

Invitation for Commissioned Visual Media

The Sheffield Institute for Interdisciplinary Biblical Studies invites physical, digital, or a combination of physical and digital visual media of the apostle Paul for a project entitled “Reimagining Paul: Apostolic Portraits of Masculinity”.

1. Budget

The total available budget is £10,000, inclusive of VAT.

2. Overview of the project

“Reimagining Paul: Apostolic Portraits of Masculinity” is an academic and public engagement project being led by Dr Grace Emmett (Sir Henry Stephenson Visiting Researcher) based at the Sheffield Institute for Interdisciplinary Biblical Studies (SIIBS) and funded by a Sir Henry Stephenson Trust fellowship award.

The core component of “Reimagining Paul” is an exhibition, due to be showcased in the summer/autumn of 2022. The exhibition will feature visual depictions of the apostle Paul in response to various examples of self-presentation found in the apostle’s letters, which form part of the New Testament. The exhibition will consist of the media commissioned as a result of this invitation, to be displayed alongside information about the relevant biblical texts (provided by the academic researcher) and the artist’s own reflections on the process of creating their work. The exhibition will be accompanied by a series of public lectures, the aim of which will be to facilitate dialogue between the Church and the academy on the topic of biblical and contemporary masculinities. It is anticipated that the exhibition will be on display at several cathedrals in England and potentially a number of other public spaces. The project is also expected to have various academic outputs, such as conference presentations and journal article publications.

3. Scope of work

Proposals for visual media are invited that respond to the question: what might it mean for conceptions of modern masculinity to visualise certain Pauline themes (see §4) and remember Paul in ways that resist more prominent depictions of him as convert, preacher, and letter-writer?

The diverse examples of Paul’s self-presentation outlined in §4 below showcase Paul’s body in ways that intersect with expectations regarding masculinity, both ancient and modern. The purpose of the exhibition is to invite visitors to consider Paul from the perspective of texts

often neglected in the visual reception history of the apostle.

Responses need not seek to offer a literal interpretation of the passages listed below, though such responses are also welcome. Responses should take into consideration the need for the visual depictions of Paul to be transportable; therefore large-scale installations, or pieces requiring extensive audio-visual support are unlikely to be suitable for this project. In addition to the visual media itself, the successfully commissioned artist/s will also be expected to supply a brief description of the work to be displayed at the exhibition. As noted above, the exhibition will also feature contextualising information about the key Pauline texts being responded to. These will be provided by the academic researcher for the project.

The audience for the exhibition is likely to be diverse and will vary depending on the location where it is being hosted. Cathedrals, though buildings clearly attached to the Christian faith, welcome visitors of all and no religious or belief identities, both local and international. There is also potential for the exhibition to be hosted in other public spaces, such as at the University of Sheffield.

4. Background information

Proposals are invited to create physical or digital visual media of the apostle Paul in response to different ways in which the apostle presents himself in his letters. The four modes of self presentation to be considered and responded to are:

- a) *Paul's disabled body* (2 Cor 10:10, 12:7b–10, Gal 4:13–15). There are numerous points in Paul's letters where he describes himself in ways that invite readings of the apostle as disabled. Use of the term "disabled" to describe Paul is not intended to speculate about what sort of impairment Paul may or may not have had (though this has certainly been a topic of interest for some scholars). Rather, it is to work with a socio-cultural framework of disability and observe that Paul alludes to at least one, or possibly several, conditions that likely "disabled" him within an ancient context. What might it look like to visualise Paul as disabled?

- b) *Paul's marked body* (2 Cor 11:23–25, Phil 3:5, Gal 6:17). In his letters, Paul describes two different types of marks this his body bears: the mark of circumcision and the "marks (*stigmata*) of Jesus". The first mark is certainly physical and it is likely that the second type of marks are also physical. But both types of mark are also imbued with broader ethnic, gendered, and theological significance for the apostle. In addition, Paul describes being flogged and beaten, depicting himself as being on the receiving end of physical violence likely to leave scars. These different types of bodily markings struggle to be reconciled with first-century ideals of masculinity, though they are marks that Paul is proud of and boasts about. If it is possible for there to be differing interpretations of these

marks, how might ambiguity about Paul's masculine credibility in an ancient context be helpful for contemplating gender in a modern context?

- c) *Paul's enslaved body* (Gal 1:10, Phil 1:1, Rom 1:1, 1 Cor 9:19, 2 Cor 4:5). Paul uses a variety of enslavement metaphors throughout his writings to the earliest churches, often as a way of articulating, as he sees it, the transformative nature of following Christ. At several points, he describes himself as a slave of Christ and a slave to other believers, while also calling believers to become enslaved to one another through love (Gal 5:13). This language is striking in its first-century context, as slaves could not fully embody ideal masculinity, but it is also striking in a modern context—particularly as it is not always visible in translation, with some texts preferring the language of “servant” rather than “slave”. What might it mean to consider Paul as a slave, and what perspectives does the history of slavery bring to bear on such considerations?
- d) *Paul's maternal body* (1 Thess 2:7b–8, 1 Cor 3:1–3, Gal 4:19). There are three places in his letters when Paul employs some form of maternal imagery to describe his relationship with the earliest church communities. He is an infant but also a nursing mother in 1 Thessalonians, a nurse who gives milk in 1 Cor, and a mother in the midst of labour pains in Galatians 4. In some ways, these are unusual modes of expression that do not lend the subject to being read as “manly”. Do these images represent instances of gender subversion? Or do the contexts within which we find them in Paul's letters point more obviously to a rhetorical strategy? Either way, contemplations of the maternal Paul, particularly in visual form, are far from commonplace: how might a depiction of mother Paul influence one's understanding of the apostle?

5. Instructions for responding

Responses should give a visual indication of the piece being proposed as well as the intended approach e.g., a sketch, photographs, video, animation etc., accompanied by a cover letter (no more than one side of A4) that: describes how the proposed piece/s responds to the primary question in §3; what medium the depiction/s would take, approximate size, and requirements for exhibition; provides a link to an online portfolio of previous work.

Proposals may pitch for the entire budget of £10,000, in which case it is expected they would respond to most, if not all, of the themes outlined in §4. This could be in the form of one or several pieces of work. Alternatively, proposals may pitch for part of the budget in line with only one or several of the themes outlined in §4. In this case, pieces by more than one individual may be commissioned, to be displayed alongside one another at the exhibition. Collaborative proposals are also welcome, should a group of artists wish to collectively respond and meet the full scope of the brief that way. Quotes should be inclusive of any equipment or materials necessary for displaying the visual media, such as specific lighting

required, or audio-visual equipment integral to the piece. Quotes should be itemized to indicate anticipated material costs, honorarium, and delivery of the piece to a UK address.

Proposals should be sent electronically to g.emmett@sheffield.ac.uk and received no later than 11:59pm GMT on 11th March 2022. Those applying are encouraged to contact Grace Emmett in advance of the deadline to discuss the nature of their proposal.

6. Timescales

- 4th February 2022: invitation for proposals published.
- 11th March 2022: deadline for proposals (11:59pm GMT).
- w/c 21st March 2022: interviews (via Zoom) for shortlisted applicants. • w/c 28th March 2022: visual media commissioned; all respondents notified of outcome. • 1st August 2022: visual media completed and delivered, along with copy for accompanying public-facing description.

7. Clarification questions

Clarification questions are welcome, whether on the nature of the project delivery, further information concerning interpretations of the biblical texts identified above, or any other aspect of the exhibition. All questions should be directed to Grace Emmett at g.emmett@sheffield.ac.uk.

8. Evaluation criteria

Proposals will be considered according to the following criteria:

- a) Whether they fall under the available budget.
- b) Whether they meet the physical limitations of the exhibition, bearing in mind that the piece/s will need to be transported between different locations.
- c) The extent to which they demonstrate engagement with the project question. d) How suitable they are deemed to be for a broad audience (e.g., those who know Paul's letters well through to those with little awareness of Paul or his writings).

9. Introduction to SIIBS and the Sir Henry Stephenson Trust

The Sheffield Institute for Interdisciplinary Biblical Studies (SIIBS) continues the eight decades of academic biblical interpretation at the University of Sheffield, since 1947, which has always taken place from diverse secular and religious vantage points. SIIBS is a cross departmental institute dedicated to the study of biblical texts and languages and their intersection with ancient and modern issues.

The Sir Henry Stephenson Trust was originally established in 1912 by Lady Stephenson, widow of Sir Henry Stephenson who had taken a prominent part in the foundation of the University and who had died in 1904. Its original object was the establishment of a Hall of Residence in connection with the University for the benefit of men students, especially those intending to take Holy Orders. In the changed circumstances after World War II the main part of the endowment is now applied in accordance with a scheme under the Charitable Trusts Acts, to the provision of a Research Fellowship in the University. The first Fellow was appointed in 1951.