

SYNOPTIC GOSPELS
NT 500
Instructor: Harry O. Maier
Fall Term 2009

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Office Hours: Thursday 1-2 PM

Purpose

To introduce students to the critical study of the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke) and related literature (for example, The Gospel of Thomas) and the issues entailed in appropriating their meaning for the contemporary context. Students will begin by addressing the critical and theological issues which 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. 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.

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 as exemplary of early Christian literary culture.
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.

Format: One 3 hour class weekly with discussion.

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. In the case of absence, students are required to confer with the professor to offer make-up work for the lecture missed.
2. Weekly, one-page journal reflection exercises focusing on the use of the synopsis. These are due at the end of each class. They will not be graded, but submission will be recorded. **In order to gain credit for this course assigned exercises must be handed in on each meeting date and any missed assignments must be completed by the last day of class.** E-mail submissions are welcome. Please attend to the rubrics outlined in the guide to email submissions, which will be distributed early in the term.

3. One 3750-5000 words/ 15-20 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. 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, December 4. 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 welcome so long as they conform to protocol regulations defined by the instructor. Only RTF or Microsoft Word versions will be accepted.
4. A final exam that will comprise Greek alphabet recognition, Synoptic passage identification, definitions, and short essay questions from a list of optional questions.

Prerequisites: None

Bibliography

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.

Aland, Kurt. *Synopsis of the Four Gospels* (Hendrickson, 2006).

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

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

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

Recommended:

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