

Week Three

YEAR ONE

Read

Collins, Preface; Introduction; Chapter 1, "The Near Eastern Context" and Chapter 2, "The Nature of the Pentateuchal Narrative," pages 1-35

Focus

Identify and become familiar with pronunciation of: Essenes; Zealots; Mishnah; Talmud; Hellenism; apocalyptic thought; Septuagint; types of criticism; Dead Sea Scrolls

"Critical" does not mean debunking scripture, and it does not mean proving its truth. Religious people should and will find truth in their scriptures, but they may also be interested to learn something about where their scripture came from, who wrote it, and how editors collected it for them to read. For that only a historical-critical inquiry will do the job.

<http://www.wfu.edu/~horton/r102/hc-method.html>

Become familiar with terms and names such as anthropomorphic, Torah, Pentateuch, Julius Wellhausen, Hermann Gunkel, Rolf Rendtorff, Gerhard von Rad, Erhard Blum; sources in the Hebrew scripture, e.g. documentary hypothesis, J, E, P, and D sources.

YEAR TWO

Read

Powell, Preface, Chapter 1, "The New Testament World," and Chapter 2, "The New Testament Writings," pages 9-62

Terms to note: testament; apostolic; catholic; seven categories of New Testament writings; Justin Martyr's account of Christian worship; canon; stages in the transmission of the Gospel Tradition; Marcion; exegesis; hermeneutics

In the chapter section "Exegesis and Hermeneutics" Powell states, "All the exegetical methods and academic disciplines described above are used by people who operate with different hermeneutical assumptions and interests. The methods themselves are simply tools that are employed for very different purposes by people with different attitudes and goals." [60] When reading the New Testament or reading how someone else interprets a passage, it is best (if not essential) to know the purpose in reading the text or the commentary.

YEAR THREE

Read

MacCulloch, Acknowledgements, Introduction, Chapter 1, "Greece and Rome," pages xxiii-46

Focus

Perspectives and concepts to notice: Christians of the Middle East; Latin-speaking Church; Orthodoxy; repentance and conversion; Bible as central text of Christianity; "Books are the storehouses for human ideas"; historical truth; conventions used throughout book

Until recently, our church historians have primarily traced Christian history as the movement from Jerusalem, through the Roman Empire, and on to Europe steadily moving westward to the New World. Such a focus of history is no longer practical.

MacCulloch's book has been chosen for Year Three study precisely because of his taking a more global approach. He presents Christian history by following three paths: the movement west of Jerusalem that became the Western-Latin expression of Christianity; the path into the Middle East and Far East; and the Eastern Orthodoxies of Byzantium empires.

Points to note: *Logos*; *Hellas*; *polis*; *ekklesia*; Plato's influence on Christianity; Hellenistic Greece; *res publica* (republic); Roman Republic; imperial monarchy

The Greek understanding of *polis* provides a way to flesh out a fuller understanding of living within a social and intellectual context [cf. pages 25, 26]. It involves knowing the collective consciousness that greatly influences a person's identity. The *polis* greatly shapes how one behaves, thinks, and lives. MacCulloch writes extensively about the Greek and Roman worlds as the cultural contexts definitively impacting Christianity.

YEAR FOUR

Read

Allen, Preface, Introduction: "What is Theology?," pages ix-xxiv

Focus

Identify the six motives Allen lists that draw people to Christianity. Reflect on which of the motives have been present in your being drawn to Christianity.

Allen notes that theological topics are sometimes organized under "rubrics." He includes such topics as creation, incarnation, Holy Spirit, etc. Compare the "rubrics" to the theological perspective questions used in the exploration phase of the theological reflection process. Identify two or three different topics that Allen names. Use the topic (rubric) to frame questions to explore a focus for theological reflection.

Respond

What purposes, attitudes, and assumptions do you bring to your reading and study of the Christian tradition?

How have your attitudes and assumptions been fashioned by the various life contexts (worlds) identified in your spiritual autobiography work? How have those attitudes and assumptions affected your reading of the Christian tradition?

Use the notes or highlights you made during your assigned reading this week to reflect on the key contexts (concerns, interests, and issues) faced by the men and women of that time. What were some concerns for those who would live in faith?

Practice

Describe what feeling "at home" means to you.

Knowing oneself includes an increasing awareness of the worlds in which each has lived or currently lives. In EfM a primary strategy for self-awareness is through the use of spiritual autobiographies. Review the information in Session Two regarding spiritual autobiographies as you are constructing your spiritual autobiography. Over the next few weeks, you will have opportunities to talk about your reflections on portions of your spiritual autobiography.

For the next few weeks the seminar will center on reflecting on your reading and reflecting on spiritual autobiographies. Instructions for preparing spiritual autobiographies are in this *Guide's* Part Two, Resources.

When you share your autobiographical reflections, what do you need to do to communicate your thoughts? When you listen to others, what do you need to do to listen well?