

English 131: The Bible as Literature

Final Exam: Take-home portion / Due by 5 pm on Monday, June 29th

* This is the “essay”-portion of the final exam. Keep in mind, though, that this is still an exam, and, in that sense, I am testing you to see how far you have come in the mastery of the course material. As befits essay questions, there are no specific “correct” answers here; but there are definitely answers that would show better or worse modes of engagement with the material (clearer or less clear, more specific or vaguer, deeper or more superficial). You do not have to produce “original” arguments for your responses (though some of the questions give you a lot of conceptual leeway). You do need to show me that you have read carefully—both from the Bible and from the secondary reading where appropriate—and that you have come to understand that reading within the patterns of interpretation and analysis we have deployed in the course so far.

** Because your responses are part of an exam and because **you have THREE responses to write**, I am not expecting lengthy treatises. One page is probably too short for the responses; but 2-3 **double-spaced** pages per question would probably be sufficient. I will NOT mark off for writing mechanics unless your phrasing gets in the way of communicating your ideas (obviously, clarity and precision must count for something, but commas or semi-colons in the wrong place or even run-on sentences or sentence fragments will not hurt your grade unless, as I say, the mechanics have a negative effect on my ability to follow your argument).

*** Please computer produce the responses and turn in a hard-copy; make sure your name is on the first page; and staple your pages together. You can single space and you can print on the back side (I have no problem saving trees). Obviously, if you single space, your single-page answer is equivalent to a 2-page double-spaced response.

**** Each response is worth one-third of the grade for this portion of the exam.

***** Please do not repeat material from one response to the next. Show me that you can work with different books, scenes, characters, passages, etc. Excessive repetition will definitely hurt your grade.

I. the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament: interrelationships / Do ONE

A. In her *History of God*, Karen Armstrong refers to the biblical God as one of the greatest ideas in history (note: she doesn't necessarily call “God” a good idea). Drawing on the Book of Job and at least one book from the New Testament, explain in what way or ways you have come to understand and / or appreciate what Armstrong might mean (you don't have to agree with her necessarily, and you can come up with your own way of phrasing the concept).

B. Discuss how and why the Book of Ruth and the Gospel of Luke both employ a “type-scene.” (They aren't necessarily employing the same type-scene and they may not be employing a type-scene for the same reason). Introduce your response with a least a general consideration of what type-scenes are and why they are part of biblical narrative.

C. Explain the evolution of the term Messiah from the Hebrew Bible to the New Testament. (The term is used many, many times in the New Testament; here are a couple of places in which it is referred to in the Hebrew Bible: 2 Samuel 5:3, 1 Kings 1:39; Psalm 89:20; but the concept functions even in places where the reference isn't explicit, as in Ezekiel 37).

II. Some questions about the Gospels / Do One

A. Luke 17:21, Jesus answers the Pharisees' question about when the kingdom of God will arrive by saying: "the kingdom of God is not coming with things that can be observed; nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There it is!' For, in fact, the kingdom of God is among you" (or you could translate "among you" as "within you" or "in your midst"). Explain why such an assertion makes sense in the context of Luke's Gospel (though you can also consider the Acts of the Apostles since Luke also wrote that) and then discuss how any of the other Gospel writers might have responded to it based on the evidence of their writings.

B. Take at least ONE story from the Gospels and explain in Crossanesque fashion the process that moves from the historical Jesus (that is, what happened in his lifetime or what he actually did or said) to the account as we actually read it in Mark, Matthew, Luke, and / or John. I want you to be very sensitive to the entire process (what Crossan calls original-transmissional-redactional). He gives several examples of this process (e.g. the leper-healing story or the account of the Last Supper in Mark) and it's fine to use the examples he gives as long as you show that you understand it in terms of the full process.

C. Robert Alter writes: "The monotheistic revolution of biblical Israel was a continuing and disquieting one. It left little margin for neat and confident views about God, the created world, history, and man as political or moral agent, for it repeatedly had to make sense of the intersection of incompatibles—the relative and the absolute, human imperfection and divine perfection, the brawling chaos of historical experience and God's promise to fulfill a design in history. The biblical outlook is informed, I think, by a sense of stubborn contradiction, of a profound and ineradicable untidiness in the nature of things" (154). Alter's book addresses the Hebrew Bible; for this question, discuss the validity of Alter's notion as it applies to at least two different Gospels.

III. The Jesus Story in a larger framework / Do ONE

A. How is the account Lawrence Wright provides in "Letter from Jerusalem: Forcing the End" related to Crossan's argument in his chapter "The Jordan is Not Just Water" (chapter 2 of his book) and to Fredriksen's argument in the e-reserve reading you did from *Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews*?

B. Explain the importance the year 70 CE (you can extend this slightly to 66-73, the dates of the First Roman War with Israel) to the development of the New Testament as a body of writing. Please show specific examples.

C. In what sense does the phrase "Bible as Literature" fit in with a study of the Jesus story as you have come to understand it?