

ABSTRACTS 2021 SSEC Conference

Held on Saturday, 1st May, 2021, at Robert Menzies College

KEY SPEAKER: MICHAEL P. THEOPHILOS

Numismatic Insights into Pauline Ethics: ΕΥΕΡΓ- on Roman Provincial, Parthian and Seleucid Coinage

The critical inclusion of numismatic evidence in modern discussions of Pauline ethics is virtually absent in current New Testament scholarship. The paucity of numismatic interaction is more likely a symptom of a wider neglect of ancient coinage in general rather than an actual absence of relevant material.

Numismatics has, at times, been drawn upon for contributing to clues which illuminate the iconographic and symbolic world of the New Testament, but rarely has such analysis extended to the linguistic level of inscriptions upon the coins themselves as informing semantic domains of Hellenistic Greek terminology. It will be argued that numismatic evidence illuminates several key themes within the ancient social matrix of benefaction, not least the extent and significance of the concept at the civic level. These findings will then be applied to specific Pauline passages.

AMELIA R BROWN

For Love or Money?: Conversion to Christianity in Aegean Port Cities, from St Paul onwards

We all grapple with reasons for large-scale cultural change, whether in the past or present, contemporary Australia or ancient Greece. One of the most dramatic and large-scale cultural changes in history was the formation and spread of Early Christianity around the coasts of the Mediterranean sea. The texts and tenets of the Early Christian Church were shaped in unrecognized ways, however, by the culture of ancient Mediterranean port cities. Sailors, merchants and even women were connected across the sea through the unprecedented maritime mobility of the Early Roman Empire. Apostolic missionaries travelled westwards first of all to the ports of the Aegean and

Egyptian coasts, moved not only by faith, but also by prevailing winds and flourishing trading networks. Christianity first took root in a select few of these Eastern Mediterranean port cities, most of which were also political capital cities of the Roman Empire, and all of which were united in possessing a diverse yet distinctive Hellenistic coastal culture. Christianity was thus shaped in very specific ways by the culture of converts from ports and harbors, into a coastal, urban and Greek-speaking phenomenon. The religion which reached Rome with St Paul, and grew to achieve imperial patronage under Constantine, developed common sacred texts, iconography and tenets of belief and ritual which were neither entirely Jewish nor polytheistic, but to an unexplored degree a result of the culture of Mediterranean Greco-Roman port cities.

PETER DOCHERTY

The Problem of Equality in 2 Corinthians 8:13-15

Paul uses the concept of equality (ἰσότης) in 2 Cor 8:13-15 to justify his expectation that the Corinthians will make a substantial contribution to the collection for the poor saints in Jerusalem. The precise nature of this concept and the way it functions within these verses are likely to have important implications for Christian social ethics. But while New Testament scholars have offered a number of perspectives on these issues, substantial problems remain: the source of the concept as Paul employs it is, for example, unclear; divergent views persist about the concept's scope and application; its relationship to the concept of generosity has been handled with considerable ambiguity; and insufficient attention has been paid to its relationship with the surrounding textual material. Individual treatments of Paul's use of equality in this passage or of the wider context within which it occurs tend to focus on a particular aspect of this complicated context at the expense of balancing considerations. This paper attempts, therefore, to document the range of issues that must be addressed in arriving at a clearer understanding of how Paul employs the concept of equality in 2 Cor 8:13-15 and asks what possibilities might or might not be ruled out by a simultaneous consideration of these issues.

CHRIS FORBES

God, Mammon, and “Cashless Societies”: bridging the gap between the First and Twenty-First Centuries

JIM R HARRISON

The Hypocrisy of ‘Honour’ Culture in Antiquity: Jesus’ Commendation of an Impoverished Widow Benefactor in Luke 20:45–21:4

The two pericopes comprising the larger literary unit of Luke 20:25-21:4 have not been investigated from an ‘honour’ perspective in Lukan studies. Two types of leaders are mentioned in each pericope: the scribal elites who seek notability (Luke 20:45-47) and the elite benefactors who underwrite the costs of temple worship by virtue of their extravagant gifts (21:1-5). In each case Jesus punctures the notability of the Jewish elites. Jesus, in a stinging prophetic and eschatological denunciation, exposes the greed and hypocritical piety of the scribes (Luke 20:45), whereas the elite temple benefactors are rebuked with the paradoxical and unexpected exemplum of an ‘impoverished’ widow, the most vulnerable figure of Second Temple Judaism (21:2-4; cf. 20:47). She stands in sharp contrast to the wealthy widow benefactors of Graeco-Roman antiquity, (surprisingly) virtually unknown to us through the epigraphic and numismatic evidence. What has been overlooked are the strong echoes of Graeco-Roman honorific and benefaction motifs that unify both pericopes within their wider literary unit, themes which form an important locus of interest in Luke’s gospel (e.g. Luke 6:32-36; 14:7-14; 22:24-30). Contemporary auditors, familiar with the public inscriptions and the operations of benefaction culture, would have recognised the honorific resonances in each pericope: the epigraphic honours and stress on primacy in Luke 20:46 and the figure of the ‘impoverished benefactor’ in 21:2-4. This unusual and deeply unconventional civic benefactor, known to us from the Graeco-Roman literature and inscriptions, emptied himself of all reserves in caring for his community, abandoning the right of exemption from public levies

(aleitourgetos) routinely extended by cities to their overly generous benefactors, lest they impoverish themselves. Luke 20:25-21:4 prepares us for the public dishonouring of another impoverished benefactor, who, divested of his possessions and naked on the cross, emptied himself of everything for his ungrateful beneficiaries (23:32-49).

LYN KIDSON

Real Widows, young widows, and the Limits of Benefaction in 1 Timothy 5:3–16

John Barclay, in his recent article on widows, "Household Networks and Early Christian Economics: A Fresh Study of 1 Timothy 5.3–16," says puzzles that "abound" in this passage. It is a puzzle that the writer wants to limit aid, seemingly to those widows over 60 and have only been married once. Why are "younger widows" seemingly denied aid? Barclay's article has gone a long way to resolving these puzzles. He has persuasively demonstrated that the passage dealing with widows in 1 Timothy 5:3-16 is "unified and well integrated in content." The writer, he says, is discussing two types of "widows": those he calls "real widows" and those he calls "younger widows." The "younger widows" he identifies as "virgins." As Barclay outlines a χήρα (a widow) is a term that refers to a woman without a man, whether that is through death, desertion, or divorce. However, in the early church virgins could remain unmarried. This was an anomaly in the social world of the early Christians, which forced them to adapt terms for the unmarried woman beyond puberty, she was a "widow." His advice to the younger celibate women (1 Tim 5:14) is to get married before they are "enrolled" as a widow (1 Tim 5:9). It is here I would like to come to a slightly different conclusion than Barclay does in regard to the problem of the younger widow. I am arguing that it is the financial problem of the young widow's dowry which is the main driving force behind the tightening of the qualifications for enrolment as a "widow."

LAURENCE L WELBORN

Equality as the Premise of Commensality at the Lord's Supper in Corinth:

Reading 1 Cor. 11:17-34 alongside Plutarch Quaest. conv. II.10

Nowhere in 1 Cor. 11:17-34 does Paul provide details about how the portions of the communal meal of the Christ followers at Corinth should be distributed. Indeed, the ideological basis of Paul's exhortation that food and drink should be shared with "those who do not have" remains implicit in his argument. Thus, it may prove instructive to locate Paul's criticism of the Corinthians' meal practice alongside a debate about "portion-banquets" (δαΐτες) in Plutarch's Quaestionum convivalium II.10, in which both the manner of distribution of the dinners and the principle of equality among the diners are explicitly discussed.

ADAM WHITE

Paul, Embezzlement, and the Corinthian Christ Group: An Examination of the Charges against Paul in Light of Similar Groups in Antiquity.

At some point between the writings of 1 and 2 Corinthians, Paul was forced to make an emergency visit to Corinth, to which he later referred as a "painful visit". The reason for this visit was (primarily) to address a suspicion on the part of some of the Corinthians that Paul was mishandling the offering for Jerusalem. What happened during the visit is impossible to know for certain (Paul does not give any details), but it is clear from his later letter that a certain member of the group had attacked and humiliated Paul. This much seems clear. In his *End to Enmity*, however, Welborn has offered a compelling reconstruction of the events of this visit. He argues that a meeting was held in which Paul was publicly accused of embezzlement. The problem, however, is

that the charge was only brought by one person and was not corroborated by sufficient witnesses. Drawing from Welborn's insights, this paper will examine the accusation of embezzlement as well as the failure of witnesses in light of other similar groups—specifically, voluntary associations and the Essene community. It will be argued that both the charge of embezzlement as well as the subsequent failure of proper judicial procedure were serious matters, intolerable in any similar, contemporary organisation.