

SYNOPTIC GOSPELS
NT 500
Instructor: Harry O. Maier
Fall Term 2015

Office number: 604-822-9461

email: hmaier@vst.edu

Office Hours: Wednesday 1-2 PM

Purpose

To introduce students to a critical study of the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke) and related literature (for example, The Gospel of Thomas) and the issues entailed in interpreting them in their ancient context and appropriating their meaning for multiple contemporary contexts. Students will begin by addressing the critical and theological issues that arise from reading the Synoptic Gospels as historically-rooted texts. They will gain an acquaintance with various literary genres that constitute the Synoptic tradition, be introduced to the characteristic theology of each Gospel and begin to demonstrate an ability to engage the Gospels critically. They will learn to grow in critical awareness of their own pre-understanding and how contemporary context shapes interpretation of biblical texts. Additionally, class time will be given to a brief introduction and resources to learn the Greek alphabet with a view to working with lexicographical and exegetical tools. By the end of term students will be able to identify and distinguish the characteristic features of each Gospel, articulate a theology of critically informed biblical study, and demonstrate skill commensurate with an introductory graduate level of scholarly engagement in the uses of tools of exegesis and interpretation. As this is not a course that takes up the quests for the historical Jesus, the main focus of the course is on the appropriation of memories associated with Jesus as well as traditions arising from him. The course will explore the various uses of history, memory, tradition, and theology in the complex social matrices in which earliest Christianity began to emerge.

Competence Objectives:

1. Growing awareness of how one's cultural and social location results in a particular pre-understanding of the Bible, a developing ability to be self-critical in the recognition of one's pre-understanding, and a growing ability to describe how social location predisposes one to read the Synoptic Gospels.
2. An ability to recognize and define and the various genres that constitute the Synoptic Gospels and their traditions as exemplary of emergent Christian literary culture, practice, and social life.
3. An awareness of the differing theological, historical, and sociological voices of the Synoptic Gospels and their constituent traditions and the ability to identify and discuss the chief themes that constitute each Gospel.
4. Demonstration of exegetical skill in a critical examination of one Gospel genre and the ability to use contemporary critical tools of exegesis and biblical interpretation in a critical examination of a Synoptic Gospel passage.

5. A growing awareness of the historical and social factors that resulted in the production of the Synoptic Gospels and their place in the development of earliest Christianity.
6. A capacity to think critically about the quest for the historical Jesus and to identify the main quests and their strengths and weaknesses.
7. An ability to transliterate a text from ancient Greek to the Latin alphabet (English).
8. A capacity to use the critical tools discussed in the course in the critical examination of Synoptic texts.
9. Demonstrated ability to use Aland's Synopsis in comparing and contrasting parallel passages.
10. Demonstration of an elementary ability to define and use Source, Form, Redaction, Historical, and Literary Criticism.
11. Demonstration of an ability to draw contemporary meaning from a close exegetical reading of Synoptic texts.
12. An elementary acquaintance with the tools of historical Jesus scholarship, their working assumptions, and the strengths and weaknesses of the application.
13. A working ability to use library (paper and e-resources) in the formulation of bibliography for the task of informed exegesis and interpretation.

Format: One 3 hour class weekly with discussion. There will also be periodic podcasts to help set the scene for the weekly lecture and class discussion. It is a requirement that students watch these in preparation for the course.

Content

Introduction to Hermeneutics and New Testament Interpretation

Introduction to the Synoptic Problem (Source Criticism)

Introduction to identification of and critical engagement with genres constituting the Synoptic tradition and their theologies (Form Criticism)

Introduction to the Birth, Passion and Resurrection Narratives (Historical Criticism)

Introduction to the characteristic theology of Matthew, Mark, and Luke (Redaction Criticism; Literary Criticism — Reader Response; Post-Structuralist, etc.)

Evaluation

***If you don't bring your Bible, please do not come to class! Always bring Aland's Synopsis (see below) and assure that you either own your own copy or you have borrowed one you can annotate.**

1. 80% class attendance; class participation **This means that absence for more than two sessions, in whole or in part, will constitute a Not Approved for the course.** In the case of absence, the student will submit a 2-page single spaced précis of the prior week's lecture, submitted at the start of the following class.

2. Weekly, one-page journal reflection exercises focusing on the use of the synopsis. They will not be graded, but submission will be recorded. **In order to gain credit for this course assigned exercises must be submitted by the start of each meeting date and any missed assignments must be completed by the last day of class.** *Journals must be submitted electronically.* Please attend to the rubrics outlined in the guide to email submissions, which will be distributed early in the term.

3. One 3000-3750 words/ 12-15 page word paper (Text-to-Interpretation) that uses 10 bibliographical entries *beyond the course texts* as research resources on **either** a parable, a miracle story, a pronouncement story, **or** on legendary material (birth, passion, resurrection, transfiguration narrative), as that pericope relates with primary reference to **one** Gospel narrative. Papers that are less than or exceed 10% of the assigned length (not including bibliography) will be returned for remediation. Sheets with bibliography on each of these genres and descriptions of what constitutes a Text-to-Interpretation paper will be distributed in class. **The paper is due Friday, 11 December. This is a strict deadline and only in exceptional cases will there be extensions beyond this date. Students are encouraged to begin their work on their papers early in the term and to familiarize themselves with the Academic Calendar in requesting extensions.** Email submissions are required except in extraordinary circumstances and must conform to protocol regulations defined by the instructor. Only PDF or Microsoft Word versions will be accepted. **VST requires students to adhere to the stylistic protocols outlined in Kate L. Turabian, et al., eds. *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations, Eighth Edition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013).** An electronic citation guide may be found at www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html

Bibliographies that do not conform to that or another recognized format will be returned for correction. This is a research paper. Students are strongly encouraged to use resources available at Regent College as well as UBC, and to begin their research before Reading Week. All electronic resources must be properly cited.

4. Students who miss class are required to submit a 3-4 single-spaced précis of the lecture missed.

5. A weekly posting to the course-dedicated website listing 2 library resources related to further study of the focus of that week's lecture.

6. A final exam during exam week that will comprise Greek alphabet recognition, Synoptic passage identification, definitions, and short essay questions from a list of optional questions.

Prerequisites: None

Bibliography (In some instances students may secure used copies of these books by on-line distributors).

******Please note that Aland's *Synopsis* is required for the first day of class.******

Required:

A Bible – preferably a critical study Bible in a translation of choice (for example,

NRSV; NIV; New English Bible; etc.), but no paraphrases and no pocket-sized editions. An excellent Bible for the study of the Synoptic Gospels is Amy Jill-Levine, ed., *The Annotated Jewish New Testament*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). ISBN 978-0195297706

Aland, Kurt. *Synopsis of the Four Gospels* (Hendrickson, 2006). ISBN 978-1598561777

Fredriksen, Paula and Reinhartz, Adele. *Jesus, Judaism, and Christian Anti-Judaism" Reading the New Testament after the Holocaust* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 2002) ISBN 978-0664223281

Pregeant, Russell. *Engaging the New Testament: An Interdisciplinary Introduction* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998). ISBN 978-0800631154

Schussler-Fiorenza, Elisabeth. *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1994) ISBN 978-0824513573

Theissen, Gerd. *Shadow of the Galilean: The Quest for the Historical Jesus in Narrative Form* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003) ISBN 0800639006

Recommended:

Soulen, Richard N. *Handbook of Biblical Criticism*, 3rd ed. (Philadelphia: John Knox/Westminster, 2003). ISBN 978-0664223144