

Short report about the workshop "Mystery" from the 23rd January 2009 in Cappenberg

The aim of the workshop which took place in the castle of Cappenberg a former monastery of the order of the Norbertines was to work precisely with texts and their meanings about mystery and mystery cults.

First Dr. Horst Schneider from the editorial staff of the *Fontes Christiani* gave an overall view over the different ancient mystery cults according to the book of the same name of Walter Burkert. He presented the cult of Demeter, Isis and Osiris, and Mithras and pointed out that all the mystery cults tried to open transforming experience for those who liked to join the community of a mystery cult.

Schneider finally compared mystery cults with the Christian religion and gave seven theses:

1. Entering the cult was sometimes conditioned but not in the Christian religion.
2. Christians had nothing to pay to become a member of the community.
3. The Christians were well organised by superregional councils, which were not established by the different other cults.
4. The content of the Christian religions was simply structured and easy to learn opposite to the Mithrascult for example.
5. Opposite to most of the mystery cults the Christians propagate the content of their religion.
6. Mystery cults and Christian religion have an important and eventful ritual for the initiation.
7. Charity was a special character of the Christian religion which made it more attractive than the other cults. This was one of the main reasons, that the Christian religion was successfully with its expansion.

Prof. Peter Wick from our consortium reflected the relation from death to life in the letters of the apostle Paul to the Corinthians and the Romans and emphasised that in the younger exegetical tradition the influence of mystery cults has been taken into consideration.

Paul tries to give an answer to the question: "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?" (1 Cor 15,35) His answer in the interpretation of Prof. Wick was a combination of a continuous und discontinuous process of change according to 1 Cor 15,51f: "I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet".

Dr. Meret Strothmann from our consortium talked about Roman emperors and mystery cults. She pointed out that mystery cults were more or less an obscure thing for the Romans because the most important question was whether the cult is compatible to the political system of the Romans or not. The Romans had the fear that meetings of the different groups of mystery cults could be the nucleus of a revolution against the empire. For the Romans the people were born into their religion but to become a member of a mystery cult there must be an individual decision. The political intension of the Romans were very often an opportunistic one: they tried to integrate new cults into their religious system.

Dr. Beate Hofmann from our consortium gave an explanation of the text: "The admonitions of Ipuwer". The date of origin of the Egyptian text is not clear only one manuscript exists out of the 19th dynasty. (12th or 13th century before Christ).

After a short description of the terrible situation of the whole country an intensive lamentation follows about the publication of the mysteries, scripts and rituals which become ineffective because of this betrayal. The betrayal of the mysteries requires the death of the betrayer.

The description of the real situation is determined by the opposite of once and now and of the change of the qualities: rich people are now poor and poor people now are rich. The conclusion of the partial strong destroyed text is the invocation of the gods to remind the former times accompanied by the question where God is today and whether he, the loving shepherd is dead or not. The whole lamentation shows that the writer is well informed about the mysteries and the actual situation of his country and presents it in a very attractive literal form.

Dr. Görg Hasselhoff from our consortium presented the text from Ambrosias "De Mysteriis". Here Ambrosias gives an introduction in the meaning of both sacraments the baptism and the Eucharist. Important is that Ambrosias expects from the new baptist people a nondisclosure and he emphasised that the explanation of the initial rituals and texts is a betrayal.

Ambrosias himself describes the great mystery of baptism different to the profane cleaning by water: the water without the Holy Spirit doesn't pure while baptism does.

Furthermore Ambrosias connects the presence of God with the place and time of the mystery rituals. God likes to give his presence more easily where the church and the mysteries are. This is specially said about the Eucharist.

Finally I gave a short explanation of the old church of Cappenberg focussed on the question about the meaning of the mystery of faith which is a central part of the Eucharistic prayer. As a result of the counterreformation the internals of the church has been changed. A former closed area of the choir stall was opened to give a direct view onto the main altar where the Eucharist was celebrated.

Part of the Eucharistic prayer is an intervention which can be found in the liturgy since the end of the 7th century and taken from the 1st letter of Paul to Timothy: The deacons must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience (1 Tim 3,9).

This intervention was related to the words about the wine: This is the cup of my blood, the new and everlasting covenant – mystery of faith – which has been given up for you and for many so that sins may be forgiven. With the liturgical reform in the Roman Catholic Church this words: “mystery of faith” were separated and explained with a small text about death and resurrection of Christ, which has to be proclaimed until the end of time.

Going through all presentations there was found out a paradox while speaking about mysteries. The meaning of a mystery consists of his closed and covered secret character. But talking about it is just to disclose or to discover it.

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