

The Historical Critical method of interpretation helps a person to understand what the person was originally writing about and why. This means that the person reading or interpreting the text using this method will look at the historical situation that the author of the text wrote in and about. The method also looks at what relationship the author had with the audience. The other method I will look at is Literary Criticism, which is looking at the meaning of the text as if it was a finished piece of literature, like a book.

2

I will look at Ephesians 2:1-10 with these two methods of interpretation in the Catholic Church.

The book of Ephesians can be found in the New Testament directly after the book of Galatians and before the book of Philippians, and is one of many books in the New Testament that is made up of letters written by Paul to the Church describing the message, and ideas of Christ. The book of Ephesians consists of letters written by Paul to the Gentile followers of Christ in the Church of Ephesus; but it is believed that the letters were also intended for the Jewish population of Ephesus as well as Gentiles.

1

Through using the literary criticism of redaction we are able to analyse and understand Paul's reasoning in writing the letter. The letter talks to the Gentiles and the Jews about death, and also Christ's own death and resurrection. Through these areas Paul is able to show the readers of the text that those who have lived a life of sin may be reborn through following Christ. Paul also shows the readers that Jews and Gentiles alike are equal in the Kingdom of God. The main message of this letter written by Paul to the Ephesians was to show the Gentiles that through Christ and his resurrection God has gifted us our salvation.

1

Ephesians 2:1...

Through this we are told that death is brought about by sin as death is "spiritual death" (MacDonald, 2000). The Gentiles are addressed in Ephesians, when they are told they too were "dead in their sin as Christ was in his grave before he was raised by God" (Swain, 1980). This is a death experienced before the acceptance of Christ and his message.

3

Ephesians 2:2...

The "course" of this world is translated to the "age" or particular time of this world, and in this verse we are told how the "Believers of Christ once walked according to the present age, which stands under divine judgement" (Kieck, 1994). According to MacDonald (2000) "the ruler of the power of the air" is the devil. Therefore, this is again looking at a time before Christ and his message were accepted. Those who are "disobedient" are the "non-believers to the realm of sin" (MacDonald, 2000). Those who are "disobedient" are those who have not yet accepted God into their lives. They have followed or were influenced by the "power of the air" (devil) because they hadn't learnt Christian morals.

3

Ephesians 2:3...

In this part of the passage "flesh means physical body, connoting natural frailty. Pauline use of flesh connotes natural, material, visible and human existence, weak and earthbound, the human creature left to itself... Prominent Pauline contrast of 'flesh' and 'Spirit' which compares a human being subject to earthly tendencies with a human being under the influence of God's Spirit" (Brown, R.E. (Ed.), Fitzmyer, J. Murphy, R.E., 1991). This explains the difference between the physical existence and spiritual existence and that we are "weak" without faith in our life.

3

Ephesians 2:4...

This part of the passage shows us "God's graciousness towards those who are lost to sin. Generous with his mercy" (Kieck, 1994). This describes how God forgives all those who sin and also accepts all those who have not followed his path in the past.

3

Ephesians 2:5...

We see in this verse how "forgiveness of sin is central to 'being made alive'..." and how it suggests that the traditional Pauline juxtaposition of cross (dying with Christ) and resurrection (Rom 6:1-4) has not been completely erased by the emphasis on heavenly exaltation. Ephesians makes the exaltation" (Kieck, 1994). This shows us how the crucifix and the resurrection stand beside each other as symbols of how Jesus' death was for forgiveness of our sin and how the resurrection shows new life is brought about after the death of sin.

3

Ephesians 2:6...

This verse continues and extends on the ideas seen in the past verse saying “That God, raising and exalted Jesus, has also raised and exalted us with him” (Swain, 1980). This explains how when Jesus ascended into heaven he raised our sin form us and enabled forgiveness and redemption.

3

Ephesians 2:7...

Through this we are shown “The work of salvation is a revelation of God’s grace. In its present existence the church, being the risen and exalted ‘body’ of Christ, is intended by God to be a visible and tangible manifestation of his grace” (Swain, 1980). This reveals to us how the death of Jesus was planned by God to physically show people that their sin can be forgiven.

3

Ephesians 2:8...

This shows that “It is through faith that we receive God’s grace – faith itself is a gift from God – it is not humanity’s work but God’s and just as much grace as salvation itself. According to Paul salvation is not a matter of a partnership between humanity and God, with God offering the gift and humanity receiving it with their own effort. Both the gift and its reception are grace” (Swain, 1980). We can see through this how God gives us our faith and that it is equal to the gift of salvation and redemption.

3

Ephesians 2:9...

This part of the passage is telling us that “Faith (which leads to salvation) is a gift and it is not based on human accomplishment. There is no room for self-assertion. The mention of ‘grace’ reinforces this point. ‘Grace’ e.g. Rom 3:24; 11:6” (MacDonald, 2000). This means that ‘faith’ is a gift that should be treasured, not taken advantage of or ‘boasted’ about.

3

Ephesians 2:10...

The passage ends by showing us that “The death of Christ requires a lowly approach to life in those who have realised their salvation through it” (Best, 1997). Meaning that we need to look at Jesus’ death as a symbol of the death of sin, and the resurrection as a new life, one of faith and love.

3