

One of the benefits of teaching at a research university with a graduate program is that – at least where I am – there are periodic reading groups with other faculty members and graduate students. I go to a couple of these a month, including one that I organize. As it turns out, last week I went to two. The first was mine, the (other) CIA, in which we typically read someone’s work-in-progress. That week’s presentation was a paper by my former student and soon-to-be faculty member in early Christianity at Duke Divinity School, Maria Doerfler, an exceptionally bright and erudite human being, who gave a paper on a virtually unknown letter by the famous fourth-century bishop Ambrose in which he condemns – ready for this? – cross-dressing. I have to admit, I knew nothing about it, or the issues that it raises (about fourth-century understandings of masculinity as they played a role in the then burgeoning Christian church).

And the next night there as a New Testament Colloquium at Duke, organized by my friend Joel Marcus, one of the top Gospel scholars in the English-speaking world. For that group we do not read a paper in advance (as we do in the CIA), but we simply come together for pizza and then an hour and a half presentation and discussion of something that one of us is working on. Again, it is all graduate students and faculty (from both UNC and Duke); that night we had about 25 people there, all of them scholars or budding scholars.

The presentation was by another friend of mine, Mark Goodacre, a professor of New Testament at Duke (in the Department of Religion, not in the Divinity School). Mark is probably best known in the world at large for running the single best website for New Testament studies anywhere on the planet, at www.ntgateway.com. I can’t recommend it highly enough. In scholarly circles Mark is best known for his work on the “Synoptic Problem” (the problem of how Matthew, Mark, and Luke relate to each other literarily – i.e. what sources they shared in common), and in particular his very strong defense of the view that the Gospel source known as Q in fact never existed. (As I pointed out in my post yesterday, Q is widely thought to have been a source principally of Jesus’ sayings that was available to Matthew and Luke but probably not to Mark.)

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