

MEMORANDUM

Bennington College
March 26, 1951

To: Students in Literature and Belief

From: Mr. Belitt

I should like to suggest the following procedure, as an experiment in self-help and group study to utilize the scheduled class periods during by absence. I have divided the class into four small discussion groups, as follows, each with a chairman to organize and direct open discussion, note attendance and participation of group members, and keep general records of topics covered during regular meetings:

1.

Joan Elliot, Chairman
Edith Askin
Jacqueline Brown
Sue Edelman

2.

Anne Kobin, Chairman
Judith Fertel
Pamela Hanford
Faith Hanna
Martha Hornblower

3.

Peggy Lampl, Chairman
Sheila Macauley
Ann ~~Macaulay~~ *Thasfaelone*
Ruth Miller

4.

Martia Reed, Chairman
Barbara Nahin
Jency Porter
Sylvia Saltman
Sophia Voulis

Group I

Chapter IV, Epistle to the Romans. Here all concerned would do well to consult the account of Abraham in Genesis, particularly Chapters 17 and 22. It might also interest the group chairman to read the eulogies of Abraham as an irrational Hero of Faith in Kierkegaard's Fear And Trembling. Class should analyze Paul's effort to supplant the Hebraic archetype of Moses as a Hero of the Covenant, with the archetype of Abraham, as a Hero of Faith. Explore the counter-Mosaic aspects of Paul's thinking here. Try to arrive at distinctions between a belief which is based upon an intuitive faith in a Promise (i.e., Abraham's faith) and a belief based upon the unalterable sanctity of divine contract and law (Moses' faith). Discuss Abraham as Patriarch of the Promise, and Moses, as Patriarch of the Law; and in broader terms, the qualities of faith, which distinguish it from righteousness in the law, as ways of belief.

Group II

Chapter VII, Romans. Explore the sustained analogy between the believer's death and resurrection in Christ, and Paul's doctrine of the death and resurrection of the old tradition of the Law. To what extent does Paul "condemn" the Law, to what extent does he justify it historically; what inadequacies does he find in it and what function does he claim for it, psychologically and spiritually, in the past? Is the Law to be discarded? Augmented by new laws? Supercoded? In the latter case, how and by what?

Group III

Chapter IX, Romans. Analyze Paul's case against the Jew. By what reasoning does he urge a transfer of initiative and privilege from the Jew to the non-Jew? Discuss the use of Old Testament precedent in his presentation of the case. To what extent is the whole idea of legitimacy itself -- of the sanctity of ritual and contract -- under attack by Paul, and to what extent is this idea replaced by an emphasis on mystery and Agape? Explore this problem as fully as possible, using Nygren and the final verses of this chapter.

Group IV

Chapter X, Romans. Analyze the case against the legalist here and the distinction between juridical righteousness and the spiritual righteousness "which is of faith." Is the Mosaic tradition outlawed or disavowed? Is it the believer's business to concern himself with doctrinal disputes and conflicts of dogma? What is the way to true knowledge and what is the whole duty of the faithful? What is the apostle's significance, to this end? What, according to Paul, are the phases in the deterioration of Israel and their failure as a gospel people?

NOTE: The Moffatt edition of the Bible, translating the Epistles out of Renaissance diction into contemporary English, will prove a helpful aid to the interpretation of all difficult passages.

NOTE: The group might assemble as a whole at the scheduled time and place and thereafter break up into discussion groups meeting in individual rooms. It is hoped that the groups will also meet individually, as study groups, during the week, if time permits.

LITERATURE AND BELIEF

Topic of Paper (due April 24):

The Nature of the Apostleship

(Elements of the Priest, the Prophet and the Suffering Servant in St. Paul; the degree to which each is present in the role of the Apostle as Paul describes it; and aspects of the role which differentiate it from all three. The task, in general, is to discover, in the vocation of the apostle -- his duties, prerogatives, teachings, and procedures -- aspects of priest, prophet, and Suffering Servant already familiar to you; and functions and characteristics which emerge for the first time.

Example: is it your impression that either priest, prophet, or Servant, or the Jesus of St. Matthew's Gospel, developed a unified theology, or propounded a consistent dogma? Is this apostle a step in this direction? Is it your impression that celibacy, urged upon the believer in St. Paul, is given similar importance by priest, prophet, or Servant? Is the place of asceticism, or free will, similar in priest, prophet, Servant, and apostle?)

In connection with the paper read:

II Corinthians - Entire, with special emphasis on Chapters 2, 3, 4, 9, 13, 15.

I Corinthians - Chapters 2, 4, 7, 9, 13, 15.

All students are urged to read the assigned chapters in Eros and Agape with special care.