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## It is *philo-logia*, to be fond of words!

*Erster Teil der Einführung in die Vorlesung »First Corinthians« im Wintersemester 2019/20 am Pontificio Istituto Biblico in Rom (8. 10. 2019). Ca. 40 Teilnehmer (eine Teilnehmerin) aus Nord- und Südamerika, Europa, Afrika, Indien und dem Fernen Osten, ganz überwiegend Priester und Ordensleute.*

Good morning everybody. I am glad to welcome you here. I feel excited to start the course on Paul's first Letter to the Corinthians together with you here at the *Istituto Biblico*. Hopefully this class will become a place where the philological and theological approach to one of the most important of the genuine Pauline letters will be in the focus of our shared intellectual effort during some months. If things go well, my exegetical experience that is rooted in the German Protestant scholarship of the last century will meet your diverse international Roman-Catholic education.

Today we have the introductory session which I would like to divide into two sections: first the introduction of us participants, second a reflection on the core issue of the letter. Eventually we may discuss practical questions, e. g. your exams and your weekly preparation.

In the first part

- I intend to introduce myself briefly, *and*
- I want to learn about your biographical backgrounds and your previous experiences with Paul's letters and theology.

Before I elaborate on these two items I shall briefly comment on what I hope to *achieve* by this introductory exercise. So please give me a few minutes to take some steps back and start with a reflection on what we are doing here and on what I expect you to do and vice versa. I hope that by this kind of mutual introducing we shall achieve both, a basic recognition of my way of reading Paul and teaching the methods and the contents of his letters on the one hand *and* of your different horizons of studying 1 Corinthians on the other. This mutual conversation hopefully will develop into a process of better understanding so that my and your experiences, questions and insights shall meet and lead to a progress in a shared reading and understanding of 1Corinthians. For *me*, it is the process of penning down the manuscript of this course and of discussing it with you in the classroom that promotes my understanding. For *you*, it is the weekly preparation, but there is something else I want to address in advance, and because I am afraid that the following ideas may sound a bit strange in your ears, I beg your pardon.

Paul, »the apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God,« as he introduces himself in 1Cor:1 is the founding theologian of Christian faith and Christian churches. Because Paul's letters belong to the most important themes of your studies I want that you try to clarify your current position in regard to Paul. I am aware of the fact that you will attend a lot of courses this semester. Nevertheless, please take your time to think about the following questions: Do you approach Paul in 1Corinthians in a mood of »great expectations« as *Augustin* did – Augustin who changed his way of life when he heard verses from Romans 13 – or as Luther did – Luther who thought about the *syntagma* of δικαιοσύνη θεού (God's justice) by day and night until he found a plausible grammatical solution – or as the Swiss priest and later reformer *Zwingli* did – Zwingli who penned down the 14 Pauline letters in Greek according to an old manuscript? Or do you approach Paul in a kind of incomprehension – a mountain too steep to climb – or of adoration – Saint Paul to whom we pray before we read him? Each approach is possible and reasonable. But please let us not fall short of the efforts of the Catholic and Protestant fathers neither in regard to their diligence and their commitment nor to their feelings.

I use the term ›feelings‹, I could also choose the term of a ›state of mind‹. Feelings are an important aspect of those different invisible hidden ties that prepare a bridge between us and the ›Other‹ – the world of objects, of nature, of living humans as well as of those who have passed away and whose records we study. What kind of ties do I have in mind *beyond* feelings? First it is our capacity of observing (sensory perception), second of sorting, reflecting and understanding (mental organization) and third also of *feeling* (emotional approach). You will remember those things you like or you dislike better than those you observe without any kind of motion. Don't follow those who argue that feelings should stay outside the academia and should be kept away from scholarship and studies. The idea that philology does not need but must expel feelings is wrong. Is it with fear, with love, with curiosity, with excitement that we learn ancient languages and that we study texts? It is *philo*-logia, to be fond of words! So you should start this endeavor of reading Paul with excitement, with commitment, with humbleness or with proud courage – whatever you want. Try to find out about your feelings and make yourself sure that your participation in this course will make a difference in your relationship to the apostle Paul and to his letters. The only state of mind that would actually be wrong is indifference or the mere feeling of being forced to »learn Paul«.

I would like to recommend – if I may – that you should write down minutes about what you feel about your reading and hearing Paul in Greek and so using the same language he used, hearing the same sound the Corinthians heard (though we don't know exactly how he pronounced his texts) and listening nearly the same way as the Corinthian community of those who confessed Christ as Lord did. Certainly, Classical Greek is not our mother-tongue, but we hear and read Paul himself in his own language. This is a remarkable privilege: We shall never hear or read Jesus or at least Peter in the same way. So, you may try out how complicated it is to read the Greek text aloud at home, how often you have to try once again from the beginning. Write down whether you understand Paul's argument or not. Write down your questions you would like to ask Paul. Write down where you feel that Paul is wrong. Write down which texts impress you ... and so forth. Are there texts you like in particular? By asking these ques-

tions you will make this course to your course: and it is exactly this that I intend to offer you: this course on Paul should not only be my course, but your course. And please: discuss the course together. When I studied, we always discussed the courses at the canteen: that helps a lot and enables you to talk about your questions and impressions in an informal way and that opens up an encounter with the text itself.

## Zur Verfasserin

Prof. Dr. Dr.h.c. Oda Wischmeyer lehrte Neues Testament an der Universität Erlangen.

