



INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR ON SAINT PAUL

Ariccia, 19-29 April 2009



Communication 2 - Friday 24 April

After having approached Paul with the means offered by rhetoric, by cultural anthropology, through a feminist reading and with the social-historical method, the doors were opened for the historical-critical method, which was well-represented by input from the Italian expert on Paul, Romano Penna who focused on the originality of the Gospel of Paul. The Albese Professor's contribution answered various questions that had been left suspended as he re-situated the person of Jesus Christ and openness to the "other" cultures at the center of Paul's experience.

The presentation of Neil Elliot then enriched the assembly by demonstrating the potential of another approach – the political one, born in the soil of the theology of liberation. The Presbyterian expert applied this approach to the letter to the Romans, indicating how Paul composed this text with a double purpose: to undermine the oppressive logic of the Roman Empire and to consolidate a community that risked marginalizing its Judaic component in order to avoid retaliation by the Roman power, in a period characterized by strong tensions between Rome and the diverse expressions of Judaism.

But the biblicist most eagerly awaited was without doubt the Anglo-Saxon James Dunn, whose studies constitute an indispensable point of reference today for anyone who desires to examine the theology of Paul and the origins of Christianity. Founder of the so-called *New Perspective*, which is particularly sensitive to the Judaic background of the Christian origins, this expert from Durham University gave us four lectures, each of which was followed by a cascade of questions. Clarity of method and passion for the apostle brought forth much fruit in his work of bringing to light the provocations of an apostle who broke every form of exclusivism and inaugurated the Christian mission, understood as the proclamation of Christ to all the nations. Being *in Christ* was reaffirmed as the foundation of the communities begun by Paul and characterized by the dimension of *koinonia* and by the experience of the *charisms of the Spirit*. Professor Dunn emphasized that a church that does not listen to Paul is a church incapable of listening to the Spirit and destined to implode.

In this first phase dedicated to biblical reflection, Paul's profile was read and re-read in perspectives very different from one another: there was the suggestion to remove the title "doctor of the gentiles" asserting that this definition is not completely adequate; another invited us to remove the sword since it is an ambiguous and dangerous symbol; another did not hesitate to suggest removing the book that Paul holds in his hands because it is an anachronism for an apostle who lived in the first century... It came spontaneous to ask: "Then in the end what remains?" There remains the man grasped by Christ, who made the Gospel the whole reason for his life to the point of transforming it into an urgent and universal announcement for which all sufferings, fatigue and persecutions become a space where the Spirit acts and encounters the people of every time and culture.

This is the Paul who challenges us. This is the Paul who impassioned Blessed Alberione, in whose company we will live the second phase of our work which is aimed at returning to the hermeneutic key most precious to us: that contained in our charismatic heritage.

Greetings and best wishes from Ariccia to all the brothers and sisters of the Pauline Family.