



St Catherine's Seminary is the name of the internal study and training program of the Old Catholic Apostolic Church

The New Testament

Jesus was born, a Jew, during the Roman occupation. Through Joseph, he can be established as a descendant of David. We are told that he was a carpenter by trade, a fairly well off profession at that time and in that place. However, when he was about thirty years old, Jesus began to teach about God's Kingdom, and in addition began healing the sick and lame. This demonstrated beyond doubt that Jesus had a special relationship to God. The Romans weren't all that bothered, but the Jewish religious authorities (who had been allowed to continue in position by the occupying Romans) tried to, and did, arrange Jesus' downfall. On the night before this downfall, Jesus called his band of followers, his disciples, to have supper with him. Then he made a new covenant with them, and all people; promising a special gift from God to them and all who would follow. Jesus was tried, in dubious circumstances, and was crucified, a method of execution particularly used for the most hated of criminals. Jesus dies on the cross but this is not the end. Jesus returns to life and is seen by his disciples. To prove he is really alive, Jesus eats and teaches, and is seen by many, not only his supporters. Jesus goes to heaven and commands his followers to continue his work and make believers of all people. God's Holy Spirit is sent to enable Jesus' followers to do this work, which still continues today.

The word 'Gospel' means Good News. Matthew, Mark, and Luke are 'synoptic' gospels which means they give a comprehensive, overall view; the gospel of John is written later with a more reflective, circumspect approach. Epistle, means a writing in the form of a descriptive letter, to describe events to those who were not there. The approximate date for the birth of Jesus is reckoned to be about 6BC. For various reasons, the transition from BC to AD became inaccurate by six years. AD means Anno Domini, Latin for 'the year of our Lord'.

The Gospels

Matthew

Matthew tells the Good News that Jesus is the promised saviour, the Messiah, through who God will fulfill His promises. Matthew is a carefully arranged book ordered to tell the story more or less chronologically. This gospel presents Jesus as the Great Teacher, who has the authority to interpret God's Law and to teach about the ways of God. Matthew writes from the Jewish viewpoint, after all Jesus was a Jew living in the Jewish world. This gospel has a flavour of being Good News for not only the Jews

but the whole world. This was probably the reason that emphasis is placed on Jesus' birth, and after his ministry, his death and resurrection.

Mark

Mark is probably the earliest (that is to say first written) of the gospels. Mark is straight to the point: he starts, 'This is the Good News about Jesus Christ, the Son of God'. Mark delivers this good news in a vigorous, straightforward manner. Jesus is seen as a man of action, power and authority, who describes himself as the Son of Man, and who has come to set his people free. Mark focuses on what Jesus did rather than just on what he said. This gospel has no mention of Jesus as a child, nor of his birth. It is when Jesus starts his ministry that Mark begins. The emphasis is on teaching and healing. Those who follow Jesus become more aware of who Jesus is, but his opponents become more hostile. The closing chapters tell of Jesus' last few days on earth, especially his betrayal and crucifixion. The resurrection and appearances of the risen Lord form the last part of Mark. There are two endings to this gospel, and both are generally considered to be written by someone other than the author of Mark, as if the gospel was completed on the authors' behalf.

Luke

Here Jesus is presented as both the promised Saviour of Israel as well as the saviour of all people. Luke was an educated man, a doctor, and his gospel gives us a different perspective on the good news. Joy and excitement are especially noticeable in the early and later chapters, and the anticipation realised in the birth of Jesus and His triumphal resurrection and ascending to heaven. We have material in Luke not given to us in other gospels : accounts of the angels, and shepherds visiting the baby Jesus, what Jesus did as a boy in the Temple, parables he taught of the Good Samaritan, and the prodigal Lost son. Luke also emphasizes the Holy Spirit, the power of prayer, God's forgiveness and the role of women in the ministry of Jesus. The author of Luke is the same who gave us the Acts of the Apostles, continuing Jesus ministry as his followers create the early church on Jesus' behalf.

John

This gospel was written about 80AD: after the life and ministry of Jesus; as the early church was growing and struggling; yet within the time frame to make it 'contemporary'. However, it gives the story of Jesus in a considered, reflective way, it is not synoptic. This makes it valuable scripture, especially when used in conjunction with the other gospels. Here, Jesus is shown to be the eternal 'Word of God' who was there at the very beginning of the universe. The Word became a human being and lived among us, according to John so that people may believe that Jesus is the promised Saviour, the Son of God, and through their faith in Him, all people may have access to God: they may have life. The early verses identify Jesus as the Word of God, then the story unfolds giving various miracles showing that only Jesus could be the Son of God. Some of the meanings behind the miracles are explained. There are those who follow Jesus and believe in him after seeing his miracles and hearing his teaching: there are those who do not and some become his opponents. The close relationship of Jesus with his disciples is explored, and his words of encouragement preparing them for his work after his death are apparent. The closing chapters continue this relationship as the disciples witness Jesus death, and resurrection. John

then emphasizes the gift of eternal life through belief in Jesus, the eternal 'Word' who is described as the way, the truth and the Life. This gospel makes use of symbolism in a very powerful way: highlighting the spiritual power of water, wine, bread, light, shepherd, sheep and so on. (The story of the woman caught in adultery [John 8.1 - 11], is not found in all manuscripts and is put in brackets in modern translations).

The Early Church

Acts of the Apostles

As it is written by the same author, many see this book as a natural continuation of Luke's gospel. Here we have the accounts of how the Holy Spirit leads Jesus' followers as they spread the good news about him and continue his work. Jesus' commission to his followers was simple but encompassed everything, the whole world. They were to spread the word about Jesus the Christ first in Jerusalem, then Judaea, then Samaria, then the whole world. It is the account of how the worldwide church started, firstly as a movement amongst Jewish people, then amongst the nations around them, then the Roman empire and beyond. Important through all this is the Holy Spirit who acts among the first Christian people of Jerusalem. Jesus promised that this power would be sent upon the believers and on the day of Pentecost the Spirit comes, and then continues to lead and guide the early church throughout the time covered by Acts. The early church grows by delivering God's message about Jesus, and Acts records this in a number of sermons and discourses. Some of the miracles and events show this power in the lives of the early church fellowship. There are three identifiable strands to Acts: firstly the beginning of the Christian movement in Jerusalem immediately after Jesus is taken into heaven, secondly the expansion and work of the early church as it grows into the surrounding regions (today known as Palestine and/or the Holy Land, and thirdly the young churches further expansion into the Roman empire. It is always difficult to identify which is the most important event when all of them are so very important, but for me and many others, the conversion of Saul, a persecutor of Jesus; into Paul who would carry on this expansion of the early church is the most profound happening told in Acts. This single action, made Paul into an Apostle (apostle being a follower chosen by God, rather than disciple, who is someone who chooses to follow God).

The Letters of Paul (Epistles)

Romans

When you consider that Paul was once called Saul and was so against Jesus that he made it his life's purpose to stop the early church by killing the followers of Jesus. Then the conversion of Paul (the same man as Saul, but changed by God) is truly remarkable. Much of the church's power comes from this fact: God changed Saul from enemy to great evangelist by the Holy Spirit, and what He did for Paul, he can and does do for us. Paul's whole life and destiny is now to work for God and he does so tirelessly. Paul's letter to the Romans was written to pave the way for a visit to the young church at Rome (then the centre of the known world). He intended to work among the Christians there, and gain their support (for he had once been a well known enemy of the church) for an evangelical visit to Spain and North Africa. This epistle explains the Christian faith from Paul's perspective borne out by experience. Paul

starts Romans by greeting the people of the church at Rome, and tells them of his praying for them (this is a letter after all). Then Paul tells them: "The Good News is that God puts people right with Himself: it is through faith, from beginning to end. [Rom 1.17]". Paul's earlier conversion is spectacular testimony to this. In Romans, Paul develops this theme further: all people, Jews and Gentiles (which means non-Jews) alike are under the power of sin. But they are put right with God by their faith in Jesus Christ. Paul then describes the new life in union with Jesus, and the new relationship this brings with God. This, Paul knows as well as anybody!! Paul can truthfully say that we are 'set free' by God's Spirit from the power of sin and death. In the mid chapters of Romans, Paul explains how the Law of God and power of God's Spirit affect the believers life. Inevitably the question of how Jews and Gentiles (non-Jews) fit into God's plan for the world arises. God reveals to Paul that the Jewish rejection of Jesus as the Christ, the Messiah or Saviour is part of God's plan to bring all people to God's Grace through Jesus. Paul hopes that eventually the Jews will come to recognise Jesus as their Messiah too. Finally, Paul writes on how the Christian life should be lived, and about love for others. Service to God, doing God's work, the Christian's duty to state (their nation) and each other and questions of conscience are explored. Paul ends with personal situations and praise of God because it is a letter.

1 Corinthians

Paul's first letter to the Corinthians was sent to address several problems which had occurred since Paul had established a church in Corinth, regional capital of the Roman province of Achaia. Corinth was a great Greek cosmopolitan city, with cosmopolitan problems: commerce, culture, widespread immorality, and pluralist varied religions. Paul addresses immorality in the church, sexuality and morality, church order, gifts of the Holy Spirit and of the Resurrection of Jesus. In Chapter 13 he presents Love as the greatest of the gifts that God has given. Paul is able to use his considerable personal experience of God's Spirit to show how to resolve these issues and answer the difficult questions that arise.

2 Corinthians

This is Paul's second letter to the church he founded at Corinth, and was sent to them at a particularly difficult time in their relationship. Some members of the church there were vociferous in their condemnation of Paul. Paul shows his deep longing to reconcile their differences and is overjoyed when this does eventually happen. In the first section of this epistle, Paul discusses his relationship to the church, and explains why he had been severe in his response to them after a period when the church were insulting and opposed to him. Paul cannot conceal his delight that this severity had brought about repentance and reconciliation. The second part of this epistle is essentially a plea where Paul makes the case for a generous financial donation to be made to the Christians in Judaea, who were to say the least, finding things difficult. The third and final part of 2 Corinthians is where Paul defends his apostleship against a handful of people at the church he established who claimed Paul's apostleship was false. They promptly claimed that they were the true apostles! (Reader take note! an apostle is one chosen by God, not the other way round. To be an apostle a dramatic event like Paul's conversion is required. To follow God is noble, very noble: it makes you a disciple, but only God can confer apostleship. If those at Corinth were made

apostles, little is recorded of it so it is unlikely. However, to claim that someone's apostleship is false gives this a flavour of political posturing. If anything it enhances Paul's apostleship).

Galatians

Galatia was a Roman province in Asia Minor. Paul's letter to the church in Galatia was to warn against a false teaching and to bring back the Christians of Galatia to true faith and practice. As the Good News about Jesus being the Christ spread among the Gentiles, that is among non-Jewish people, there were those who argued that in order to truly be a Christian, one had to follow the Law of Moses (that is to say, be a Jew) first. Paul knew that was not necessary. Paul taught that all that was needed to be put right with God was faith in Jesus. It was not necessary to observe the Law of Moses in addition. Paul begins by defending his apostleship, and he insists that his calling came from God, not any human, and that his mission is specifically aimed at non-Jews. Then he develops the theme that by faith alone people are put right with God. In closing, Paul shows that Christian behaviour flows naturally from the love that results from faith in Jesus.

Ephesians

This epistle is concerned above all with "God's plan to bring all creation together, everything in Heaven and on earth with Christ as head" [Eph. 1.10]. Paul is also appealing to God's people to live out the meaning of this great plan for the unity of mankind through oneness with Jesus Christ. Paul develops this theme by telling of the way that God the Father has chosen His people, how they are forgiven and set free from sin through the Son, Jesus; and how God's promise is underwritten by the Holy Spirit. He then appeals to the Ephesians to live in a manner which makes their 'oneness' in Christ real in their lives. A number of symbolic examples are given to show this: the church is like a body, with Christ as its head; or like a building, with Christ the chief corner-stone; or like a marriage, the church as the wife and Christ the husband. Great depth of expression is used as Paul considers God's grace in Christ. All things are seen in the light of Christ's love, sacrifice, forgiveness, grace and purity.

Philippians

The church at Philippi was the first church established on European soil in the Roman province of Macedonia. Paul was in prison when he wrote this letter to the church there. There was opposition amongst some of them to Paul, and the pressures other churches faced from false teaching was present here too. The main reason this letter was sent was to thank the Christians at Philippi for the gift they had sent to him in his time of need. Paul seeks to reassure them and to encourage them so that they may have confidence during their times of trouble as well as Paul's. Have the humble attitude of Jesus, he pleads, and do not be driven by selfishness, ambition or pride. He reminds them that life in union with Christ is a gift of God's grace, given freely because of their faith and nothing to do with observing the ceremonies of the Jewish Law. This letter has an emphasis on joy, confidence and perseverance in the Christian faith and life. It reveals Paul's deep affection for the church he established at Philippi, and it reveals also Paul's own confidence in Jesus Christ.

Colossians

Colossae was a town east of Ephesus in Asia Minor. Paul felt a sense of responsibility for this church even though he had not set this church up, probably because it was in an area where Paul had established churches and had sent workers out to evangelize from Ephesus (a provincial capital). Paul had discovered that false teachers were at work within the church at Colossae, teaching that in order to be saved Christians needed to be circumcised and observe rules about ritual foods etc. Paul writes to condemn these teachings, claiming that they actually detract from faith in Jesus. Through Christ God created the world, and through Christ, God is bringing it back to Him. The only hope of salvation comes from union in Christ, and Paul spells out the implications of this to all believers. This letter was delivered to the Colossians by a man called Tychicus. He was accompanied by a slave called Onesimus to whom Paul wrote Philemon later.

1 Thessalonians

After Paul had established a church at Philippi, he established one in the nearby provincial capital of Macedonia a city called Thessalonica. The Jewish communities became jealous of the success of this church and of Paul's teaching as their opportunities for converting non-Jews to Judaism was restricted by it. Paul was forced out and went to Berea and then on to Corinth. There, he received a message from Timothy about the situation within the church at Thessalonica. Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians to address their concerns, to encourage and reassure them. He is thankful for their faith and love and reminds them of the kind of life he had lived while with them. He then answers some of their concerns: what will happen when Christ returns? Can someone who died before Christ's return still share in eternal life? When will Christ be returning? Paul asks them to continue quietly working and waiting patiently, until the time when He will return.

2 Thessalonians

This book continues with the story of Christ's return as confusion and misunderstanding was unsettling the church at Thessalonica. Paul deals with the misunderstanding that the day of the Lord's coming had already arrived. Evil and wickedness will reach a climax before the coming of the Lord, and an anti-Christ a wicked opponent 'The wicked One' will be prevalent, says Paul. Remain sure and ready, Paul teaches, even though there will be testing times. Work for a living, and continue to do good to others. The Lord will come whenever He will.

1 Timothy

Timothy was an assistant to Paul in his missionary work. Timothy was a young man, with Greek father and Jewish mother, he was likely to be Paul's successor. So Paul wrote this letter to him. First it warns of the false teaching which was facing all the young churches at the time, a mix of Jewish and non-Jewish ideas about ritual foods and other practices. Then, Paul instructs Timothy about church administration, worship, and the qualities needed by church leaders. Finally Timothy is advised on the qualities a good servant of Jesus should have, and his responsibilities towards other believers.

2 Timothy

This second letter to Timothy is mainly personal advice to him. Timothy is encouraged to endure and keep on witnessing faithfully to Jesus, to hold the teaching of the Good News and the Old testament, to do his duty as a teacher and evangelist, and to continue to do so in the face of suffering and opposition. Timothy is warned about becoming embroiled in arguments described as 'foolish and ignorant'. Paul reminds Timothy of his own life and purpose, and of his faith, patience and love; and of his endurance and suffering in persecution.

Titus

Titus was Paul's helper and assistant in Crete. He was a gentile who had become Christian, and Paul had put him in charge of the church there. Titus is reminded of the qualities a church leader should show (especially against the background of poor behaviour shown by the Cretans). Titus is instructed how to teach the various groups within the church: the older men, the older women (who are to in turn instruct the younger women), the young men and the slaves. Paul's final advice to Titus is about Christian conduct: peaceful, friendly, avoiding argument, conflict and division within the church.

Philemon

Philemon was probably a member of the church at Colossae, and wealthy enough to have a slave called Onesimus. Onesimus had run away from his master and had somehow come into contact with Paul. Paul had converted Onesimus into a Christian, and Onesimus had assisted with the evangelical work. Onesimus had accompanied Tychicus to Colossae, which is likely to be his returning with this letter to deliver to Philemon. Paul writes to Philemon and asks him to welcome back Onesimus not only as a forgiven slave, but as a fellow Christian.

Other Letters (other Epistles)

Hebrews

The letter to the Hebrews was written to a group of Christians who were in danger of abandoning the faith altogether. They were facing mounting hostility and opposition and the writer seeks to encourage them in their faith by showing that Jesus is the Christ, the true and complete revelation of God. The writer does this by emphasizing three qualities: Firstly that Jesus is the eternal Son of God, who through his suffering on earth learned true obedience to the Father. Jesus was therefore, as Son of God, superior to Angels, the Old Testament Prophets, even Moses himself. Secondly, God declared Jesus to an eternal priesthood, higher than and superseding, the priests of the Old Testament whose sacrifices of animals only foreshadowed the true sacrifice; and thirdly that through faith in Jesus, the High Priest, salvation is achieved. The faith of some of Israel's famous characters is cited and continued faithfulness encouraged, but with the focus on Jesus. The writer advises to continue in faith despite whatever suffering and persecution may be put in their way. This epistle seems likely to have been addressed to those who had become Christian from a Hebrew religious background, and who were likely to revert to their old religious ways which the writer wants to avoid.

James

This is a collection of practical instructions, wisdom and guidance in vivid example and figures of speech. From a Christian perspective, this letter covers riches and poverty, temptation, prejudice, good conduct, use of language, quarreling, pride and humility boasting, judging others patience and prayer. James emphasizes the importance of actions, as well as faith in the Christian's religion. Addressed to 'All God's people scattered over the whole world' it is aimed at Christians generally, rather than in a specific place or situation.

1 Peter

This book sets out to encourage the Christians who were facing persecution and suffering because of their faith. Addressed to "God's chosen people", a phrase which echoed the Hebrew religion, and a phrase which would have been recognised by the Christians who would have at one time been under the influence of those religious codes. In this book, the readers are reminded that Jesus Christ by His death, resurrection, and the promise He made to send the Spirit is the 'Good News' which makes them the chosen people. So they are to accept and endure any suffering, and have confidence, that doing so is a test of their faith, and their reward will come on the day "that Christ is revealed". If they live "as the people of Christ" their suffering will have purpose.

2 Peter

This book is especially concerned about false teachings which imply that Christ will not again return. The writer says that the delay is because God wants everyone to be saved, having turned away from their sins. Hold true to the knowledge of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, the writer urges, hold true to the knowledge given to you by those who knew Jesus and heard his teaching. This letter is addressed widely, to Christians living in many areas.

1 John

This first letter of John has two purposes: first to encourage the young Christians to live in fellowship with God through Jesus, and secondly to warn against false teachings which would destroy this fellowship. The writer exposes the false teaching something like this: because evil results from the physical world, and Jesus was all good, then he could not have been really human. This false teaching claimed that salvation was to be freed from concern about the physical world, and that salvation had nothing to do with morality nor love for others. The writer of 1 John rejects this by re-emphasizing that Jesus was both the Christ and a human, and this unites all who follow Jesus in love for one another and for God. 1 John is written in the plural 'we', whereas the subsequent letters attributed to 'John' are from an individual. Considering the persecution and dangers of false teachings, these letters authors are not completely known, and the name John could have been chosen as a symbolic gesture being a respected authoritative Christian figure.

2 John

This very short letter was sent to a church and its members under the symbolism of "to a dear lady and her children". It warns of false teachers and their teaching, instead appealing to the church to love one another. It claims to be from the 'Elder'.

3 John

This very short letter was sent to a man called Gaius a church leader, and praises him for his support to other Christians. It also warns against a man called Diotrephes, who is saying "terrible things" about the young church. Like 2 John, this letter is sent by someone who calls himself 'the elder'. I assume the recipients knew who that was.

Jude

The letter from Jude warns against false teachers who were claiming to be believers. A short letter, similar in many ways to 2 Peter, this letter encourages the readers to "fight on for the faith which God has given to his people once and for all".

Prophecy

Revelation (also called Revelation of St John)

This book was written at a time when the Christians and the young Christian church was being persecuted because of their beliefs in Jesus Christ as Lord. This book's purpose was to give hope, encouragement and comfort as well as to urge continued faithfulness during these testing times. The majority of this book is Apocalyptic, that is to say its message is hidden in symbolism which would be readily understood by Christians reading it, but would make little or no sense to others. It was presumably written in this way to carry its message without adding further to the persecutions the readers were already facing. Many of the revelations are repeated over and over again in differing symbolism, and through different visions. Many of these visions and symbolic examples have resulted in much scholarly debate since then. The central message though is clear: Jesus is the Christ, he is Lord. God will totally defeat his enemies, including Satan. Then the faithful will be rewarded with blessings in a new heaven and a new earth when God's triumph is complete. For us, care needs to be taken with this book. We need to be aware of how God speaks to us through its words and symbolisms. Many fundamentalists can make this scripture say anything that suits them - which was not the intention!

Draft A