Hellenistic environment, Paul also belonged to a Christian tradition. He inherited the practices of baptism and eucharist and on occasion quotes from early Christian tradition (1 Cor 11: 23ff & 1 Cor 15: 3ff). An early Christian hymn is quoted in Philippians 2: 6-11, yet Paul rather surprisingly shows little knowledge, or even interest, in the traditions and teachings of Jesus. He rather concentrates on the Christ who was crucified, risen and exalted, and is now the reigning and saving Lord who is active through the Spirit.

Christ is central to the thought of Paul. He is the one who calls and the one who brings in the Kingdom. He is the wisdom of God, the Lord and the Son of God. He is the centre of a new people who both fulfil historical Israel and replace those in contemporary Israel that have rejected Christ. The new community are in Christ and are his body and to talk about the church is to talk about Christ. Salvation is for those who have faith in Jesus Christ. It liberates them from sin, the flesh, the principalities and powers and the law. Dying and rising with Christ, they become part of the new creation and need to behave accordingly.

Paul is not a systematic theologian. Sanders in his book, *Paul* (page 32) argues that we owe it to the difficulties in Paul's churches that he became a theologian. Much of his thinking is formed in response to the issues that confront him and his churches. Many of these central issues have been revisited by the church over the ages and have been used in the formulation of church doctrine in many different periods. This was true of Augustine in the fifth century, Luther in the sixteenth and Barth in the twentieth century. For this reason, Paul's letters have often been read in the light of these theological interpretations and to the detriment of the original text. Scholars today are therefore keen to rediscover Paul's text and to work with it in fresh ways. David Horrell, in his book *An Introduction to the Study of Paul* outlines a social scientific approach to the Pauline epistles which investigates the social level of Pauline Christians, the character of the Pauline congregations, and leadership in the Pauline churches. He also outlines some feminist perspectives.

There is a good discussion of Paul's theology and thinking in John Ziesler's book *Pauline Christianity* that will provide a good introduction to the subject. EP Sanders book *Paul* is rightly a classic and has helpful chapters on some of the central issues of Paul's thinking. Chapters 5 and 6 of David Horrell's book *An Introduction to the Study of Paul* are also helpful.

FOR THIS SESSION

This session is designed to enable candidates to

- iii) share the insights and discuss any issues that emerge from a thorough study of the 'Introduction' to this session and the supporting reading
- iv) examine how Paul's letters have been constructed and to recognize that they are real letters to real people in real situations
- v) glimpse the man behind the letters and to recognise some of the strong motivations that drove his letter writing and contributed to the construction of his theology

ARRIVE AND WORSHIP

In pairs

Share what you have noted from the Seminar Day.

As a group

Worship together.

PROJECT

As a group

1. **Paul's letters**
Study the Introduction and discuss any issues that emerge.
2. **Genre**
Raymond Brown, in his book *An Introduction to the New Testament*, identifies a more or less standard format detectable in most New Testament epistles (compare with the similar format in Boxall p63). He argues that generally four parts of the letter are distinguished.
 1. The Opening Formula containing
 - i) The sender
 - ii) The addressee
 - iii) The greeting
 - iv) The remembrance or Health Wish
 2. Thanksgiving
 3. The Body of the Letter or Message containing
 - i) Body opening
 - ii) Body closing or recapitulation
 4. Concluding Formula.

Using Study Sheet 1 examine the opening formula, thanksgiving, message and concluding formula in 1 Thessalonians, 2 Corinthians and Philemon.

Explore ways in which these may reveal something of the structure, context and intention of each letter.

3. **Paul – Apostle and Missionary**

Examine Galatians 1: 13-17
1 Corinthians 15: 3-11
2 Corinthians 11

Explore how Paul understood his life and work in the light of these passages.

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

Discuss any issues that have emerged from the session.

Summarise key areas of learning using the sheet provided.

PRAYER and PREPARATION

Offer the evening's work to God in prayer.

Plan your preparation for Session 2.

GROUP LEARNING SUMMARY SHEET

Summarise what you have learned as a group in this session

STUDY SHEET 1

1 Thessalonians

2 Corinthians

Philemon

Opening formula

Chapter 1

¹ Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy,
To the church of the Thessalonians
in God the Father and the Lord Jesus
Christ:

Grace to you and peace.

Chapter 1

¹ Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the
will of God, and Timothy our brother,

To the church of God that is in
Corinth, including all the saints
throughout Achaia:

² Grace to you and peace from God our
Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Chapter 1

¹ Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and
Timothy our brother.

To Philemon our dear friend and co-
worker, ² to Apphia our sister, to
Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the
church in your house:

³ Grace to you and peace from God our
Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Thanksgiving

Chapter 1

² We always give thanks to God for all
of you and mention you in our prayers,
constantly ³ remembering before our
God and Father your work of faith and
labour of love and steadfastness of hope
in our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁴ For we
know, brothers and sisters beloved by
God, that he has chosen you, ⁵ because
our message of the gospel came to you
not in word only, but also in power and
in the Holy Spirit and with full
conviction; just as you know what kind
of persons we proved to be among you
for your sake. ⁶ And you became
imitators of us and of the Lord, for in
spite of persecution you received the
word with joy inspired by the Holy
Spirit, ⁷ so that you became an example
to all the believers in Macedonia and in
Achaia. ⁸ For the word of the Lord has
sounded forth from you not only in
Macedonia and Achaia, but in every
place where your faith in God has
become known, so that we have no need
to speak about it. ⁹ For the people of
those regions report about us what kind
of welcome we had among you, and
how you turned to God from idols, to
serve a living and true God, ¹⁰ and to
wait for his Son from heaven, whom he
raised from the dead – Jesus, who
rescues us from the wrath that is
coming.

Chapter 1

³ Blessed be the God and Father of our
Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies
and the God of all consolation, ⁴ who
consoles us in all our affliction, so that
we may be able to console those who
are in any affliction with the consolation
with which we ourselves are consoled
by God. ⁵ For just as the sufferings of
Christ are abundant for us, so also our
consolation is abundant through Christ.
⁶ If we are being afflicted, it is for your
consolation and salvation; if we are
being consoled, it is for your
consolation, which you experience
when you patiently endure the same
sufferings that we are also suffering. ⁷
Our hope for you is unshaken; for we
know that as you share in our
sufferings, so also you share in our
consolation.

Chapter 1

⁴ When I remember you in my prayers,
I always thank my God
⁵ because I hear of your love for all the
saints and your faith towards the Lord
Jesus. ⁶ I pray that the sharing of your
faith may become effective when you
perceive all the good that we may do for
Christ. ⁷ I have indeed received much
joy and encouragement from your love,
because the hearts of the saints have
been refreshed through you, my brother.

1 Thessalonians**2 Corinthians****Philemon**

Body Opening

Chapter 2

⁹ You remember our labour and toil, brothers and sisters; we worked night and day, so that we might not burden any of you while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. ¹⁰ You are witnesses, and God also, how pure, upright, and blameless our conduct was towards you believers. ¹¹ As you know, we dealt with each one of you like a father with his children, ¹² urging and encouraging you and pleading that you should lead a life worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.

Chapter 1

⁸ We do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, of the affliction we experienced in Asia; for we were so utterly, unbearably crushed that we despaired of life itself. ⁹ Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death so that we would rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead. ¹⁰ He who rescued us from so deadly a peril will continue to rescue us; on him we have set our hope that he will rescue us again, ¹¹ as you also join in helping us by your prayers, so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted us through the prayers of many. ¹² Indeed, this is our boast, the testimony of our conscience: we have behaved in the world with frankness and godly sincerity, not by earthly wisdom but by the grace of God – and all the more towards you. ¹³ For we write to you nothing other than what you can read and also understand; I hope you will understand until the end – ¹⁴ as you have already understood us in part – that on the day of the Lord Jesus we are your boast even as you are our boast.

Chapter 1

⁸ For this reason, though I am bold enough in Christ to command you to do your duty, ⁹ yet I would rather appeal to you on the basis of love – and I, Paul, do this as an old man, and now also as a prisoner of Christ Jesus. ¹⁰ I am appealing to you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I have become during my imprisonment. ¹¹ Formerly he was useless to you, but now he is indeed useful both to you and to me. ¹² I am sending him, that is, my own heart, back to you.

Body Closing

Chapter 5

¹² But we appeal to you, brothers and sisters, to respect those who labour among you, and have charge of you in the Lord and admonish you; ¹³ esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves. ¹⁴ And we urge you, beloved, to admonish the idlers, encourage the faint hearted, help the weak, be patient with all of them. ¹⁵ See that none of you repays evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to all. ¹⁶ Rejoice always, ¹⁷ pray without ceasing, ¹⁸ give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. ¹⁹ Do not quench the Spirit. ²⁰ Do not despise the words of prophets, ²¹ but test everything; hold fast to what is good; ²² abstain from every form of evil.

Chapter 13

¹ This is the third time I am coming to you. “Any charge must be sustained by the evidence of two or three witnesses”. ² I warned those who sinned previously and all the others, and I warn them now while absent, as I did when present on my second visit, that if I come again, I will not be lenient – ³ since you desire proof that Christ is speaking in me. He is not weak in dealing with you, but is powerful in you. ⁴ For he was crucified in weakness, but lives by the power of God. For we are weak in him, but in dealing with you we will live with him by the power of God. ⁵ Examine yourselves to see whether you are living in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not realise that Jesus Christ is in you? – unless, indeed, you fail to pass the test!

Chapter 1

¹⁷ So if you consider me your partner, welcome him as you would welcome me. ¹⁸ If he has wronged you in any way, or owes you anything, charge that to my account. ¹⁹ I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand: I will repay it. I say nothing about your owing me even your own self. ²⁰ Yes, brother, let me have this benefit from you in the Lord! Refresh my heart in Christ. ²¹ Confident of your obedience, I am writing to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say. ²² One thing more – prepare a guest room for me, for I am hoping through your prayers to be restored to you.

1 Thessalonians**2 Corinthians****Philemon**

Body Closing (cont'd)

Chapter 5

²³ May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴ The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do this. ²⁵ Beloved, pray for us.

Chapter 13

⁶ I hope you will find out that we have not failed. ⁷ But we pray to God that you may not do anything wrong – not that we may appear to have passed the test, but that you may do what is right, though we may seem to have failed. ⁸ For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth. ⁹ For we rejoice when we are weak and you are strong. This is what we pray for, that you may become perfect. ¹⁰ So I write these things while I am away from you, so that when I come, I may not have to be severe in using the authority that the Lord has given me for building up and not for tearing down.

Chapter 1

²³ Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends greetings to you, ²⁴ and so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my fellow workers. ²⁵ The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

Concluding Formula

Chapter 5

²⁶ Greet all the brothers and sisters with a holy kiss. ²⁷ I solemnly command you by the Lord that this letter be read to all of them. ²⁸ The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

Chapter 13

¹¹ Finally, brothers and sisters, farewell. Put things in order, listen to my appeal, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you. ¹² Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the saints greet you. ¹³ The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.

Chapter 1

²³ Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends greetings to you, ²⁴ and so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my fellow workers. ²⁵ The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

SESSION 2

PAUL'S LETTER TO THE GALATIANS

This session is designed to enable candidates to:

- i) study the text of Galatians and to investigate the structure, context and intention of the letter
- ii) investigate how Paul's history and his understanding of his mission contributes to the letter's thinking
- iii) examine the theology that Paul constructs in response to the events in Galatia
- iv) explore how this theology can challenge the Church's understanding of its life and mission today.

Before the session

1. Read the whole letter to the Galatians out loud – or listen to the online version at <http://www.biblegateway.com/resources/audio/>
2. Study the Introduction to the session and undertake supporting reading including Boxall pages 79-82.
3. Using the Work Sheet provided, write a short introduction to the Epistle identifying
 - i) the context that gave rise to the Epistle
 - ii) Paul's intention in writing to the Galatians
 - iii) the way in which Paul structured the letter

Book list for this session

Brown RE	<i>An Introduction to the New Testament</i> New York, Doubleday (1997)
Dunn JDG	<i>The Theology of Paul's Letter to the Galatians</i> Cambridge: CUP (1993)
Esler PF	<i>Galatians</i> London: Routledge (1998)

SESSION 2

Paul's Letter to the Galatians

INTRODUCTION

In the preface to his book *The Theology of Paul's Letter to the Galatians*, J.D.G. Dunn writes (page xiii) 'Anyone who is interested in the doing and making of theology could hardly find a better starting place than the letter of Paul to the Galatians. For here is Christianity's first great theologian – arguably its greatest theologian – in full blood. Here we can never lose the sense that issues of profound significance are in the balance, to be argued for, and defended as though life itself was at stake – as, for Paul, it was'.

It appears from Paul's letter to the Galatians that a group of Jewish Christians were persuading Paul's converts that they needed to be circumcised as Jews in order to become full members of the church. This raised key issues for Paul about the nature of the church and about God's work of salvation. More than that, the demand that Gentile Christians should keep the Jewish law undermined much of the work that he had done as an apostle to the Gentiles and put the very nature of the Gospel that he preached under threat. He therefore wrote a letter to Galatians that is very personal in tone and full of fierce polemic and prophetic fervour. The theology of the Epistle to the Galatians is therefore not written as an academic treatise, but is constructed under fire and in the heat of debate.

The Author

The Epistle to the Galatians provides us with more personal and autobiographical information than any other of Paul's letters. In chapters 1 and 2 we learn of the way that he understands his work as an 'apostle', his previous life and his conversion to the faith. We also learn of his previous encounter with the Christian leadership in Jerusalem and a subsequent confrontation with Peter in Antioch. He also gives some very personal reminiscences about his evangelising work in Galatia (4:12-20) that enable us to build up a picture of his life and work. However, these autobiographical narratives are also essential to the theology of the letter. Chapters 1 and 2 of the Epistle are intended to introduce the principal theological argument of the following chapters and are integral to the letter's intention and strategy. Paul saw his own experience as an epitome of the Gospel and his dispute with the Galatians as a test of the Gospel that he lived and proclaimed.

The Galatians

There is some dispute among scholars about exactly who the 'foolish Galatians' (3:1) actually were. It is clear that they belonged to the region that was known as Galatia, (now modern Turkey) and that the region derived its name from the Gallic tribes who migrated into Asia Minor in the third century B.C.E. The church communities addressed in Paul's letter were either situated around Ancyra in ethnic Galatian territory to the North of the province (the North Galatia Theory) or to churches at Antioch, Lystra and Derbe in the South (the South Galatia Theory). The former were evangelised in C.E. 50 and 54 and the latter in C.E. 47-48 and 50. For further information about the Galatians and the circumstances of Paul's letter see Brown's *Introduction to the New Testament*, pages 474-477

and JDG Dunn's *The Theology of Paul's Letter to the Galatians* pages 6-8 and Introductions to commentaries on Galatians.

Paul's Opponents

After Paul had left Galatia, Christians of Jewish origin (6:13) had come, probably from Jerusalem, preaching another Gospel (1:7) that was clearly different from Paul's. Indeed, they appear to be enjoying considerable success in persuading Paul's converts that they needed to be circumcised. Paul acknowledges (1:6-9) that they claimed to preach the 'Gospel of Christ'. They also seemed to agree with Paul on the importance of faith in Christ (2:16) and of the cross of Christ (6:12). Indeed, Paul and his opponents would have shared much in common. They would have shared the story of Israel, the story of Christ, and the experience of being 'in the Spirit of Christ'. However, by wanting the Gentile Christians to be circumcised as Jews and to keep the Jewish law, they represented a different way of understanding the Gospel and raised key questions for Paul about the purposes of God in salvation and the nature of the church. How do Gentile and Jew relate to each other within the purposes of God? How should Gentiles relate to the God of Israel? How can Gentiles participate in the blessings God promised through Abraham? Who belongs to Israel now, and on what terms? Is circumcision to be the key factor of the new community's identity?

Jew and Gentile

When Paul visited Peter, James and the other Apostles at Jerusalem, it appears that Paul's plea that Gentile converts be recognised as belonging to Christ without needing to fulfil the requirements of the Jewish Law had won the day. However, it is likely that this consultation had in fact produced a compromise that had masked a variety of different understandings within the Christian community. Therefore at Antioch (2:11-14), Paul needed to confront Peter on the issue again. This incident was clearly of enormous importance for Paul because it appears to have marked the beginning of his distinctive thinking on the subject. Dunn argues that this disagreement may also have resulted in a breach between Paul and the Jerusalem leadership. Either way, Paul ends the biographical section of Galatians with a description of this incident. His intention may well have been therefore to re-establish the ground that he had won at Jerusalem and to put his arguments on a firmer theological footing.

The Structure of the Epistle

1. The Opening Formula 1:1-5 – but note how Paul describes himself in verse 1
2. Thanksgiving None – but note what he says in 1: 6-10 instead
3. The Body of the Letter 1:11 - 6:10
Content analysis
 1. Biographical section
 - i) Narration of his life and experience 1:11 - 2:14
 - ii) Debate with opponents 2:15-21
 2. Proofs for justification by faith and not law 3:1 - 4:31
 3. Ethical exhortation 5:1 - 6:10
 4. Concluding Formula 6:11-18 – note there are no personal greetings

For further information, see Brown *An Introduction to the New Testament* pages 470-481 and Dunn's *The Theology of Paul's Letter to the Galatians* chapters 2-5. See also Introductions to commentaries on Galatians.

FOR THIS SESSION

This session is designed to enable candidates to examine

- i) the context that gave rise to the Epistle to the Galatians, Paul's intention in writing it and the way that the Epistle is consequently structured
- ii) how Paul's life and experience has shaped his thinking
- iii) the theology that emerges from his encounter with his opponents in Galatia
- iv) the relevance of Paul's thinking for the Galatians and for today

ARRIVE AND WORSHIP

In pairs

Share any reflections on Session 1.

As a group

Worship together.

PROJECT

As a group

1. The text

Using the work that you have prepared for this session

Examine

- i) the context that gave rise to the Epistle
- ii) Paul's intention in writing this letter to the Galatians
- iii) the way in which Paul structured his letter

Discuss any issues that arise.

2. Paul's life and experience

Study chapters 1 and 2 of Galatians.

Identify and examine

- i) how Paul understands his Apostleship and the authority this gives him
- ii) details of his previous life and experience
- iii) his experience in Jerusalem and at Antioch with Peter and the other Apostles
- iv) *how this experience has shaped his thinking*

3. Theology in the making and Living as heirs of Abraham

Divide into 2 groups.

First group: Study verses 3:1 to 4:20

Examine the arguments that Paul uses against his opponents in Galatia.

- i) How does Paul express the relationship between Christians and the Jewish Law?
- ii) How does Paul express the role of Jesus in this relationship?

Highlight any key verses.

Second Group: Study verses 4:22-5:26

- i) What does Paul claim that Christians have been set free from and how has this been achieved?
- ii) What are the implications of this for Christian life?

Highlight any key verses.

Bring the groups back together and share your findings.

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

List the key features that characterise Paul's understanding of the church in the letter to the Galatians.

Explore ways in which these support and/or challenge our understanding of the life and mission of the church today.

Summarise key areas of learning using the sheet provided.

PRAYER and PREPARATION

Offer the evening's work to God in prayer.

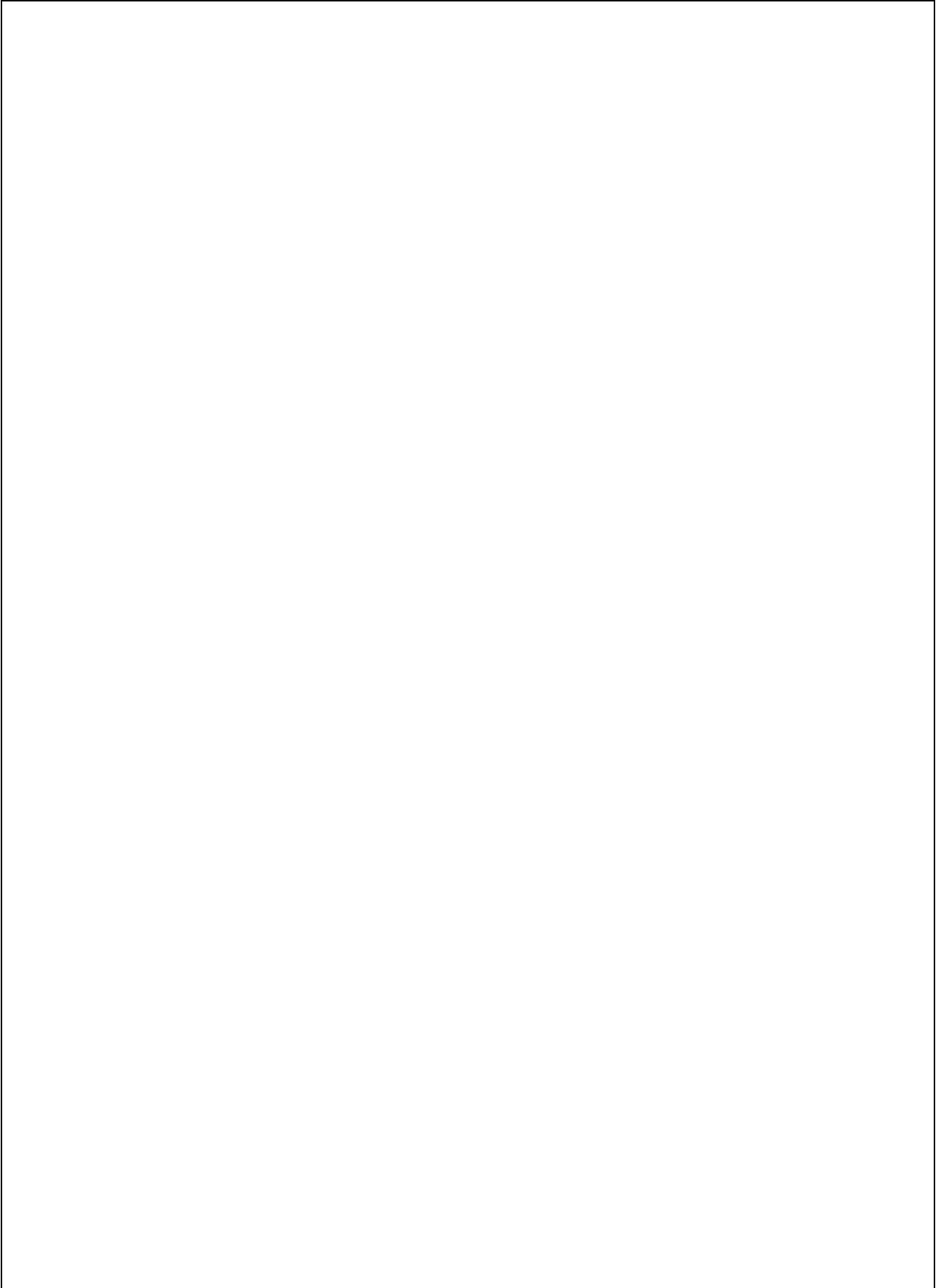
Plan your preparation for Session 3.

WORK SHEET

Paul's Letter to the Galatians

Write a short introduction to the Epistle identifying:

- i) the context that gave rise to the Epistle*
- ii) Paul's intention in writing to the Galatians*
- iii) the way in which Paul structured the letter*



GROUP LEARNING SUMMARY SHEET

Summarise what you have learned as a group in this session

SESSION 3

PAUL'S FIRST LETTER TO THE CORINTHIANS

This session is designed to enable candidates to:

- i) study the text of 1 Corinthians and to investigate the structure, context and intention of the letter
- ii) examine the nature of the divisions in the Corinthian church
- iii) examine the issues that Paul addresses and the way that he responds to them
- iv) explore the relevance of Paul's thinking for the church today.

For this session

1. Read the whole of 1 Corinthians out loud or listen to the online version at <http://www.biblegateway.com/resources/audio/>
2. Study the Introduction to the session and undertake supporting reading including Boxall pages 72-77
3. Using the Work Sheet provided, write a short introduction to the Epistle identifying:
 - i) the context that gave rise to the Epistle
 - ii) Paul's intention in writing this letter to the Corinthians
 - ii) the way in which Paul structured the letter

Book list for this session

- | | |
|------------|---|
| Brown RE | <i>An Introduction to the New Testament</i>
New York, Doubleday (1997) |
| Dunn JDG | <i>1 Corinthians</i> (New Testament Guides)
Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press (1995) |
| Barrett CK | <i>The First Epistle to the Corinthians</i>
London: A&C Black (1971) |

SESSION 3

Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians

INTRODUCTION

Paul's known contacts with the Corinthian church lasted for nearly a decade and traces of as many as seven letters between the two have been detected by scholars. Attempts to live the Gospel in a prosperous, multiethnic and multiracial society caused the Corinthian church many problems. Because of the tensions and difficulties that had surfaced within the community, JDG Dunn can write in his Study Guide *1 Corinthians* (page 9) that this letter, 'takes the lid off the New Testament Church in a way that no other writing does...It is a fascinating picture, one very far removed from the ideal of the pure New Testament church which still influences many people's thinking about New Testament Christianity'.

Corinth

Corinth was situated on the south-western extremity of the isthmus that connects the mainland of Greece with the Peloponnese. A newly dug canal linking the Gulf of Corinth to the Aegean further made Corinth a natural crossroads for both North-South and East-West traffic. Re-established as a Roman colony in 44BCE, its population was cosmopolitan and included freed slaves of Greek, Syrian, Jewish, and Egyptian origin. Many were keen to use their skills in manufacturing and commerce to make their fortunes in this new environment and a good number grew rich and powerful.

Archaeology has enabled scholars to undertake an accurate reconstruction of the city. There is evidence of numerous shrines dedicated to different Gods and the Egyptian cult of Isis and Serapis is represented. The city centre had a prominent *bema* (podium) in the centre of the market place, demonstrating the importance of public speaking in the city. Numerous small shops opened onto the market place giving Paul many opportunities for contact and conversation as he plied his trade.

Corinth enjoyed a reputation for moral laxity and words derived from the name of the city were used for whoremongering and prostitution. However, Corinth was probably no better and no worse than any other commercial city at the time.

Author and Date

The authorship of the letter is not in doubt. It was written by Paul from Ephesus in response to information brought to him by two sets of visitors and possibly by Apollos himself (16:12). A letter has been written by the Corinthians (7:1) outlining questions, or putting forward a viewpoint from the church and it is possible that Paul uses the sequence of issues raised in that letter to furnish a response in the Epistle.

In order to date the letter it is necessary to draw upon the Acts of the Apostles. Paul had met Priscilla and Aquila in Corinth (Acts 18:2) shortly after the expulsion of the Jews from Rome by Claudius in 49 C.E. There is a reference to Gallio as Roman Proconsul in Acts 18:12-17 and he

held this post between 51-52 C.E.. The Corinthian church was therefore likely to have been founded by Paul between 50-52 C.E. There was a lapse of time before the letter was written. Paul had made his base at Ephesus, Apollos had arrived in Corinth and conducted a substantial ministry there and had moved on. Paul had written a previous letter (lost to posterity) and there had been some coming and going between Paul and Corinth. 1 Corinthians was therefore likely to have been written in the period 54-57 C.E.

The Letter

Because of some rather awkward links and jumps in the letter, some scholars have argued that two or more separate letters have been interwoven. Indeed, some have sought to find Paul's previous (lost) letter to the Corinthians woven into the text. However, most modern scholars argue that 1 Corinthians is a single letter, possibly composed in disjunctive stages as the information came to Paul from Corinth. The unity of the letter is further reinforced by scholars who study its rhetorical strategy and sense an Epistle that is a living dialogue between Paul and the Corinthian church in which his argument is bent in different directions to appeal more effectively to different interests and individuals. Some argue that 1 Corinthians is essentially an appeal for unity and Paul therefore wrote the letter in order to persuade the Corinthian church to end their factionalism and be reconciled to one another.

The Structure of the Epistle

1. The Opening Formula 1:1-3
2. Thanksgiving 1:4-9
3. The Body of the Letter 1:10 – 16:18
 - Divisions in the Corinthian Church 1:11 – 4: 21
 - Issues between Church and World 5-10
 - Issues between Church and God 11-16:18
4. Concluding Formula 16:19-24

Further reading to support this section can be found in the Introduction to CK Barrett's Commentary *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, chapters 1 and 2 of JDG Dunn's *New Testament Guide 1 Corinthians* and RE Brown's *Introduction to the New Testament* pages 511ff.

Social Status

Chapter 1: 26-29 tells us that the majority of the members of the Corinthian church came from the lower social classes. However, it is clear from here and elsewhere in the Epistle that there were a few influential members who came from the upper classes. The 'wise' that Paul refers to would belong to the educated classes, the 'powerful' and the 'nobly born' would be influential in the church and community. Though a minority, the social status of this small group would give them a disproportionate influence. Indeed, it is likely that those Christians who are named by Paul, and those that he baptized himself, belong to this group. They were also likely to have been the most active and influential members of the congregation. It is therefore important to recognize that the Corinthian church was marked by significant social stratification and that this will be a factor in the issues that Paul addresses.

Also, and in addition to the tensions that may have existed between the different social groupings at Corinth, there were also likely to be patron-client obligations affecting the way that the church community operated. Society at the time was structured around a graduated hierarchy of patron-client ties. These obligations would be at work inside and outside the church. The new Christian

community was therefore being formed within a society that was organized around different social groupings and patron-client relationships. It was in this quite complex social context that the Corinthians were attempting to work out what it might mean to live 'in Christ'. This was further exacerbated because the church normally met for its Eucharistic meal in a private home, more particularly the home of one of the more prominent members. Public gatherings were therefore happening in private space and the role of church members 'in Christ' was difficult to discern from their more familiar roles in the household and in the world.

This tension is at the heart of most of the issues in the Epistle, including the problem of church factions, sexual behaviour, food offered to idols, the role of women and the behaviour at the Eucharist.

Chapter 4 in JDG Dunn's *New Testament Guide 1 Corinthians* deals with the issue of social status in greater detail. Further chapters of this book and the relevant sections of Barrett's commentary will aid the work of the session.

FOR THIS SESSION

This session is designed to enable candidates to examine

2. the context that gave rise to the First Epistle to the Corinthians, Paul's intention in writing it and the way that the Epistle is consequently structured
3. the nature of the divisions in the Corinthian church
4. the issues that Paul addresses and his response to them
5. the relevance of Paul's thinking for the church today

ARRIVE AND WORSHIP

In pairs

Share any reflections on Session 2.

As a group

Worship together.

PROJECT

As a group

1. The text - context, genre, structure and intention

Using the work that you have prepared for this session

Examine

- i) the context that gave rise to the Epistle*
- ii) Paul's intention in writing this letter to the Corinthians*
- iii) the way in which Paul structured his letter*

2. Divisions at Corinth

Study Chapters 1-4

Address the following questions

- i) What is the nature of the divisions in the church at Corinth?*
- ii) Where does true wisdom lie for Paul and how is it best expressed?*
- iii) How does Paul describe his own ministry and what is he hoping this will achieve?*

3. Issues in the Church

In Two Groups

Group 1

Study Chapters 5-7

Divide a piece of paper into three columns

List in the columns

- i) *the issues*
- ii) *Paul's judgment in each case*
- iii) *The reasons that Paul gives for his judgment*

Group 2

Study Chapters 11-13

Divide a piece of paper into three columns

List in the columns

- i) *the issues*
- ii) *Paul's judgment in each case*
- iii) *The reasons that Paul gives for his judgment*

As a Group

Share the results

Identify any common themes or values in Paul's response to the issues

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

List the key features that characterise Paul's understanding of the church in this letter to the Corinthians.

Explore ways in which these support and/or challenge our understanding of the life and mission of the church today.

Summarise key areas of learning using the sheet provided.

PRAYER and PREPARATION

Offer the evening's work to God in prayer.

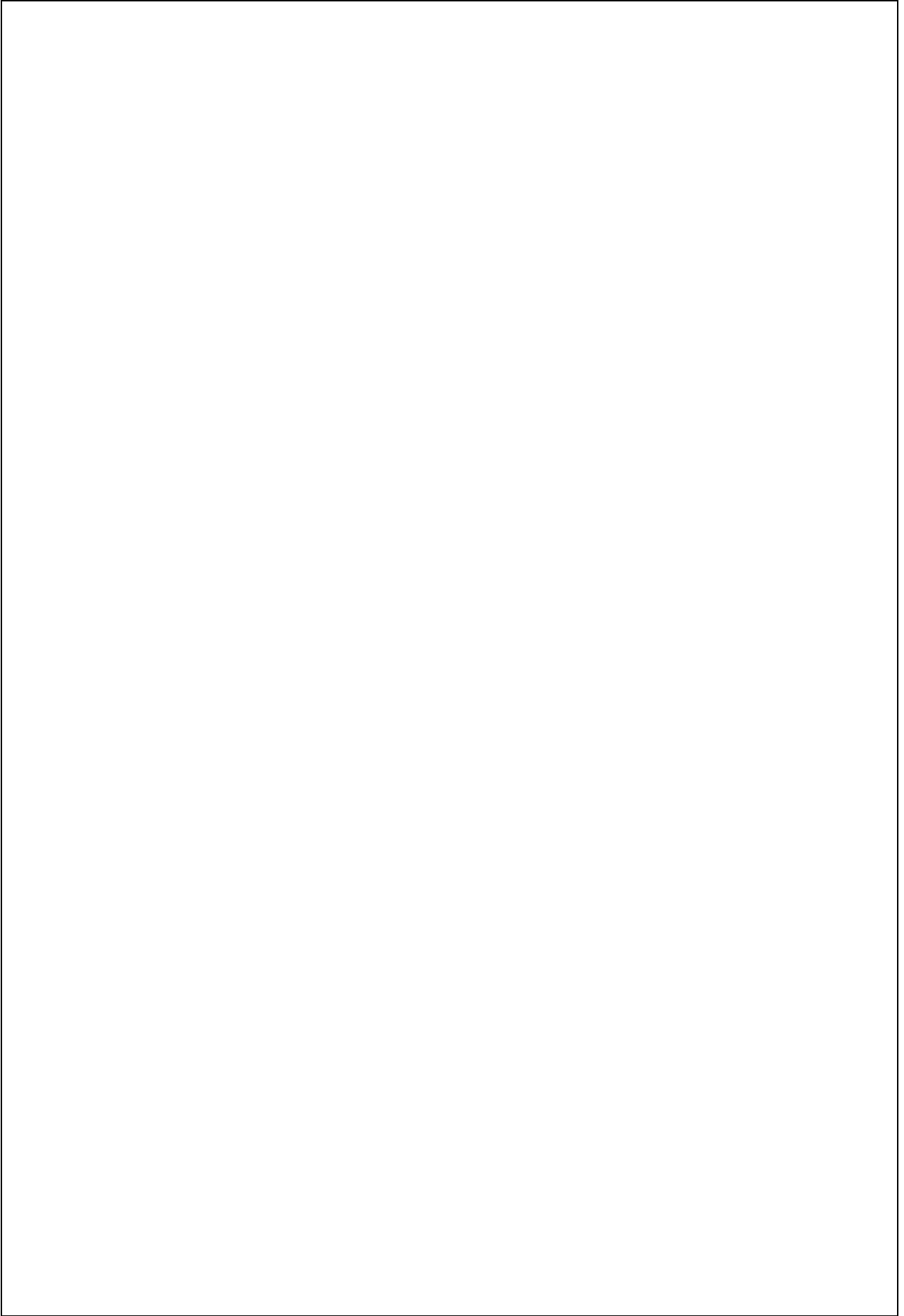
Plan your preparation for Session 4.

WORK SHEET

Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians

Write a short introduction to the Epistle identifying:

- i) the context that gave rise to the Epistle*
- ii) Paul's intention in writing to the Corinthians*
- iii) the way in which Paul structured the letter*



GROUP LEARNING SUMMARY SHEET

Summarise what you have learned as a group in this session

SESSION 4

THE FOUR GOSPELS

This session is designed to enable candidates to examine:

- i) the nature of the four gospels, their distinctive characteristics and the relationship between them
- ii) their different contexts and intentions.
- iii) the different ways in which they use the common tradition.

Before the session

1. Study the Introduction to the session and undertake supporting reading including Boxall chapters 2,5,13
2. Using the Work Sheet provided, write a short introduction to the Gospels addressing the questions
 - i) What is a gospel?
 - ii) How are the gospels related to each other?
 - iii) What makes each gospel unique?

Book list for this session

Brown RE	<i>An Introduction to the New Testament</i> New York: Doubleday (1997)
Achtemeier PJ	<i>Introducing the New Testament: its literature and theology</i>
Green JB & Thompson MM	Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans (2001)
Burridge, R A	<i>Four Gospels, One Jesus?</i> SPCK London (2005)

SESSION 4

The Four Gospels

INTRODUCTION

Genre

The first datable example of the use of the term 'gospel' as a literary type occurred in the writings of Justin Martyr in the second century. This designation was derived from the use of the term *euangelion* in the text of Mark for the 'good news' proclaimed by or about Jesus, a word that had already been used by Paul for a similar purpose. Some scholars have argued that the 'gospel' is a unique genre, invented by early Christianity and that this adequately describes the work of the four evangelists. In the larger Roman world, 'gospel' referred to the announcement of good news, such as a victory in battle or the birth of a child. Clearly the gospels are 'good news' in this sense.

However, other scholars have argued that the gospels bear similarities to ancient Graeco-Roman biographies, and particularly with the popular 'lives' of great figures, though there are also many differences in style and content. Others have recognised that the gospels are broad narratives about the life of Jesus capable of accommodating many different literary forms, including parables, birth stories, genealogies, sermons which each require a series of different approaches to reading and interpretation. In this sense the 'gospel' is a host genre for all these literary types.

For some scholars the evangelists were essentially preservers of a tradition which they collected with respect and to which they made only relatively modest alterations. Other scholars stress the importance of understanding each gospel as a complete literary work that tells an individual story of the good news of Jesus. Some therefore give considerably more importance to the work of each author than others do.

This is at least partly due to the way that scholarship has changed over the last few years. Earlier interpretation had focused on the source, history and genre of each of the pieces of tradition (source and form criticism). Attention then focused on the way in which the gospel writers took up and made detailed modifications to their sources (redaction criticism). More recent scholarship has been interested in the way in which the gospel writers composed their narratives (literary criticism). The characterization of Jesus and the literary and rhetorical strategies of each of the gospels has therefore provided a rich vein for recent interpretation.

The gospels were written at a time when the original apostles, and those who had been eye-witnesses to the Christ events, had begun to die and were therefore being lost to the church. It is also likely that, in the more settled urban church communities in the latter part of the first century, the authority and influence of the initial itinerant prophets and teachers was increasingly being replaced by an authority vested in local leaders. Each gospel therefore represents, in part, an attempt to provide a coherent narrative of the Christian proclamation for a new generation of Christians and to provide inspiration, direction and identity to the local Church community.

The Gospel Tradition

Although it is possible to speak of an author for each of the Gospels and to recognize the unique way in which each has woven the stories about Jesus into a literary whole, it is also important to remember that the material that the gospel writers used predate these narratives. It is likely that over 30 years elapsed between the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus and the writing of the first gospel narrative.

The events to which the gospels bear witness date for the most part from the 20s and early 30s C.E. The society of Jesus' day was essentially non-literate and events and teaching were committed to individual and corporate memory. Those communities that gathered around the ministry of Jesus would have undertaken an informal but controlled transmission of Jesus' sayings and deeds. In liturgy, in baptism preparation and in general instruction Jesus' sayings, actions and ethical teachings would have been used to develop the identity and character of the new communities. Although it is ultimately impossible to be sure about the way in which the oral tradition coalesced in the gospel narratives, it is likely that certain traditions converged around key figures such as Peter, James the brother of Jesus and Mary Magdalene and the communities associated with them. Such traditions and collections of traditions would almost certainly have been shaped by and given shape to the beliefs and practices of these communities or circles. Different communities are therefore likely to have been formed around different traditions and this may well account for the way in which the four Gospels, written for four very different Christian communities, differ both in style and content.

The Synoptic Gospels

The gospels of Mark, Matthew and Luke share a high degree of similarity of content and are traditionally known as the Synoptic Gospels. The nature of the relationship between the three gospels is far from clear. 95% of Mark's Gospel appears also in Matthew and Luke. Further, all three gospels have a common structure and chronological order and share a startlingly similar use of vocabulary and literary style. It is therefore likely that either Mark knew and used Matthew and Luke or, the more usual explanation, both Matthew and Luke knew and used Mark. It is also likely that Matthew and Luke had access to another written source of sayings. This has been called Q (from the German word for source *Quelle*) but its existence has never been independently verified. There are therefore a number of solutions as to the relationship between the three gospels and the sources that each have used. This has been referred to as the 'synoptic problem' and will remain an ongoing debate.

The Gospels

Each of the gospels calls upon the Jesus tradition in order to write the good news for the community in which they live. Each gospel tells the Jesus story from a unique perspective which is closely related to the context in which the gospel was constructed and the theology of the person who wrote it. Most commentaries therefore begin with an introduction to the gospel that is designed to investigate its authorship, date, setting, sources, plan, message and theology.

Each of the gospels was written out of a different Christian centre and it is possible to build up a possible picture of the intended community from the Gospel narratives themselves. It is difficult to be certain but it is likely that Mark was written in around 65 C.E. possibly in Rome for a Greek speaking community of Gentile origin. They appear to have experienced tension with their Jewish inheritance and may well have undergone persecution and failure. Matthew was probably written between 80-90 C.E. for a community in the area of Antioch. It is likely to have been a predominantly Jewish-Christian congregation that was laying the foundations for its future as a new community separated from Judaism. Luke may well have been written around 85 C.E. to churches affected directly or indirectly by Paul's mission, possibly in Greece or Syria. Luke states his

intention in the prologue to Theophilus to write ‘an orderly account of the things that have been fulfilled among us’. This he does in two volumes, the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles. It is likely that his intention is to inform, challenge and reassure a largely Gentile congregation and, while rooting the narrative in Jewish history and hopes, make it relevant to his readers.

John was likely to have been written between 80-110 C.E. for a community in the Ephesus area. The differences between the Synoptic Gospels and the Gospel of John have attracted attention for centuries. Whether or not John knew of the existence of the Synoptic Gospels, he clearly did not use them as sources for his narrative. John’s gospel has a very different chronological structure, vocabulary and literary style. The parables of Jesus and the tradition of Jesus’ proverbs have been replaced by lengthy and well developed sermons.

For further reading see Achtemeier, Green and Thompson’s *Introducing the New Testament* (chapter 3) and Brown’s *Introduction to the New Testament* (chapter 6)

FOR THIS SESSION

This session is designed to enable candidates to examine:

- i) the nature of the four gospels, their distinctive characteristics and the relationship between them
- ii) their different contexts and intentions
- iii) the different ways in which they use the common tradition

ARRIVE AND WORSHIP

In pairs

Share any reflections on Session 3.

As a group

Worship together.

PROJECT

As a group

1. The four gospels

Using the work that you have prepared for this session

Examine

- i) *the genre of the gospels*
- ii) *their sources and the relationship between them*
- iii) *factors that make each gospel unique*

2. Four ways of using the tradition

Study Sheet 2 shows a synopsis of the incident of the 'Cleansing of the Temple'.

It is one of the stories common to all four gospels

Using Study Sheet 2 and commentaries as appropriate, undertake the following

- i) *Identify the similarities and differences between the stories in each gospel*
- ii) *Investigate where the story is placed in each gospel*
- iii) *Examine how each gospel writer uses this story and how this might relate to their overall intention*

3. **Theological intention and context**

Much can be learned about the intentions and context of a Gospel by reading the beginning and the end.

In Two Groups

Group 1

With the aid of commentaries as appropriate

Study: Mark 1: 1-15 Mark 16: 1-8
 Luke 1: 1-4 Luke 24: 44-53 (Acts 1:1-11)

Address the question

What can be learned about the intentions and context of each Gospel from these texts?

Group 2

With the aid of commentaries as appropriate

Study: Matthew 1: 1-18 Matthew 28: 16-20
 John 1: 1-18 John 21: 15-25

Address the question

What can be learned about the intentions and context of each Gospel from these texts?

As a Group

Share your answers

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

Discuss any issues that have emerged from the session.

Summarise key areas of learning using the sheet provided.

PRAYER and PREPARATION

Offer the evening's work to God in prayer.

Plan your preparation for Session 5.

STUDY SHEET 2

Matt 21 12-13	Mark 11 15-18	Luke 19 45-48	John 2 13-17
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The Cleansing of the Temple

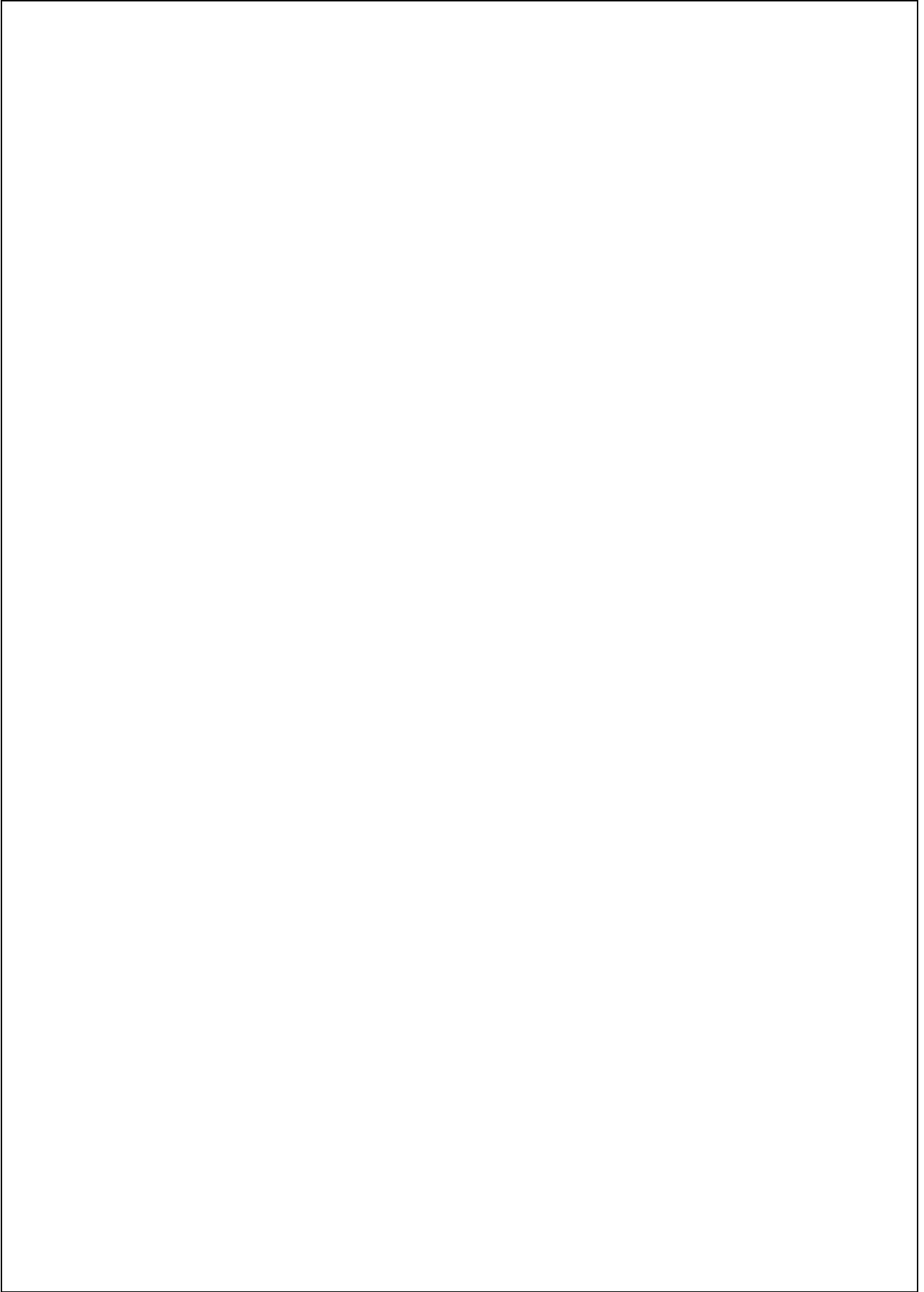
<p>¹² And Jesus entered into the temple of God</p> <p>and cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple,</p> <p>and overthrew the tables of the money-changers, and the seats of them that sold the doves.</p> <p>¹³ and he saith unto them, It is written, My house shall be called a house of prayer: but ye made it a den of robbers.</p>	<p>¹⁵ And they come to Jerusalem; and he entered into the temple.</p> <p>and began to cast out them that sold and them that bought in the temple,</p> <p>and overthrew the tables of the money-changers, and the seats of them that sold the doves; ¹⁶ and he would not suffer that any man should carry a vessel through the temple.</p> <p>¹⁷ And he taught, and said unto them, Is it not written, My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations? but ye have made it a den of robbers.</p> <p>¹⁸ And the chief priests and the scribes</p> <p>heard it, and sought how they might destroy him</p> <p>for they feared him,</p> <p>for all the multitude was astonished at his teaching.</p>	<p>⁴⁵ And he entered into the temple,</p> <p>and began to cast out them that sold,</p> <p>unto them, ⁴⁶ saying</p> <p>It is written, And my house shall be a house of prayer: but ye have made it a den of robbers</p> <p>⁴⁷ And he was teaching daily in the temple But the chief priests and the scribes and the principal men of the people sought to destroy him</p> <p>⁴⁸ and they could not find what they might do; for the people all hung upon him, listening.</p>	<p>¹³ And the passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ¹⁴ And he found in the temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the changers of money sitting: ¹⁵ and he made a scourge of cords, and cast out</p> <p>of the temple, both the sheep and the oxen; and he poured out the changers' money, and overthrew their tables; ¹⁶ and to them that sold the doves</p> <p>he said Take these things hence; make not my Father's house</p> <p>a house of merchandise. ¹⁷ His disciples remembered that it was written, The zeal of thine house shall eat me up.</p>
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WORK SHEET

The Four Gospels

Write a short introduction to the Gospels addressing the questions:

- i) What is a gospel?*
- ii) How are the gospels related to each other?*
- iii) What makes each gospel unique?*



GROUP LEARNING SUMMARY SHEET

Summarise what you have learned as a group in this session

SESSION 5

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MARK (1)

This session is designed to enable candidates to

- i) study the text of Mark's Gospel and investigate its context, purpose and key themes.
- ii) explore Mark's Gospel as story and investigate characters, plot and setting.
- iii) examine Mark's 'narrative Christology' and explore how this may contribute to our understanding of the person and work of Jesus.

Before the session

1. Read the Gospel through out loud or listen online at <http://www.biblegateway.com/resources/audio/>
2. Study the Introduction to the session and undertake supporting reading including Boxall p100-104 and the extract of Telford *Mark* provided at the back of this session.
3. Using the Work Sheet provided, write a short introduction to Mark's Gospel identifying
 - i) date and authorship
 - ii) context and purpose
 - iii) key themes

Book list for this session

Achtemeier PJ	<i>Introducing the New Testament: its literature and theology</i>
Green JB & Thompson MM	Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans (2001)
Brown RE	<i>An Introduction to the New Testament</i>
	New York: Doubleday (1997)
Hooker M	<i>The Gospel according to St Mark</i>
	London: A&C Black (1991)
Telford WR	<i>Mark, New Testament Guides</i>
	Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press (1999)

SESSION 5

The Gospel According to Mark (1)

INTRODUCTION

Date and Authorship

The Gospel of Mark is almost certainly the earliest of the four canonical Gospels to be written. Although some scholars would question the evidence, it is still likely that Matthew and Luke used Mark's Gospel as a key source for their narrative. Ancient tradition associates the writer of the gospel with the John Mark of the Acts of the Apostles, whose mother had a house in Jerusalem and who accompanied Paul and Barnabas on the 'first missionary journey'. He has been regarded as a follower and interpreter of Peter. However, this tradition is hard to establish and the author detectable from the gospel is a Greek speaker, who was not an eyewitness of Jesus' ministry who makes inexact statements about the geography of Palestine. He drew on pre-shaped traditions about Jesus, much of which was oral but some of which may have been written to create a coherent story for his local community. It is most likely that the gospel was written between 60-75 CE.

To Whom was it Written?

It is clear that Mark was writing for Greek speaking Christians of Gentile origin. He takes care to translate Aramaic expressions into Greek and seeks to explain Jewish customs. There are numerous examples of Latin words translated into Greek and numerous examples of Semitic forms of speech or thought indicating that the author had access to Palestinian traditions.

The most widely attested theory is that Mark was written for the Christian community in Rome, but plausible arguments can be made for an origin in Galilee, Antioch or small town southern Syria.

Key Themes

- i) A key theme of the gospel is suffering. Jesus fulfils his destiny through suffering and death and calls his disciples to follow.
- ii) Mark centres his story on the person of Jesus. Christology is of key importance and it is revealed in the way that Mark structures his Gospel and tells his story. And part of this story is the secrecy that surrounds the person of Jesus – the 'messianic secret'.

- iii) Another key theme is that of discipleship. To be a follower of Jesus is to follow in the way of the cross. However, the first disciples seem unable to grasp this or very much else that Jesus teaches them. Indeed, the way that Mark presents the Apostles has raised questions about the context in which Mark was writing and the purpose of his work. Perhaps he was hoping to encourage his readership in their struggle to understand and respond to the gospel message by acknowledging how hard it was for the first disciples. On the other hand, he may have been criticising the original Jewish apostles because he was concerned about the influence that they continued to have on his essentially Gentile church.

Purpose

Mark almost certainly had no single purpose in writing his Gospel. It is generally true that, with the geographical spread of the church and with the passing of time there was a need for information about Jesus and his teaching. Nevertheless, Mark's presentation is distinctive and requires more specific attention. The traditional view is that Mark is writing to a church (possibly in Rome) that is experiencing persecution and suffering. Mark is therefore writing to strengthen their faith.

Others suggest that Mark's emphasis on the cross may well have been designed to counteract a brand of charismatic Christianity that had over-emphasised the glory and power of Jesus, at the expense of his weakness, service and suffering. Mark may have been encouraging a model of discipleship built on these virtues. Perhaps he is calling on his readers to re-evaluate their understanding of Jesus, church and ministry.

Telford explores the view that Mark's Jesus has a special interest in Gentiles and the Gentile mission. Galilee may have a symbolic association with the Gentile mission. In the early part of the gospel, Jesus lives and works among Gentiles in Galilee and at the end of the gospel, after his death and resurrection in Jerusalem, the angel tells the women that the risen Jesus is going before them into Galilee (the Gentile world). The gospel therefore ends where it began, in Galilee, and ends, as it has proceeded, with the failure of the first Jewish disciples (in this case the women) to do what they are told. Telford therefore suggests that Mark's gospel reflects a community of Greek speaking Gentile Christians in tension with their Jewish inheritance, affirming their mission to the Gentile world.

Structure

The gospel falls naturally into two parts. The first part (1:1 – 8:26) tells the story of Jesus' ministry of healing and preaching in Galilee. The second part (8:27 – 16:8) tells of his journey to Jerusalem, his suffering, death and resurrection. 16:9-20 is almost certainly appended by a later copyist and is not an original part of the gospel.

The Interpretation of Mark

Mark appears to have received little attention over the centuries. It has had relatively few commentaries and expositions devoted to it, probably because of Augustine's view that the gospel was an abbreviation of Matthew. It was not until the eighteenth century that Mark began to emerge from its relative obscurity. It came to prominence once it was acknowledged that it represents the earliest connected literary account of the teaching and activity of Jesus as interpreted by a Christian community in the Mediterranean world forty years or so after his death. Over the years scholars have applied different critical disciplines to the study of Mark. Source criticism has examined the oral (and possibly written) traditions used by the evangelist and has concluded that Mark has woven small collections of individual traditions into a more or less coherent presentation.

Form criticism has attempted to recover the traditional units that make up the gospel, discover the genre and function of each unit and to investigate the light it sheds on Jesus' teaching. It has thrown light on the complex process of gospel construction and on the role that is played by the practical needs of the community in the transmission of the oral traditions.

However, source and form criticism led to scholars being preoccupied with the single units of the gospel tradition and arguably underestimated the author's influence on the material. Redaction criticism has investigated the way in which Mark has used his sources and has explored the author's theological intention and purpose in selecting the self contained pericope and linking them together. This has helped to highlight the role of the evangelist and the holistic nature of the text, although it has not always been easy to isolate the individual sources and therefore to agree the exact nature of Mark's unique contribution.

Many scholars now favour a literary approach to the text. These demand that we take Mark more seriously as an author and see the text holistically. Genre criticism investigates texts in relationship to their literary type and scholars have explored Mark's gospel as a Graeco-Roman Biography, as Apocalyptic Drama, as Greek Tragedy and as Hellenistic Romance. Scholars have investigated the literary techniques and rhetorical devices used by Mark, his use of irony, his use of narrator and his use of the Old Testament. They have also investigated Mark as story.

Mark as Story

Scholars have recognised that Mark's understanding of the person and work of Jesus is largely conveyed through the story that he tells. Scholars have referred to this as Mark's 'narrative Christology' and have argued that it is necessary to take Mark's Gospel seriously as a story in order to explore his understanding of Jesus.

Such an enterprise demands attention to characters, plot and setting. (*Students should read Telford WR, 'Mark' pages 108-115 for further information on this subject.* This is reproduced in this booklet at the end of this session) The main characters are Jesus, the disciples and the Jewish authorities and there are a number of minor characters who make cameo appearances. Characters may be 'round', ie complex and unpredictable; 'flat' ie predictable with a few consistent traits; or 'stock' ie with one consistent trait. They may be 'reliable' evoking sympathy and confidence, or 'unreliable' evoking antipathy and mistrust.

Mark presents a single, unified story with a consistent plot which leads to a recognisable climax. There are two inter-related plot themes. The first concerns the conflict between Jesus and his opponents. The second, and related plot theme, is the conflict between Jesus and his family and disciples.

Mark's settings are many and varied. The first part of the gospel takes place in Galilee and its surrounding area and the second part in Jerusalem. Within this framework, Mark's characters are encountered in the wilderness, at sea, in the house, in a boat, in the synagogue, up a mountain etc. These may be integral to the stories themselves or may have a more symbolic role in the story.

Character, plot and setting therefore help create the story that Mark tells.

For further information on Mark's Gospel see Brown RE *An Introduction to the New Testament* Chapter 7, Telford WR, *Mark* chapters 1-3, Hooker MD, *The Gospel According to Mark* Introduction, Achtemeier, Green and Thompson, *Introducing the New Testament* Chapter 5.

FOR THIS SESSION

This session is designed to enable candidates to:

- i) study the text of Mark's Gospel and investigate its context, purpose and key themes
- ii) explore Mark's Gospel as story and investigate characters, plot and setting
- iii) examine Mark's 'narrative Christology' and explore how this may contribute to our understanding of the person and work of Jesus.

ARRIVE AND WORSHIP

In pairs

Share any reflections on Session 4.

As a group

Worship together.

PROJECT

As a group

1. The text

Using the work that you have prepared for this session

Examine

- i) the date and authorship of Mark
- ii) the context and purpose of the gospel
- iii) key themes in the gospel

2. Mark as Story

Using your experience of reading Mark out loud and your reading of Telford WR, *Mark*, pages 108-115 (provided at the back of this session).

Undertake the following

- i) Examine the characters in the story ie Jesus, the disciples, Jesus' family, the Jewish authorities and any other minor characters you like..
Identify whether they are round, flat, stock, reliable or unreliable
- ii) Explore the plot and sub-plots and examine the way in which they relate to each other as the story unfolds.
- iii) Examine different settings in the Gospel. Identify ways in which the settings can be significant for the way that the story is told and interpreted.

3. The Person of Jesus

Divide into two groups.

Mark's portrayal of the person of Jesus has been called 'narrative Christology'.

Explore the following stories and examine how they make clear, through the story, Mark's understanding of the person of Jesus.

First Group: Mark 4: 35-44

Second Group: Mark 2: 1-12

Share your findings.

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

Address the question

How does an understanding of Mark's Gospel as a story help or hinder your understanding of the person and work of Jesus?

Summarise key areas of learning using the sheet provided.

PRAYER and PREPARATION

Offer the evening's work to God in prayer.

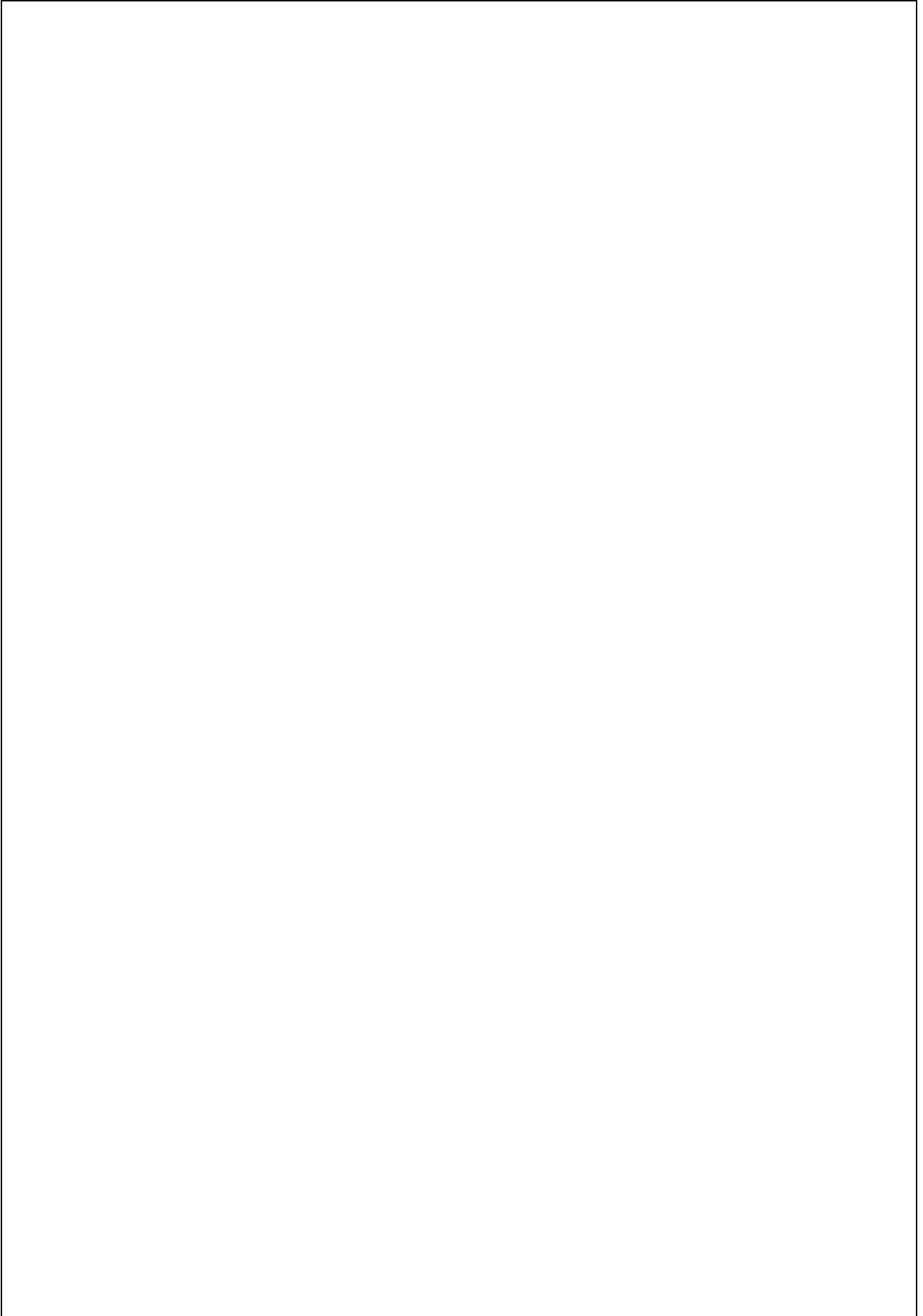
Plan your preparation for Session 6.

WORK SHEET

The Gospel According to Mark (1)

Write a short introduction to Mark's Gospel identifying:

- i) date and authorship*
- ii) context and purpose*
- iii) key themes*



GROUP LEARNING SUMMARY SHEET

Summarise what you have learned as a group in this session

Additional Reading: Telford, *Mark* p108-115

Mark as Story *The Characters*

Jesus. From the ‘how’ of the narrative, Mark’s ‘discourse’ let us now turn to the ‘what’ and consider Mark as ‘story’. I shall comment on the characters, the plot and the settings. The main characters in Mark’s story are Jesus, the disciples and the Jewish authorities but there are also a number of minor characters who give cameo appearances. Our description will be a literary one since our interest will lie at this stage in the characters as they appear in Mark’s narrative world rather than in the historical questions which Mark’s presentation raises in connection with them. The literary critic employs certain terms to analyse characterization in a narrative; Characters may be ‘round’ (i.e. complex and unpredictable) ‘flat’ (i.e. predictable with a few, usually consistent traits) ‘stock’ (i.e. with only one predictable and consistent trait). Characters may also be ‘reliable’ (i.e. enlisting the readers sympathy or confidence and hence reinforcing the narrators point of view; for example, the voice of God from heaven 1.11; the centurion at the cross, 15.39; the young man at the tomb, 16.5-7) or ‘unreliable’ (encouraging the reader’s antipathy or serving to distance the reader from the values they represent; for example, Judas, 3.19 or the scribes, 1.22; 2.6-8; 3.22).

Jesus is without doubt the central and dominant character in Mark’s story. According to Rhoads and Michie (Mark as Story, p. 104), the Markan Jesus is a ‘round’ character because of his many and varied traits (authority, integrity, faith, selflessness) and one towards whom the narrator maintains a consistently favourable point of view. It is often said that, of all the evangelists, Mark presents the most human Jesus (note his anger, 3.5; harshness, 8.33 ; impatience, 9.19; even vindictiveness, 11.13-14). Mark was concerned, however, not so much with the human character of Jesus but with his status, that is, with what his words and deeds reveal about who he was. The Markan Jesus, as was noted in the opening summary of the Gospel, is a figure endowed with power (*dunamis*; cf. e.g. 5.30) and authority (*exousia* cf. e.g. 1.22, 27). He wields this power over nature (cf. e.g. 4.35-51), he works miracles (cf. e.g. 4.35-5.43), he possesses supernatural knowledge (cf. e.g. 2.8) and he can be dramatically ‘metamorphosed’ before his disciples (9.2-8). A key feature in Mark’s presentation of Jesus is the aura of secrecy which surrounds his person and activity. He issues commands to silence in respect of his healing action and identity (cf. e.g. 1.44; 3.11-12; 5.43; 8.30; 9.9), gives private instruction to his disciples (cf. e.g. 4.11-12, 33-34; 7.17-23; 9.9-13), issues parabolic teaching meant to confuse (cf. 4.11-12), attempts to conceal himself (cf. e.g. 7.24; 9.30) and refuses to give a sign to establish his credentials (cf. 8.11-13). The mystery surrounding him is heightened by the various responses Jesus is described by the narrator as evoking from others (cf. e.g. 3.21 ‘mad!’; 3.22 ‘demon-possessed’; 6.14-16 ‘a reincarnated John the Baptist, Elijah or prophet’; 2.7 and 14.63-64 ‘blasphemer’; 3.11 and 14.39 ‘Son of God’). This range of reactions highlights the complex nature of the Markan Jesus. He provokes fear, offence, amazement, popularity and opposition from all who encounter him. It is in his interaction with two groups in particular, however, that the author achieves for his character this quality of striking enigma, namely, the disciples and the Jewish leaders.

The disciples. Because of their conflicting traits, the disciples are to be regarded as ‘round’ characters, according to Rhoads and Michie, and the narrator characterizes them both favourably and unfavourably. ‘On the one hand, they are loyal and courageous, with a capacity for sacrifice and enough fascination with Jesus to follow him. On the other hand, they are afraid, self-centered and dense, preoccupied with their own status and power’ (Mark as Story, p. 123). If anything, this even-handed description may underemphasize the negative aspects of the Markan portrayal (cf. M.R. Thompson, *The Role of Disbelief*, 1989) for, when filled out, it becomes almost damning: the disciples bar others (9.38; 10.13-14); they are status conscious

(9.33-37; 10.28-31, 35-45); they are fearful, afraid, cowardly (4.40-41; 6.50-51; 9.6, 32; 10.32; 14.50); they fail to take up their cross like true disciples (8.34-38); they are exhorted to have faith but admonished for the lack of it (4.40; 9.19; 11.22); they are unable to perform miracles (9.18, 19, 23); they are unable keep watch but betray, forsake, and deny Jesus (ch. 14); they are unaware of the true identity of Jesus (namely the suffering Son of God); they fail to comprehend, in the first part of the Gospel, this secret, and positively misunderstand its implications in the second half. I shall comment later on some of the historical explanations which have been offered for this harsh treatment but here one should mention the purely literary approach taken to this portrayal by R.C. Tannehill ('The Disciples in Mark', in Telford, *Interpretation of Mark*, pp. 169-95). In examining the narrative role of the disciples, Tannehill argues that the author first reinforces the positive view of the disciples as men called to follow Jesus and leads the reader to identify with them. Then he shows the inadequacy of their response to him, and their failure, so leading the implied (Christian) reader to self-criticism.

The Jewish leaders. Opposed to Jesus in the Markan story are the Jewish leaders. Although a number of different groups are named (the Pharisees, the Herodians, the Sadducees, the elders, the chief priests and the scribes), viewed from the perspective of the reader, they form a united front. According to literary critics (e.g. J.D. Kingsbury, E.S. Malbon), they hence stand forth as a single character. The authorities are 'flat' characters in Mark and their characterization is built upon their opposition to Jesus. They are viewed by the narrator almost consistently throughout in a negative light. According to Rhoads and Michie, the opponents have no faith, are blind to the rule of God, and are hardened against Jesus...They are self-sewing, preoccupied with their own importance, afraid to lose their status and power, and willing to destroy to keep them (Mark as Story, p. 117). Depicted as hypocrites (7.6-7), they are shown as guilty of an unforgivable sin in questioning the source of Jesus' power (3.28-30). For rejecting Jesus, they are implied to be wicked murderers (12.1-12) and their culpability in later plotting and executing his demise is also anticipated for the reader by the prospective device of the repeated passion prediction (8.31; 9.31; 10.33-34). Stealthy and devious in carrying out their design, according to the narrator (14.1-2), and acting out of envy in so doing, according to the 'reliable' Pilate (in an 'inside view', 15.10), they are shown at the end cruelly mocking Jesus on the cross (15.31-32), and oblivious to the dénouement which only the reader is in the privileged position to expect.

The minor characters. The narrative of the Gospel of Mark is also adorned by a number of minor characters, or 'the little people', as Rhoads and Michie describe them. They give as examples the men who bring a paralytic to Jesus, the leper, Jairus, the synagogue ruler, the Syrophenician woman, the children Jesus embraces, the poor widow, and Joseph of Arimathea. 'They are "flat" characters with several consistent traits which they share in common; a childlike, often persistent, faith; a disregard for personal status and power; and a capacity for sacrificial service' (Mark as Story, p. 130). Many of these are women, and, in line with contemporary interest, a number of studies in the 1980s (e.g. those of M.A. Beavis, E.S. Fiorenza, E.S. Malbon) have focused on them, investigating their narrative role and the literary image which they project. Women appear in Mark's healing stories (cf. e.g. 1.29-31; 5.24-34; 7.25-30), in isolated stories or incidents (cf. e.g. 3.31-35; 6.17-29; 12.41-44) and in connection with his passion and resurrection (14.3-9; 15.40-41; 16.1-8). Their portrayal is neither extensive nor uniformly positive (cf. 6.17-29), and the reader is only told explicitly as late as 15.40-41 that women were among those who followed Jesus and 'ministered to him'. Nevertheless the thrust of these studies is the assertion that the women in Mark are exemplary figures embodying not only the ideals of female virtue (at least as these were espoused in antiquity) but also of faith, service and discipleship. The women are taken as models of those who recognize who Jesus is (cf. e.g. 14.3-9) and even as foils or positive counterparts for the faltering male disciples. One further 'character' worth mentioning is the crowd (ochlos) which features frequently in the Markan narrative. 'Crowds with traits similar to those of the little people often respond to Jesus. They come to Jesus wherever he is...follow him, respond to his compassion and

his power, and are “glad‘ to hear him” ’ (Rhoads and Michie, *Mark as Story*, pp. 134- 35). In the end, however, influenced by the Jewish leaders, they reject him (cf. 15.8, 11, 15), although this is partly, Rhoads and Michie claim, because they have failed to understand him. According to P.S. Minear, Mark assigned to the *ochlos* a very significant role in the events of the gospel. They represent a continuing audience of committed believers (14.43; 15.8, 11, 15 are, he maintains, a different group), ‘a primitive laity’ with whom the laymen in the Markan community would have identified.

The Plot

The conflict between Jesus and his opponents. ‘Our desire to impose maximum plot-coherence on a set of narrated events is an innate and powerful one; we pose as many connections as we can’ (S.D. Moore, *Literary Criticism*, p. 14). Notwithstanding this fact, those who have recently taken a literary approach to Mark, as we have seen, have emphasized that Mark presents a single unified story with a consistent plot (cf. W.H. Kelber, *Mark’s Story of Jesus*), a result that we should not expect if Mark were an edited collection of traditions. Kelber’s book presents Mark as ‘an interpretative retelling’ of this story while that of J.D. Kingsbury (*Conflict in Mark*) analyses the plot, examining the principal storylines of the Gospel, and how they intertwine. According to Rhoads and Michie, the narrator’s point of view in telling the story is consistent throughout. The plot is coherent: events that are anticipated come to pass; conflicts are resolved; predictions are fulfilled. The characters are consistent from one scene to the next...Thus, the unity of the gospel is apparent in the remarkable integrity of the story it tells (*Mark as Story*, p. 3). The story which is recounted leads to a recognizable climax, namely, the death and resurrection of Jesus, and the narrator leads the implied reader to anticipate the course of events by dropping hints as to future developments early on (cf. 2.19-20; 3.6). There are two interrelated plot themes, the first of which concerns the conflict between Jesus and his opponents. This is built up successively section by section (cf. 2.1-3.6; 3.22-30; 7.1-23; 10.2-9; chs. 11-12; 14-15) culminating in Jesus’ visit to Jerusalem, his besting of his opponents in argument, his arrest, trial and crucifixion. The plot appears to be resolved in the triumph of Jesus’ enemies over him but in fact what appears to be a tragedy turns out to be (in literary terms) a comedy. The Jesus who cannot come down from the cross and save himself actually rises from the dead and is vindicated. This vindication is carried out beyond the text into the future (where the reader stands) by the apocalyptic discourse, a passage introduced before the passion narrative and pointing beyond it to Jesus’ future return in triumph.

The conflict between Jesus and his family and disciples. The second and related plot theme is the conflict between Jesus and his family and disciples. The narrator chronicles Jesus’ attempt to get them to understand who he is, and emphasizes their repeated failure to comprehend his divine nature and destiny. This theme, too, is built up in stages. Before 8.30, they fail to recognize that he is the Son of God despite every invitation to do so (cf. 4.41; 6.52; 8.21). After 8.30, they positively misunderstand the true nature of Jesus’ divine status and mission and the true nature of discipleship springing from it. By the end of the narrative, one has betrayed him, another has denied him, all have deserted him. The only ones to hear the claim that he is risen are the women at the tomb, and, although they are instructed to pass on the message, ‘they said nothing to anyone’, we are told, ‘for they were afraid’ (16.8). Any resolution of this second theme is left, therefore, to the implied reader who is invited, it appears, to supply his or her own ending.

The Settings

We come finally to Mark’s settings. A good story, like a good film, must have not only stimulating characters and an exciting plot but, if it is to maintain our interest, attractive settings. If Mark were a film director, then we might award him high marks for his choice of locations. Mark’s geographical and topographical settings are many and varied. The first part of the Gospel, as we have observed, is

set in Galilee and its surrounding area, the second part in Jerusalem, with Jesus' journey from Galilee to Jerusalem forming the centre-piece. Within this overall framework, Mark's characters are encountered in a variety of places: in the wilderness (e.g. 1.4, 12, 35; 6.31; 8.4); at the sea (e.g. 1.16; 2.13; 3.7; 4.1; 5.21; 7.31); in the house (e.g. 2.1, 15; 3.20; 7.17, 24; 9.33; 10.10); in the synagogue (e.g. 1.21; 3.1); getting in/out of a boat (e.g. 3.9; 4.1, 36; 5.2, 21; 6.32, 45, 54; 8.10, 14); in the hills/on a mountain (e.g. 3.13; 6.46; 9.2; 13.3); on the way/road (e.g. 8.27; 9.33, 34; 10.17, 32, 46, 52); in the temple (e.g. 11.11, 15, 27); in the tomb (e.g. 5.2; 16.5). Scholars have debated the significance of these settings. Some have obviously been taken over by the evangelist from his tradition and are integral to the stories themselves (e.g. , John's appearance in the wilderness). Others seem artificial (e.g. the sudden appearances of 'the house'; e.g. 7.17; 10.10) , and may be attributable to the evangelist himself. A number of the locations are pregnant with significance in relation to myth, history and tradition, both Jewish (e.g. 'the wilderness', 'the mountain', 'the synagogue', 'the temple') and Christian (e.g. 'the house', the early Christian meeting-place or 'the way', a metaphor for discipleship and the early Christian movement's self-designation, according to Acts 9.2; 19.9, 23 etc.), The narrative opposition between Galilee and Jerusalem or between the land and the sea (especially Jesus' frequent lake crossings) has received particular attention, with historical, symbolic or purely mythological significance being perceived in these dichotomies. For some, for example, the 'lake' symbolizes the fringes of Jewish society and the dividing line between Jew and Gentile. Galilee is the centre of order, Jerusalem of chaos. Reference has already been made in this respect to the work of E.S. Malbon and B. van Iersel in bringing out, from a structuralist perspective, the deeper meaning of these polarities.

In this chapter, to sum up, we have examined the Gospel of Mark as a literary composition. Having introduced six of the newer literary 'criticisms' and their respective presuppositions and methods, their contributions to questions concerning the Gospel's genre and its overall structure and arrangement were then summarized. We then went on to demonstrate the ways that these approaches have highlighted the literary techniques and rhetorical devices employed by the evangelist. In the concluding section the Gospel was considered as a story, with characters, a plot and settings. Examination of the settings, as with the other literary aspects we have considered, has revealed the extent to which the study of Mark as 'literature' is closely intertwined with the study of Mark as 'theology'. It is to the third and final of these aspects of the Gospel that we shall now turn, namely, to Mark as a religious text.

SESSION 6

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MARK (2)

This session is designed to enable candidates to

- i) study the theology of Mark's Gospel.
- ii) explore Mark's understanding of Christian discipleship.
- iii) examine Mark's understanding of the new community of Jesus.

Before the session

1. Study the Introduction to the session and undertake supporting reading including Boxall ch7 and the additional material at the end of this session.
2. Using the Work Sheet provided, write a brief introduction to Mark's theology including
 - i) his presentation of the person and work of Jesus
 - ii) the 'messianic secret'
 - iii) why Jesus died
3. Re-read Mark 8.27-10.52

It may be helpful to bring a commentary to the session.

Book list for this session

- | | |
|------------|--|
| Hooker M | <i>The Gospel according to St Mark</i>
London: A&C Black (1991) |
| Telford WR | <i>Mark</i> , New Testament Guides
Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press (1995) |
| Telford WR | <i>The Theology of the Gospel of Mark</i>
Cambridge: CUP (1999) |

SESSION 6

The Gospel According to Mark (2)

INTRODUCTION

The Theology of Mark

It is difficult to know how much of the theology of the gospel is the unique contribution of the author and how much is inherited in the traditions that he has received. It is also impossible to isolate Mark's own understanding of the story from that which we read into the text. However Mark presents the story of Jesus in ways that raise questions about his understanding of the gospel message and the truths that he wants to convey.

The gospel is essentially 'Good News' about Jesus. However, this good news is hard to confront and harder to embrace because it presents a radical challenge that requires people to abandon their old way of life and, in order to do the will of God, to join a new community. It calls disciples to lose their life in order to gain it, and to follow Jesus to the cross ((8:34-38). This is a hard call that nobody in the story seems able to respond to, though the rewards of healing, restoration, forgiveness and abundant harvest litter the text.

As was noted in the last session, the whole gospel is focused on the figure of Jesus and, as we also noted above, Mark's understanding of his person and work is predominantly conveyed in the way that the story is told. Jesus nowhere preaches himself, but every part of Mark's story makes implicit claims on his behalf. Mark's readers are therefore confronted by the Kingdom of God in action and are called to make a decision for or against this Jesus.

The theme of discipleship runs through the gospel. In the first part the disciples are called, chosen and sent out, but in the second part, following Peter's confession of faith at Caesarea Philippi, the full meaning of discipleship is revealed. This happens both through the direct teaching of Jesus and in the way that the disciples continuously misunderstand this teaching and exhibit a complete lack of faith or understanding.

However, the disciples do at least have some inkling of the truth and have given up their previous lives to follow him. Those who oppose Jesus have no such understanding. A series of 'conflict stories' (2:1 – 3:6) identify the opposition of the Jewish authorities and this is followed by a rejection by Jesus' own family (3:20ff) and the rejection by the people of his own village (6:1-6). It is clear that a contrast is being drawn between those who are 'inside' the new Jesus community and those who are 'outside', although the line is not always easy to draw. Indeed, on occasion 'outsiders' show more faith in Jesus than the 'insiders' (7:24-30).

At the centre of Mark's narrative is the haunting question, 'Why did Jesus die?' The text provides

three answers. On one level of the story Jesus died because of the wickedness of his enemies and the treachery of Judas. However, on another level Jesus also died because it was God's will and because he was obedient to that will. In 10:45 Jesus describes his death as being a 'ransom for many', and in 14:24 as effecting a new 'covenant'. It is important not to read later ideas of 'atonement' into these words that are, in any case, difficult to interpret with any precision in their present context. What is clear from the gospel is that Jesus' death 'for many' now creates a new people of God who will inherit the Kingdom.

But Jesus' death cannot be separated from his resurrection, and Jesus himself cannot be separated from the new 'redeemed' community. He too will drink wine in the Kingdom of God and go before them into Galilee. However, Mark stresses that it is only because of Jesus' obedient acceptance of death that resurrection is possible. This resurrection both creates the new community and condemns the Jews. The gospel was written at a time when there was great tension between Christian and Jew. The rejection of Jesus' message had been followed by the rejection of the 'Good News' by the majority of the Jewish people.

In Mark's Gospel, Jesus' person is shrouded by secrecy. The first part of the gospel understands his authority as that of the concealed Son of God and the second part of the gospel recognises that his true significance is linked with the divine necessity of his redemptive suffering, death and resurrection. There is therefore a motif of concealment and revelation which is hinged around the incident in Caesarea Philippi when Peter proclaims Jesus as the Christ. Scholars have therefore talked about the 'messianic secret' and have attempted to explain it in a variety of ways. (See the additional reading at the end of this session for a view given by Hooker.)

In Mark it is in fact likely that the secret of Jesus' identity does not serve to shroud his person in mystery but rather to reveal him, in his true status, to the hearers and readers of the gospel. Jesus' instructions to various people not to speak openly about him suggest that the real significance of his identity is hidden from those in the story but is being clearly revealed to those hearers and readers who are committed to him. It is likely therefore that the 'secret' is a literary device to draw attention to the real significance of the story and to help explain the failure of the disciples to understand his journey to the cross and of the Jewish authorities to recognise him at all. This may echo a historic truth. Certainly the Markan Jesus made no messianic claims for himself and came to be known as the Messiah only through his suffering and death.

It is clear that early Christians understood Jesus as the fulfilment of the apocalyptic hopes of Israel and that they believed that Jesus was the messianic agent of the Kingdom. However, Telford argues that Mark represents an early stage in the transformation of this hope. Jesus, the 'proclaimer' of the coming eschatological Kingdom of God is in the process of being seen as the 'the proclaimed' in whose person and ministry the Kingdom was already present. With the coming of Jesus there has been a judgement on Israel, and on his return this judgement will be consummated. The 'little Apocalypse' of Mark 13 therefore urges the Christian community to take comfort from the fact that it was the divine plan for suffering and persecution to precede his second coming. The community is therefore living 'between the times', needing to respond with an ethical watchfulness.

However, Telford also makes the point that Mark uses the tradition to present Jesus as he was likely to be seen by Gentile converts, namely as the divine Son of God rather than as the Jewish Messiah, the Son of David. The secrecy motif helps to present the Jesus of the Jewish-Christian tradition as the more exalted, but secretly revealed Son of God whose suffering and death are part of God's pre-ordained plan for the redemption of the world. Mark therefore reflects a shift away from the earlier Jewish-Christian apocalyptic tradition which emphasised Jesus' role as eschatological prophet, royal Messiah and apocalyptic Son of Man, towards an understanding of Jesus that emphasises his suffering and death as the key to the salvation of the world. He puts it succinctly by arguing that the emphasis on eschatology is gradually giving way to an emphasis on christology and soteriology. This is the gospel that is increasingly to be proclaimed to the Gentile world.

For further reading on the theology of Mark's Gospel, see Hooker MD, *The Gospel According to St Mark*, (pages 19-26), Telford WR, *Mark*, (chapter 4) and Telford WR, *The Theology of the Gospel of Mark*, (chapters 2&4).

FOR THIS SESSION

This session is designed to enable candidates to:

- iv) study the theology of Mark's gospel
- v) explore Mark's understanding of Christian discipleship
- vi) examine Mark's understanding of the new community of Jesus.

ARRIVE AND WORSHIP

In pairs

Share any reflections on Session 5.

As a group

Worship together.

PROJECT

1. The Theology of Mark

Using the work that you have prepared for this session

Examine key elements of Mark's theology including

- i) his understanding of Jesus*
- ii) the 'messianic secret'*
- iii) why Jesus died*

2. The Way of the Cross: Christian Discipleship

Study Mark 8:27 – 10:52.

List the incidents and examine the sequence.

Identify any recurring themes

Divide the Group as appropriate

Using commentaries, address the question

What does each incident tell us about discipleship?

As a Group

Report findings

Address the question

What does this section as a whole tell us about Mark's understanding of what it means to follow Jesus?

3. The New Community

In the light of your work on discipleship and the following texts

- i) Mark 2: 13-17
- ii) Mark 3: 31-34
- iii) Mark 13: 9-13
- iv) Mark 14: 22-25

Address the questions:

- i) What kind of community is being formed?*
- ii) What might it mean to belong?*

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

Address the question

In what ways is Mark's portrayal of Christian discipleship and community 'Good News' for you, your church community and the world?

Summarise key areas of learning using the sheet provided.

PRAYER and PREPARATION

Offer the evening's work to God in prayer.

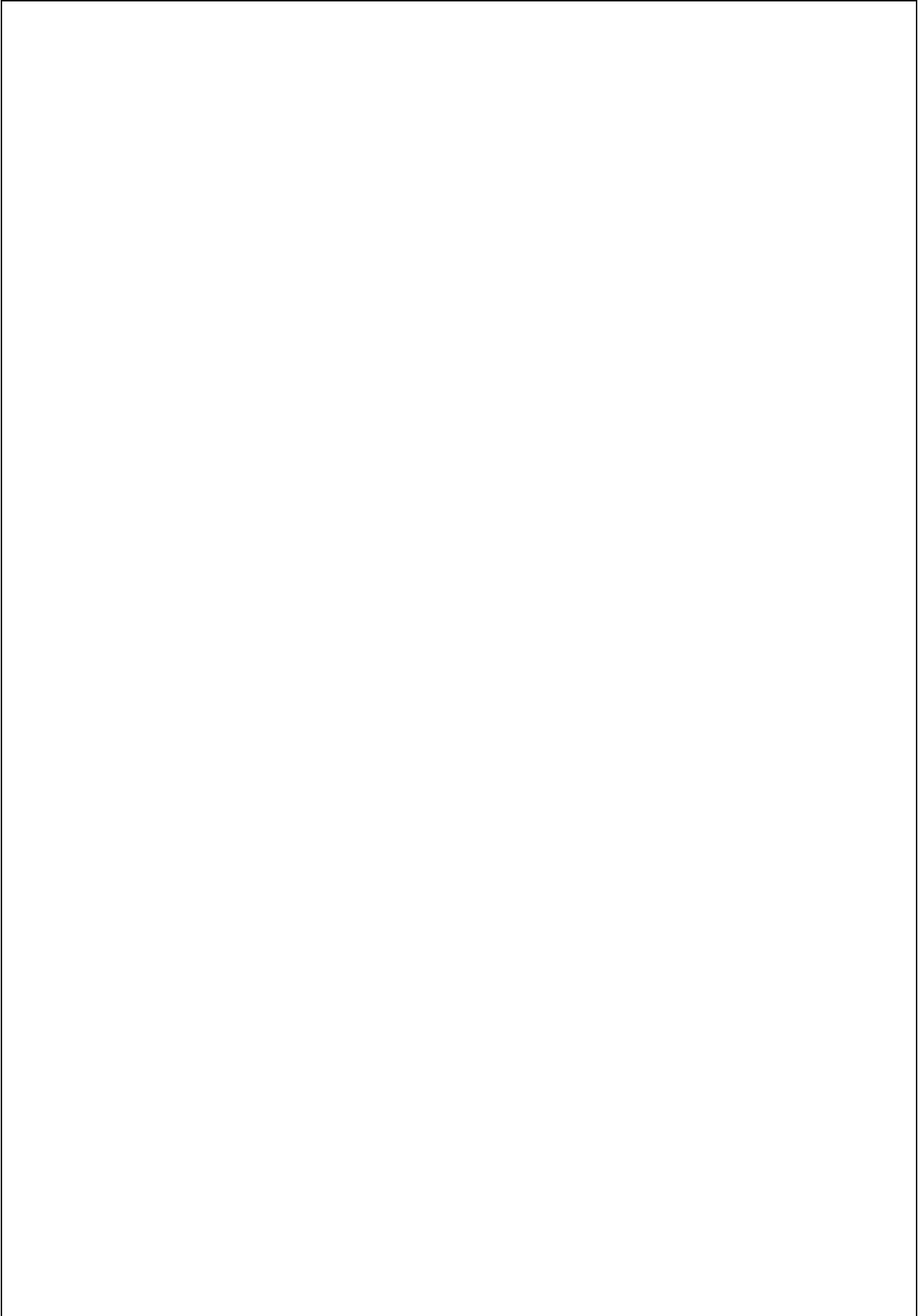
Plan your preparation for Session 7.

WORK SHEET

The Gospel According to Mark (2)

Write a brief introduction to Mark's theology including:

- i) his understanding of the person and work of Jesus*
- ii) the 'messianic secret'*
- iii) why Jesus died.*



GROUP LEARNING SUMMARY SHEET

Summarise what you have learned as a group in this session

Additional Reading: **Hooker *The Gospel According to Mark* p66-69**

Additional note: the messianic secret

The notion of secrecy occurs from time to time in various forms in the first half of Mark's gospel. Jesus silences the demons, who claim to know who he is (1.24f., 54; 5.1 1f.), and orders the disciples to remain silent when they learn that he is Messiah and Son of God (8.50; 9.9).

But it is not only the identity of Jesus which is to be kept secret, for we if also find him commanding those who are healed to say nothing about their cure (1.44; 5.45; 7.56; 8.26).

It was William Wrede who first attempted to explain the theme of secrecy (which he termed 'the messianic secret') in Mark's gospel by suggesting that it reflects a tension between the belief of the early Church in Jesus as Messiah and the unmessianic character of Jesus' ministry. Jesus' commands to secrecy, he argued, cannot be taken as historical but are a dogmatic device to explain why he was not acknowledged as Messiah during his ministry. The interpretation of Jesus' words and deeds as messianic belongs to the post—Easter faith of the community and has been imposed upon the tradition (W. Wrede, *Das Messiasgeheimnis in den Evangelien*, 1901; E.tr. *The Messianic Secret*, 1971).

In stark contrast to this interpretation, various commentators continued for many years to maintain that the messianic secret was basically historical (so, e.g., Taylor and Cranfield). The commands to secrecy were explained as the result of Jesus' wish to conceal his messiahship from men and women during his ministry for fear that it would have been misunderstood as a claim to political kingship; instead, it was argued, he chose to use the ambiguous term 'the Son of man', which could be given the content he desired.

Both these views raise problems. The view which takes the secret to be historical fails to explain why Jesus should have chosen to confuse his disciples by using an enigmatic title, leaving them bewildered about his own understanding of his messiahship. It also assumes that there are in fact 'unclean spirits' who possess supernatural knowledge, and leaves unsolved the problems of how the bystanders could ignore the confessions of Jesus' identity made by the men and women who were possessed by these spirits, and why Jesus should give such unrealistic commands — e.g. the command to keep silent about the fact that he has raised a child from the dead (5.45)! Wrede's solution is equally problematic: since Jesus was put to death as a messianic pretender, it seems that during his ministry questions about his messiahship were already being asked, even if no clear answer was yet being given. To describe the whole ministry of Jesus as 'unmessianic' is to ignore totally the plain evidence of the gospels in favour of a complex theory as to how that evidence came to be arranged. If there is any agreement among New Testament scholars today, it is in believing that Jesus acted with authority and believed himself to have been commissioned by God: it is difficult not to use the term 'messianic' to describe such authority. And were the Church — or the evangelist — to have imposed a messianic interpretation on to totally non-messianic material, one would hardly have expected the messianic secret to have emerged: rather, one would have expected much clearer statements of Jesus' messiahship.

But Wrede was surely right in pointing to Easter as the crucial turning—point. It is not until the resurrection that men and women are able to understand who Jesus is and what he signifies. It is not that the Church imposes a messianic interpretation on to a non-messianic life and death: rather, in the light of Easter faith the disciples see events from a new perspective. If we ask how Mark makes use of the secret, then it is important to notice that it junctions in precisely the opposite way to what one expects: it serves as a means of revelation to the hearers/readers of the gospel. When Jesus commands the unclean spirits to be silent about his identity it is too late, since they have already spoken (1.24f.; 5.11f.). Yet no one in the story hears them, and the truth they utter remains hidden — as it must, to all whose eyes and ears have not been opened: their words are intelligible only to those who already believe that Jesus is what they declare him to be — the Son of God. Jesus'

instructions that nothing should be said about the restoration of a child to life (5.45) or about the opening of a deaf man's ears (7.56) and a blind man's eyes (8.26) are equally implausible as historical commands: such things cannot be hidden and are spoken of all over Galilee. But Jesus' instructions that nothing should be said about what he has done suggest that the real significance of these miracles is hidden from the crowd and revealed only to those who are committed to him. It is perhaps no accident that the secret is associated here with miracles of resurrection and the restoration of hearing and sight, for Mark himself makes use of these themes as symbols of understanding and belief. It is only after the resurrection that the truth about Jesus will be made known (9.9); and, while many have ears to hear, they do not all listen or understand (4.1-12); as for the miracle of the restoration of sight in 8.22-6, this itself is used by Mark as a symbol for the dawning of the disciples' faith (8.27-55).

It is significant, too, that the secret is not universally imposed. It occurs in two contexts. First, there are the commands for secrecy which are given immediately after some declaration about who Jesus is has been made: 1.24f., 5.4; 5.11; 8.50 and 9.9; a remarkable example occurs in 10.48, where the crowd tries to silence Bartimaeus and refuses to hear what he proclaims. Second, there are the three miracles we have just noted, where restoration to life, and the restoration of hearing and sight, seem to be used in a symbolic way. The one example which does not fit into either category is 1.44, where the command to say nothing is subsidiary to the order to the healed leper to show himself to the priest. In contrast to these commands for secrecy we have frequent references to the fact that men and women talked freely about what Jesus was doing (1.28, 45; 2.12), that Jesus made no secret of his healing (5.19, 50), and that crowds flocked to him as a result (5.10; 6.54ff.). The exorcisms themselves are common knowledge (5.20-50). The secret is thus only one side of the story; just as important is Mark's insistence that everyone in Palestine knew about Jesus' teaching and healing and was marvelling at it.

It seems clear that the commands to secrecy are largely (though not necessarily entirely) artificial, and that they are a narrative device which has been used by Mark to draw his readers' attention to the real significance of his story. Secrecy and disclosure are part of a theme which pervades the whole of Mark's gospel. Throughout the narrative, Jesus acts with supreme authority yet makes no open claims for himself. Even when he challenges his disciples by asking them about his identity, he orders them to say nothing (8.27-50); when he makes a dramatic entrance into Jerusalem and into the temple (11.1-18), the significance of his actions is not understood and he refuses to explain the basis of his authority directly (11.27-55). Yet for those with eyes and ears to see and hear, the meaning is plain: they know why the Son of man must suffer (8.51), they understand why he rides into Jerusalem on the back of a colt (11.1-10), and they comprehend why he appeals to John the Baptist as the witness to his own authority (11.27-55). The truth about Jesus is displayed in his miracles - yet men's normal reaction is fear and uncomprehending amazement (2.12; 5.15, 55, 42; 7.57). Even the disciples are bewildered (4.41; 8.14-21). He teaches the word to those who have ears to hear (4.1-9); yet the disciples are mystified and have to ask for an explanation (4.10-12). From time to time the truth about Jesus is openly proclaimed - at the baptism (1.10f.); by unclean spirits (1.24; 5.11; 5.7); at the transfiguration (9.2-8). But no one hears the voice or sees the Spirit descend at the baptism; the unclean spirits are silenced whenever they cry out; and the disciples are told to say nothing about the transfiguration until after the resurrection. The truth about Jesus is at once hidden from view and yet spelt out on every page of the gospel.

Mark has perhaps used this technique to explain not merely the failure of Jesus' disciples to grasp the whole truth about him before his death and resurrection, but also the failure of the religious authorities to recognize him at all. The rejection of Jesus by his own people raised real problems for the early Christian community: how was it that Israel rejected her Messiah? The answer was sought in the plan and purpose of God. If Jesus' death was foreordained, so too was his rejection by the nation's leaders, and the only explanation must be that the truth was deliberately concealed from them — and that meant that it was concealed by Jesus himself.

It remains an open question whether Mark has created the messianic secret ex nihilo, or made use of a theme which he found in the tradition. Our answer to this question depends on the degree of

creativity which we attribute to Mark himself. On the assumption that he is in fact making use of earlier traditions, we may ask whether any of this has its origins in Jesus' own ministry. If we believe that Jesus' actions were characterized by an authority which may fairly be termed 'messianic', then it is possible that the so-called secret reflects not simply the tension between Jesus as he was perceived in his lifetime and as he was confessed after the resurrection, but the reluctance of Jesus to make claims about himself: for his message was centred on God and on his Kingdom, not on himself, and, if he believed himself to be in any sense the Messiah, the last thing he would do was to claim the title for himself. Artificial though the secret may be, there is a sense in which it corresponds to the truth about the way in which Jesus came to be acknowledged as Messiah only through suffering and death.

SESSION 7

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO JOHN (1)

This session is designed to enable candidates to

- iv) study the text of John's Gospel and investigate its context, purpose and key themes.
- v) explore John's Gospel as story and investigate characters, plot and setting.
- vi) examine John's 'Christology' and explore how this may contribute to our current understanding of the person and work of Jesus.

For this session

1. Read the Gospel through out loud or listen online at <http://www.biblegateway.com/resources/audio/>
2. Study the Introduction to the session and undertake supporting reading including Boxall ch 6
3. Using the Work Sheet provided, write a short introduction to John's Gospel identifying
 - i) date and authorship
 - ii) context and purpose
 - iii) key themes
4. Complete Section 1 of the 'Tutor Review Sheet'. Give it to your tutor and ask that s/he completes Section 2 and returns it to you at the end of Session 8

Book list for this session

Achtemeier PJ	<i>Introducing the New Testament: its literature and theology</i>
Green JB & Thompson MM	Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans (2001)
Brown RE	<i>An Introduction to the New Testament</i> New York: Doubleday (1997)
Lindars B	<i>John</i> New Testament Guides Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press (1990)
Stibbe MW	<i>John's Gospel</i> London: Routledge (1994)

SESSION 7

The Gospel According to John (1)

INTRODUCTION

Date and Authorship

Traditionally the author has been associated with the Apostle John who could be regarded as an eyewitness to what is recorded in the gospel. Assuming that the apostle is also to be regarded as the 'elder' of the Johannine Epistles, the most widely held popular view was of the evangelist, as a very old man, writing down his reminiscences of the life of Jesus and writing words of encouragement to his churches. However, this view is not widely held by scholars today.

In fact the gospel writer himself suggests (John 21:24) that the author is the 'Beloved Disciple'. The identity of the beloved disciple is never revealed in the gospel itself but he has been traditionally identified as the apostle John. Irenaeus, writing around 180CE, certainly identifies him as such, although care needs to be taken with this evidence because he was writing at a time when the very survival of the gospel would have depended on the authority given it by apostolic authorship. Further, almost all scholars assume that the gospel originally ended at John 20:31 and that chapter 21 is a later addition. There is therefore no clear evidence that the beloved disciple in fact wrote the gospel, or that he ever really existed, although some scholars believe that he may have provided a link between Jesus and the formation of the gospel. However, it is equally likely that this character was a literary device to give expression to the author's own views on discipleship. In the gospel he represents true discipleship and acts as a foil to Peter. He is the model for every reader and the one with whom readers are asked to identify.

Ultimately it is not possible to know who the author was and what his relationship to the 'Beloved Disciple' may have been. John is traditionally dated in the nineties and a late date is suggested by the way in which the gospel reflects the strained relationship between church and synagogue characteristic of this time. In the 1980's John Robinson made a brave attempt to claim an earlier date of composition but scholars have not accepted his arguments as being decisive.

To Whom was it Written?

Tradition connects John with Ephesus, but this may be due in part to the association with the John of the gospel and epistles with the John who wrote the book of Revelation, whose connection with Ephesus is certain. Although this association cannot be affirmed it remains possible. Another serious suggestion connects John with Syria.

John's Gospel has been written by a Christian for Christians in the light of the Christian tradition. However, it is clear from a cursory reading of John that it is very different from the Synoptic Gospels in its presentation of the person and work of Jesus. The prologue, in particular, suggests influences that come from outside the world of classical Judaism. Scholars in previous generations have therefore sought to identify the sources of this thinking and have investigated the relationship between John's presentation of Jesus as the divine 'word' (Greek 'logos') and the Hellenistic thought of his day. Others have examined the relationship between John's Gospel and the development of the second century Christian heresy called Gnosticism.

More recently scholars have recognised that attempts to combine elements of Greek thought with the Hebrew scriptures had been undertaken within orthodox Judaism before the growth of Christianity and that John's presentation of Christ may well have been influenced by this kind of Hellenistic-Jewish thinking. John's Gospel is rooted in the Old Testament and draws on the Wisdom Tradition, already subject to Greek interpretation, to present Jesus as the divine 'word' and God's agent in creation.

It is clear from the gospel that the community for whom John was writing was concerned with some key issues between Christians and Jews and it is therefore possible that John is writing for a church in dialogue with a Hellenistic-Jewish community. There is clearly little love lost between the groups. The Jews are Jesus' enemies and are treated very harshly in the gospel. Indeed, some have suggested that the sharpness of the debate with the Jews and the clear distinction between the community and the world in the gospel might point to John's community as a beleaguered sect, alienated from local society, intensely loyal to each other, but hostile to those outside. In the chapters that deal with issues of discipleship (13-17) there is real anxiety about the future position of the disciples.

The discourses in John clearly reflect a debate with the synagogue about the person of Jesus. In the Jewish wisdom tradition the law is personalized and spiritualized as the mediator between God and man. In the prologue and in the discourses Jesus fulfills that role. It is therefore a real possibility that the discourses, built on key sayings from the Jesus tradition, are intended to be a tool in this ongoing debate with the synagogue

Key Themes

5. A key theme of the gospel is salvation and this is defined in John as having 'life in its fullness' (10:10) or eternal life (3:16). It is the reason for God's action in Christ. There is little interest in the 'Kingdom of God' which is mentioned in only one place when quoting from the tradition. John rather stresses that salvation is the possession of eternal life, both now and in the future.
6. Jesus brings a new intimate relationship between God, himself and the believer. In John the disciple is asked to believe in (literally believe *into*) Jesus in order to have eternal life and this brings about the new set of intimate relationships.
7. In John, Jesus is the pre-existent 'word' who is 'made flesh'. The primary subject of revelation is God's glory in Jesus and the crucifixion is no longer a shameful humiliation, but a royal progress which allows the divinity of Christ to shine through. It is an exaltation, the ultimate demonstration of his moral union with the Father.
8. Judgement is not, as in the synoptics, a 'day of the Lord' in the future, but the result of the

personal reaction of each person who is confronted by Jesus. The gospel therefore constantly challenges the reader to belief or unbelief.

9. It is a gospel of sharp contrasts between light and darkness, life and death, truth and falsehood, heaven above and earth below, faith and unbelief, seeking and finding.

Purpose

A key purpose of the gospel is reflected in 20:31, 'so that you may come to believe'. The reader is invited, as were Jesus' disciples, to 'come and see'. It is possible that John was written to present the truth of Jesus to a Jewish-Hellenist community and did so by presenting him as the pre-existent Son of God who is superior to the Jewish patriarchs and to the law.

Structure

The whole book may be considered as a unity. Brown *'An Introduction to the New Testament'* suggests a basic division between (i) the Book of Signs ((1:19-12:50) and (ii) the Book of Glory (13:1-20:31) while Kieffer *'The Oxford Bible Commentary'* prefers a geographical structure. Most scholars question the originality of Chapter 21 and the account of the woman caught in adultery (7:53-8:11) was probably not included until the third century.

The Interpretation of John

John's relationship to the Synoptic Gospels has been a matter of long debate. Some scholars have seen a direct textual relationship with Mark or to one or other of the Lukan sources. However, it is likely that John had access to the oral tradition of the church, much of which was common to the synoptics. Therefore some stories are similar in both John and the synoptics, some are based on stories of the same type and there are sayings that are probably different translations of the same original. It is clear however that a feature of John's compositional technique is to draw different elements from the tradition together to make composite pictures for his gospel.

Bultmann attempted to show that John had used three sources to write his gospel, a signs source, a discourse source and a passion narrative source. However, attempts to maintain this position have proved problematic. Indeed, some scholars feel it likely that the great discourses in John are based on the evangelist's own homilies delivered in his church. In each case the 'text' is a saying or story about Jesus from the tradition.

Because of the abrupt changes and contradictions present in the text scholars have put forward various theories about the construction and redaction of the gospel. Brown has postulated a later editor who inserted further material in the early second century, but the consistency in style suggests that the same author may have been responsible for creating a second edition of the gospel at a later point.

Many scholars now favour a literary approach to the text. Scholars have explored John as Hellenistic Biography and recognised that he employs the archetypal modes of storytelling in general; comedy romance, satire/irony and tragedy.

John's Story

Taking John seriously as a story demands attention to characters, plot and setting. (Stibbe's book, *John's Gospel* is a very good introduction to this way of reading the gospel) The main character is Jesus, and he is an elusive hero whose abstruseness is evidenced in his speech and his actions. Other key characters include the disciples, the Jews, the crowd and a number of key minor characters who make cameo appearances. As with Mark's Gospel, characters may be 'round', ie complex and unpredictable; 'flat' ie predictable with a few consistent traits; or 'stock' ie with one consistent trait. They may be 'reliable' evoking sympathy and confidence, or 'unreliable' evoking antipathy and mistrust.

John, as Mark, presents a single, unified story with a consistent plot which leads to a recognizable climax. Indeed conscious plotting of the narrative is more obvious in John. There are two plots. The first is the main plot which is Jesus' positive quest to do the work of the Father. But there is also another plot. This is the negative quest of the Jews to destroy Jesus.

John's settings are many and varied. These may be integral to the stories themselves or may have a more symbolic role in the story.

Character, plot and setting therefore help create the story that John tells.

For further information on John's Gospel see Brown RE *'An Introduction to the New Testament'* (Chapter 11), Lindars B, *John*, 'New Testament Guides' Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press (1990), Stibbe MW, *John's Gospel*, London: Routledge (1994), Achtemeier, Green and Thomson, *'Introducing the New Testament'* (Chapter 7).

FOR THIS SESSION

This session is designed to enable candidates to:

- iv) study the text of John's Gospel and investigate its context, purpose and key themes
- v) explore John's Gospel as story and investigate characters, plot and setting
- vi) examine John's 'Christology' and explore how this may contribute to our current understanding of the person and work of Jesus.

ARRIVE AND WORSHIP

In pairs

Share any reflections on Session 6.

As a group

Worship together.

PROJECT

As a group

2. The text

Using the work that you have prepared for this session

Examine

- i) the date and authorship of John
- ii) the context and purpose of the gospel
- iii) key themes in the gospel

2. John as Story

Using your experience of reading John out loud

Undertake the following

- i) *Examine the characters in the story – ie Jesus, the disciples, the Jews, other characters as you choose. Identify whether they are round, flat, stock, reliable or unreliable*
- ii) *Explore the plot and sub-plots and examine the way in which they relate to each other as the story unfolds.*
- iii) *Examine different settings in the Gospel. Identify ways in which the settings can be significant for the way that the story is told and interpreted.*

3. The Person of Jesus

Divide into two groups

Examine John's portrayal of Jesus in the gospel. How does he make clear, through the story, his understanding of the person of Jesus?

First Group: John 4:1-42

Second Group: John 11:1-38

Share your findings.

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

Address the question

How does an understanding of Mark's Gospel as a story help or hinder your understanding of the person and work of Jesus?

Summarise key areas of learning using the sheet provided.

PRAYER and PREPARATION

Offer the evening's work to God in prayer.

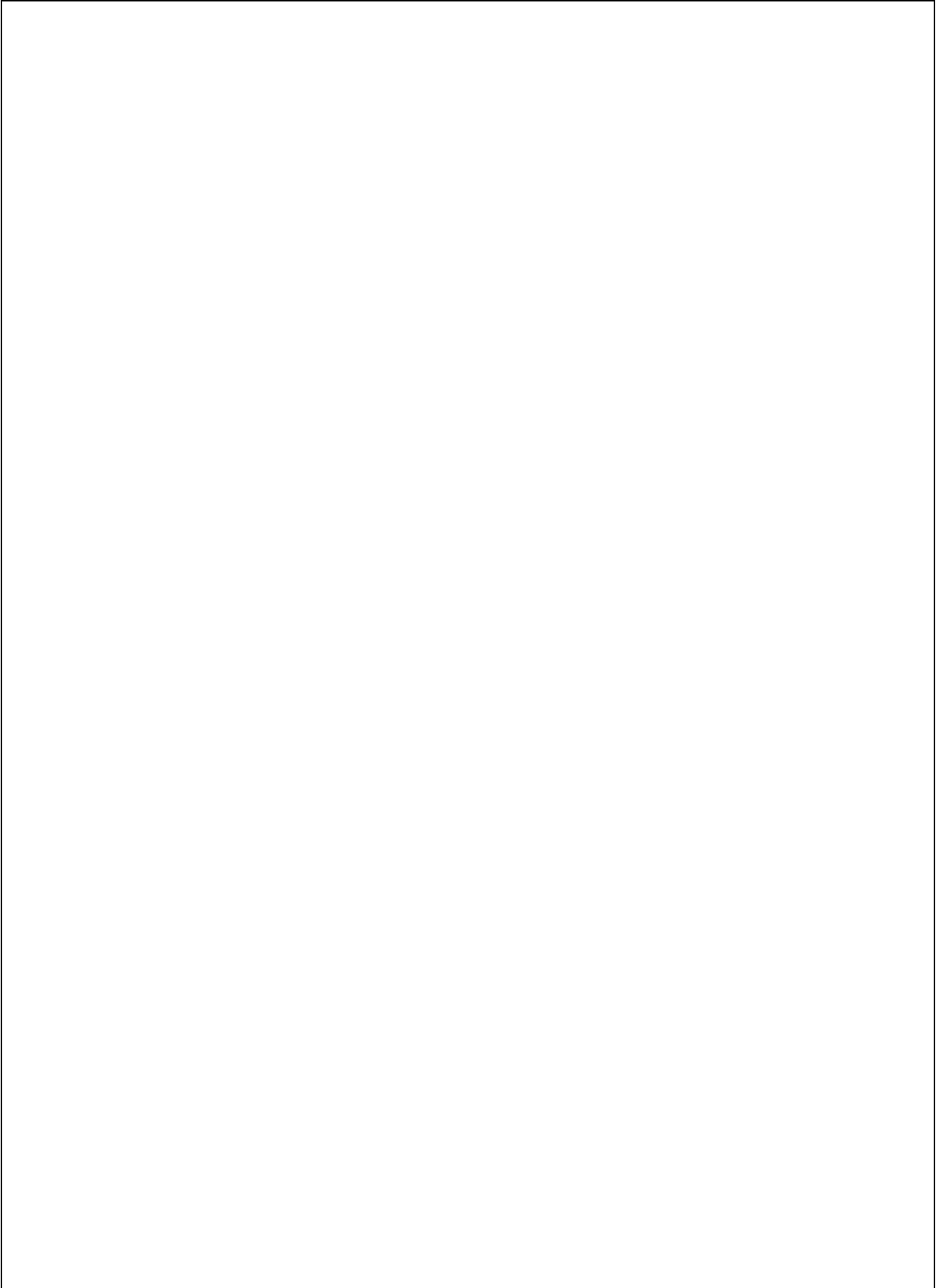
Plan your preparation for Session 8.

WORK SHEET

The Gospel According to John (1)

Write a short introduction to John's Gospel identifying:

- i) date and authorship*
- ii) context and purpose*
- iii) key themes*



GROUP LEARNING SUMMARY SHEET

Summarise what you have learned as a group in this session

SESSION 8

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO JOHN (2)

This session is designed to enable candidates to

- i) study the theology of John's Gospel.
- ii) explore John's portrayal of the person and work of Jesus and the nature of discipleship and church community through an examination of
 - a) the 'Bread of Life' discourse
 - b) a section of the 'Farewell Discourses'.

For this session

1. Study the Introduction to the session and undertake supporting reading
2. Using the Work Sheet provided, write a brief introduction to John's theology including
 - i) his portrayal of Jesus
 - ii) believing in Jesus
 - iii) Jesus' death and glorification
 - iv) discipleship and community
3. Read the passages for study in Session 8 out loud i.e. John 6: 1-71 & John 15:1 - 17:26.
4. Complete the Group Review Sheet.

Book list for this session

- | | |
|---------------|---|
| Lindars B | <i>John</i> , New Testament Guides
Sheffield; Sheffield Academic Press (1990) |
| Moody Smith D | <i>The Theology of the Gospel of John</i>
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1995) |

SESSION 8

The Gospel According to John (2)

INTRODUCTION

The Theology of John's Gospel

The fundamental question of the fourth gospel is the question of God - who is God and how does he reveal himself? In addressing this question John presupposes the Jewish and Christian traditions. Although drawing on theological ideas and religious vocabulary that is widespread in the Hellenistic world, John is clearly steeped in the Jewish scriptures and traditions and draws his understanding of the person and work of Jesus primarily from these sources. The scriptures point to Jesus as God's revelation to his people. The authenticity of the Christian revelation therefore depends on a correct interpretation of the Jewish scriptures. However, it is equally true for John that the correct interpretation of the Jewish scriptures depends upon faith in Jesus.

It is clear from reading John's narrative that his gospel reflects at least two perspectives - the historical Jesus and the Johannine community, both in conflict with their Jewish adversaries. Johannine theology therefore presupposes a church, which stands over and against the Jewish synagogue and is part of an ongoing controversy with the Jews.

However, the church community also stands over and against the world in John's Gospel. The world can be a positive place in as much as it is part of God's creation, or a negative place in which Jesus and his followers are rejected and persecuted. It presently stands in a state of alienation and condemnation - a place of darkness (5:19ff), sin (8:21), slavery (8:34) and falsehood (8:44). Indeed, not only is the human condition hopeless without God, this would not have been fully realized without the coming of Jesus (15:24). The Jews after all assume that all is well.

Christology

Only John puts the issues of christology on the lips of Jesus. Jesus constantly talks about himself and uses a series of titles and images to illustrate his work of salvation. Jesus is the Messiah, and the translation of the Hebrew term, '*messias*' is actually used in John (1:41, 4:35) rather than the commonly used Greek term '*christos*' (Christ). Unlike Matthew, John does not try to establish Jesus' messiahship through the use of proof texts and exegesis. It is rather established in the context of the story, where it is the only explanation to those who have faith. Messiahship is therefore a constant issue in the gospel where Jesus is explicitly presented as the King of Israel. Nathanael recognizes Jesus as such at the beginning of the gospel (John 1:49). Jesus withdraws from the crowd after the feeding of the 5,000 because they want to seize him to make him king (6:15). He enters Jerusalem as a kingly figure (12:13) and this sets the scene for a major exploration of this theme through the passion narrative, focused in the encounter with Pilate (18:28 - 19:16). Jesus ultimately dies as the rightful King of Israel, rejected by the Jews. John's use of terminology is fascinating. In John 'the Jews' cannot be simply equated with 'Israel'. The term Israel is used very positively. Nicodemus is a teacher of Israel and this is a good thing. In contrast, the term 'The

Jews' always has negative connotations.

The issue of Jesus' origin is confronted by John. In the prologue Jesus is identified as the divine 'logos' (word). Interestingly he is called 'logos' before being named as Jesus and he is called 'rabbi' before being proclaimed as Messiah. This has led some scholars to claim that these two titles, 'logos' and 'rabbi', frame John's christology. As 'logos' Jesus is anchored in God and as 'rabbi' he is a man among human beings. Once human, he is no longer referred to as 'logos', and once recognised as Messiah he is no longer called 'rabbi' on any regular basis. Jesus is clearly a human being in John's Gospel but by associating Jesus, not only with the purpose and mission of God, but with God himself (1:1,18, 20:29) he goes beyond other New Testament writers.

Believing in Jesus

According to 20: 31, the gospel was written that those who read it may 'come to believe' and this is a key theme of the narrative. In the gospel believing is both a matter of human choice and divine gift (1:12-13). It is a gift because, in order to be part of that life, the individual must be born from above (3:3). But belief is also a matter of choice and after each of Jesus' signs, some come to believe and some do not. To believe in Jesus is to know him and to know God (14:7) and this knowledge is personal and intimate.

The first part of the gospel has been called 'the Book of Signs'. Each Sign is typically followed by a dialogue between Jesus and his opponents concerning his status and role. This is then followed by a monologue, which ultimately challenges those present to believe. The very designation of these mighty works of Jesus as 'signs' suggests that John intends to use these incidents to signify who Jesus is and to evoke belief. Christology is thereby anchored in the life and ministry of the earthly Jesus although they are presented from a post-resurrection perspective. Jesus' signs are drawn from the experience of Jesus' earthly life but the words are the words of the risen and exalted Christ. The Signs thereby play a positive role in calling attention to Jesus' origin, power and purpose. Outside the 'Farewell Discourses' (John 13-17) Jesus' disciples are at best bystanders in his earthly, public ministry. However, the words in the 'Book of Signs', although addressed to Jesus' opponents, are also directed at Jesus' followers. The 'I am' sayings, peculiar to John, are part of the overall process whereby Jesus' identity is signified and belief is evoked. They present Jesus as the fulfillment of human longing and need. Drawing upon Old Testament images of God and Israel, they focus Jesus' saving work and hint at his divinity.

Death and Glorification

Jesus' death is critical for John's theology. John recounts images of Jesus sacrificial and vicarious death that come down to him from the Christian tradition. Jesus is therefore identified by John the Baptist as 'the lamb of God' (1:36), dies when the Passover lambs are being slaughtered and gives his flesh for the life of the world (6:51). He is also the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep (10:15). However, John attempts to reinterpret the death of Jesus as a revelation of God. For John, Jesus' death is his glorification. On the cross he is lifted up and God's glory is revealed. It is the crucial moment of God's revelation and judgement in and through him. The resurrection adds nothing to John's theology but is of course crucial. None of Jesus' works would be revelation without his resurrection from the dead.

Discipleship and Community

The 'Farewell Discourses' of chapters 13-17 focus on the disciples and on the community that will come after them. The 'church' and the 'Holy Spirit', present throughout the gospel, now come to the fore. The church has been part of the indispensable background to John's narrative but the gospel has concentrated on christology rather than ecclesiology and it is not always possible to reconstruct John's community from his account. It is possible that John's Gospel reflects a community that had no hierarchy or formal structure, and that it had no sacraments. However, it is

equally possible that both are presumed in the narratives. It is not clear what the church community was like, but it is clearer what John thought it ought to be like.

The community should be grounded on faith in Jesus and is called to obey Jesus' commands and to love one another (13:13ff). Believing obedience is therefore the essence of discipleship and of being church. The advent of the Spirit is a key factor in the formation of the church because a full knowledge and understanding of Jesus and his saving work is not complete until the Spirit comes. Jesus is clear that the role of the Spirit is to be a permanent counsellor, recalling Jesus' teaching and leading the community into truth. It is only with the Spirit's presence that the disciples can truly become one with Christ. The sending of the Son into the world is therefore paralleled by the sending of the Spirit to the church.

In chapter 17 Jesus prays for unity and the object of that unity is mission - that the world may know and believe. This unity is grounded in love, but love in John is focused in and for the community. This is because the community's loving unity is an essential part of God's revelation in Jesus. John does not employ the apocalyptic language of the Synoptic Gospels about the end of the world and the return of Christ. Instead he uses the notion of 'eternal life' to argue that life with God is present and permanent and is safe, even though the community is in danger and will experience earthly suffering and death.

For John, this relationship with Jesus that leads to 'life' is a direct gift to each individual. The image of the vine (15: 1-11) shows how each person is related to Jesus but is less clear on how individuals relate to each other. Taken together with Spirit's role to interpret the words of Jesus and lead the community into truth, it is in fact possible that John's community was not highly structured and had resisted a move towards a more authoritative leadership. It is however likely that John 3: 1-21 (the story of Nicodemus) and John 6: 53-56 (the Bread of Life discourse) presuppose that the community practiced baptism and shared Eucharist.

The church is the community of Jesus' friends and the beloved disciple is a model of that friendship and shows how it might be for all of us. With faith in Jesus we could all become beloved disciples, close to Jesus. Perhaps that is why he is unnamed. As the community of those that the Father has called together by sending his Son into the world, the church, for John, is God's human dwelling place, sent out into the world to witness to those who are in darkness and unbelief.

For further information on the theology of John's Gospel see Lindars B, *John*, 'New Testament Guides' Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press (chapter 4) and particularly Moody Smith D, *The Theology of the Gospel of John*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (Chapter 3).

FOR THIS SESSION

This session is designed to enable candidates to:

- vii) study the theology of John's gospel
- viii) explore John's understanding of the person and work of Jesus and the nature of discipleship and church community through an examination of
 - a) the 'Bread of Life' discourse
 - b) a section of the 'Farewell Discourses'.

ARRIVE AND WORSHIP

In pairs

Share any reflections on Session 7.

As a group

Worship together.

PROJECT

i) The Theology of John

Using the work that you have prepared for this session

Examine key elements of John's theology including

- i) his understanding of Jesus*
- ii) believing in Jesus*
- iii) Jesus' death and glorification*
- iv) discipleship and community*

ii) Study John 6: 1-71 – The Bread of Life

Examine how the passage is structured.

Note how John uses

- a) The story from the Christian Tradition of the Feeding of the 5,000*
 - b) Jewish scripture*
- in the construction of his narrative

Address the following questions:

- i) What does this passage reveal about Jesus?*
- ii) What kind of Christian community is assumed by John in this passage?*
- iii) How might this passage evoke belief?*

3. Study John 15:1 - 17:26 - The Believing Community

Undertake the following tasks

- i) *Examine how the passage is structured and identify the different elements*
- ii) *List the characteristics of the church community proclaimed by Jesus in John*
- iii) *Identify the nature of the relationship between*
 - a) *Father and Son*
 - b) *Son, Spirit and church*
 - c) *Church and world*

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

Address the question

In what ways is John's portrayal of Christian discipleship and community 'Good News' for you, your church community and the world?

Summarise key areas of learning using the sheet provided.

PRAYER and REVIEW

Offer the term's work to God in prayer.

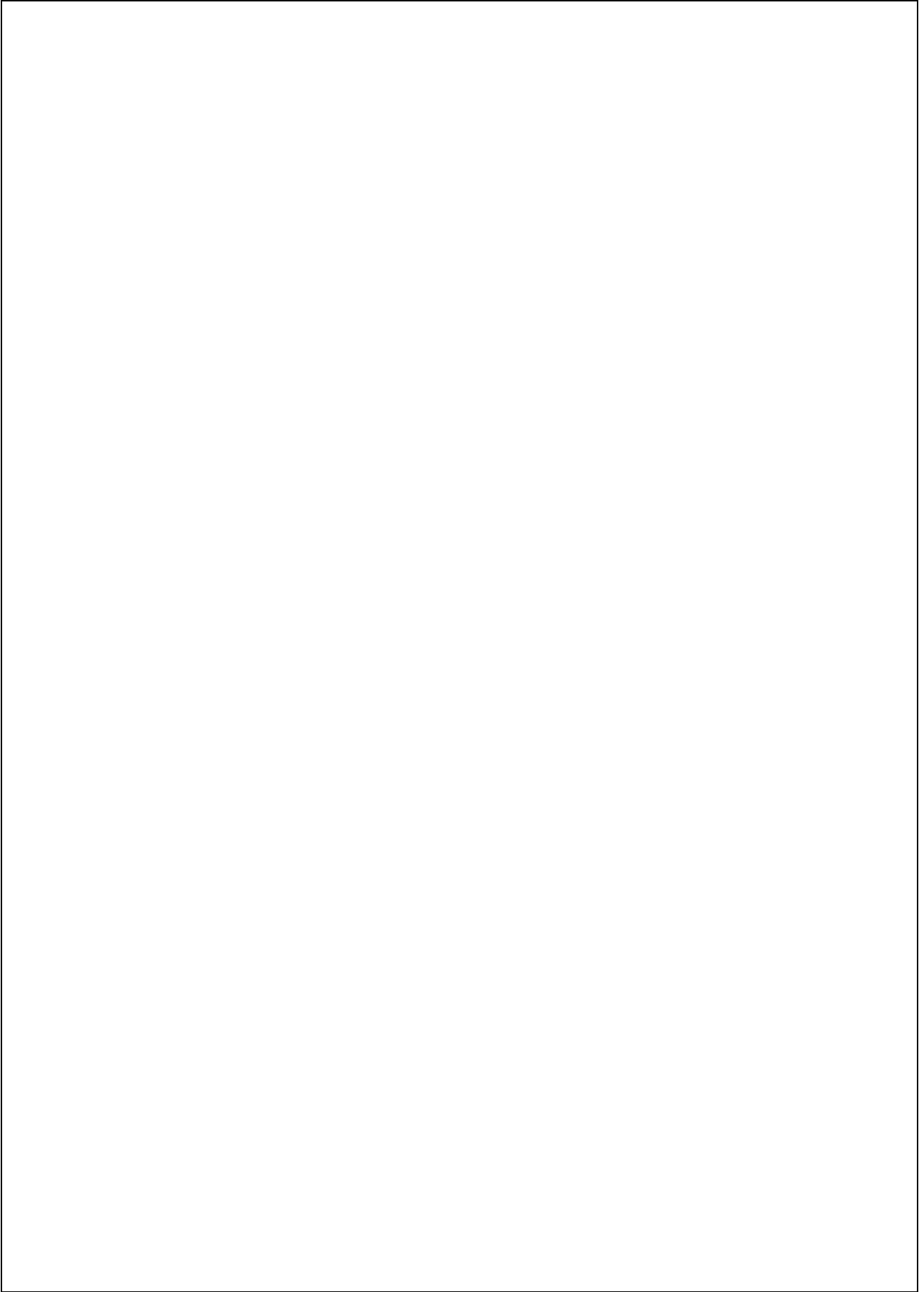
Collect the information from the 'Group Review' sheets. Discuss the implications and plan appropriate action for next term.

WORK SHEET

The Gospel According to John (2)

Write a brief introduction to John's theology including:

- i) his understanding of Jesus*
- ii) believing in Jesus*
- iii) Jesus' death and glorification*
- iv) discipleship and community.*



GROUP LEARNING SUMMARY SHEET

Summarise what you have learned as a group in this session

REVIEW SHEETS

Tutor Review
Group Review

TUTOR REVIEW SHEET

[Please write in the boxes provided]

Section 1 *[To be completed by the candidate]*

Name of Candidate

Type of Ministry

Benefice

...

Section 2 *[To be completed by the Tutor and returned during Session 8]*

What changes have you observed in the candidate's

(i) knowledge and understanding of this term's subject

(ii) beliefs and attitudes

(iii) skills in working with the subject

How effective has the candidate been in

(i) enabling the learning of other group members ?

(ii) learning from other group members

What has been the candidate's main contribution to the life of the group ?

GROUP REVIEW SHEET

[To be completed by all group members and brought to Session 8]

How would you describe the general atmosphere/feeling in the group ?

*How far do you think the group has achieved the overall aims for the term ?
(See inside cover)*

How helpful have you found the way that the group has worked this term ?

How well have you been able to prepare for each session ?

How well did you work together as Tutor - Group member ?

What changes (if any) might improve the group's ability to work together ?

ASSIGNMENT

**INTRODUCTION TO THE
NEW TESTAMENT**

INDIVIDUAL ASSIGNMENT WRITTEN PROJECTS

ASSIGNMENT 1

In 1,500 words address the question:

*What is a) Mark's **or** John's understanding of the person and work of Jesus and how is this 'good news' for today?*

Candidates should show knowledge and understanding of:

- i) the context, purpose and key themes of the gospel
- ii) the questions, issues or challenges that the gospel raises for today.

ASSIGNMENT 2 – Please choose the 1,500 word assignment relevant to your training pathway.

All assignments focus on 1 Corinthians 10:23-11:1

Candidates should again show knowledge and understanding of:

- i) the context, purpose and key themes of the gospel
- ii) the questions, issues or challenges that the gospel raises for today.

Exploring Priesthood or Reader Ministry:

Write a 1000 word sermon on the text and a 500 reflection on the process used in writing the sermon.

Exploring Pastoral Ministry:

Reflect on a pastoral situation you have encountered in the light of this passage.

Exploring Evangelist Ministry:

What in this text might make Christianity attractive to contemporary society and what might be unattractive?

Exploring Youth and Children's Ministry:

You have been asked to lead a session for children or young people on this text – what would you do to help them engage with the meaning of the text?

Exploring Education for Discipleship:

Reflect on the implications of this passage for Christian life.

Exploring ministry as a Deacon: You may choose to address any one of the the questions set for Priesthood, Pastor or Evangelist.

ASSESSMENT

The assignment will be marked by a Diocesan assessor and moderator. The assessor will seek to establish the extent to which each candidate has successfully accomplished the task set out above.

The following criteria will be observed:

That the work contains evidence of:

- accurate and critical reading of the biblical text and a range of related literature
- clarity of thinking
- good organisation and imagination
- ability to work to the specified task throughout
- use of the appropriate academic method of making references

That the work displays:

- Good planning and organisation
- Clear presentation in terms of written style, spelling, grammar and layout appropriate to its purpose.

INDIVIDUAL ASSIGNMENT EXEGESIS

ASSIGNMENT

Produce an exegesis (of 750 words each) of any **two** of the following passages

- i) Gal 1: 13-17
- ii) Mark 2:1-12
- iii) John 4:7-15

ASSESSMENT

The assignment will be marked by a Diocesan assessor and moderator. The assessor will seek to establish the extent to which each candidate has successfully accomplished the task set out above.

The following criteria will be observed:

That the exegesis contains evidence of:

- Clear communication of ideas and concepts
- An ability to work with texts in a critical way
- An ability to present a systematic interpretation of the texts and their meaning

That the work displays:

- Good planning and organisation
- Clear presentation in terms of written style, spelling, grammar and layout appropriate to its purpose

