

Paper #1

RELI 25: New Testament/Christian Origins, Spring 2009

Thesis and Outline due on Blackboard Friday March 20 8:30 am
Paper Due Monday March 23 9:30 am in class and on Blackboard

Write an essay 1200-1500 words in length responding to one of the following prompts.

- 1. Using comparative criticism, compare and contrast Jesus' trial, passion and crucifixion, and/or resurrection in the Gospel of John to Jesus' trial, passion, and/or resurrection in one other Gospel.** A good paper will focus on just one or two specific themes or issues. For example, themes/issues include the representation of Jesus, the roles of the Jewish leaders, the depiction of Pilate, the roles of the disciples, or many, many others. (Papers will not get extra points for comparing more than one Gospel; papers will not get extra points for comparing all three elements -- trial, passion and crucifixion, resurrection -- rather than just one.)
- 2. Using comparative and/or redaction criticism, compare and contrast Jesus' teachings in the *Gospel of Thomas* to the message of or about Jesus in one other Gospel.** (The paper need not try to cover everything in the *Gospel of Thomas*. You might wish to consider focusing on the message of emblematic passages in *Gospel of Thomas*, on passages that are shared between the two Gospels, or passages that are shared but slightly different, or passages/elements of the two Gospels that are completely different in wording but have similar messages/meanings.)
- 3. Using the literary-historical method, examine the role of women in the community of Jesus' earliest followers.** Be sure to consider differences as well as similarities among Gospels we have read. Consider: can you make firm conclusions about the women around Jesus (instead of just the perspectives of each individual Gospel writer), and if so how? (Unless you can provide specific citations from Ehrman or other course assignments, please avoid comparing the role of women in the Gospels to other forms of Judaism in this period; we haven't studied women in Judaism, so the paper will probably make egregious historical errors. If you've taken another course with me or Ancient Judaism from Prof. Lenzi and want a waiver on this ban, talk to me in advance.)
- 4. Using the literary-historical and reader-response methods, put yourself in the shoes of a Greco-Roman pagan living between 90 and 120 CE. You have heard or read stories about Jesus' life and death. What about Jesus would have been appealing to you, and why?** What inhibitions might you have to overcome in considering whether to become a follower of this movement? In other words, what might convince you to become a devotee of Jesus? Which Gospel/s is/are more persuasive to you and why? (Note: a good paper can focus only on one Gospel! You need not cover all of them!)
- 5. Using the thematic method, argue for or against the following statement: "The Gospel of John contains the highest Christology of the five main gospels we read (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Thomas)."** The paper need not examine all gospels thoroughly; you may focus on one or two you think are the most relevant for your discussion. A good thesis will not simply restate the prompt but will have an actual argument about Christology in the relevant gospel(s).
- 6. Using the comparative method, compare and contrast the representation of Jesus as a "Son of God" figure in the Infancy Gospel of Thomas to Jesus in one of the other Gospels.** The Infancy Gospel is "filling in" events in Jesus' life, but it does so with particular goals. Just like the other gospels, this one has a particular vision of who Jesus is and why he is important. What do these stories about Jesus' childhood say about his identity, especially as someone called a "Son of God" (a figure who appears in Judaism and Greco-Roman traditions)?

Content and argumentation:

- The essay should be governed by a clear, strong thesis. Note: a strong thesis is specific and focused, is not a summary, is not entirely obvious and requires argumentation to persuade, and is complex or original (original within the context of this course).
- The argument and thesis should be supported by the analysis of evidence from primary sources (ancient texts) in the course.
- The paper also should engage with Ehrman and other secondary sources (such as essays on assigned websites, Fredriksen), class lecture, and discussion.
- Extensive direct quotation is unnecessary; avoid long block quotes. This is a short paper, so please paraphrase where possible and directly quote key sentences and phrases.

- Try to avoid binary thinking—arguing that something is either X or Y, or assuming that since it is A it cannot be B. Try to be more nuanced. (For example, remember Luke’s point about Jesus: Jesus is a Jewish prophet *and* a “savior of all people” [Ehrman 121]—not either/or.)
- Definitely do avoid making gross overgeneralizations about Judaism.
 - ⇒ Remember the diversity of Judaisms in Jesus’ time
 - ⇒ Remember that the canonical Gospels have biased perspectives toward Judaism, since they are trying to show differences between themselves and some Jewish traditions or communities

The nuts and bolts:

- Use only the NRSV or RSV translation for the paper (and not any other)
- Do not do additional research for the paper.
- The assignment should be 1200-1600 words, typed, double-spaced, and paginated. **Papers that are shorter than the minimum, or papers that b.s. their way to the minimum, will be penalized. Please try not to go over the word limit, either.** (There is no extra credit for a longer paper.)
- Do not put your name on the paper. Provide only your ID#. (Be certain it is accurate.)
- Use parenthetical citations in the MLA style, e.g. (Ehrman 62).
- No Works Cited page is necessary.
- For ancient texts, use the following standard abbreviations for ancient texts followed by the chapter, colon, verse (where enumerated): Matt, Mark, Luke, John, *Gos. Thom.* So, (Matt 2:2) and (*Gos. Thom.* 114).

Resources

- *Gospel Parallels*, on reserve in the library
- Bible search engine (to search for a word, phrase, etc.; select NRSV): <http://bible.oremus.org/>

Reminder of grading criteria on syllabus

- A Reserved for excellence. The assignment, paper, exam, class participation, etc., demonstrates all the qualities of a B and demonstrates originality or complexity in thinking.
- B Assignments, exams, and papers fulfill all the requirements of the assignment and demonstrate strong competency in the course material. Essay exams and papers also demonstrate critical, analytical thinking about the material in the course, and provide a clear argument and thesis (where required) with documentation. (Essays and papers are neither simple summaries of the readings/films/etc. nor personal reflection ungrounded in the course material.)
 Typed assignments are well proof-read, with clear prose and accurate grammar.
 Participation and Reading Responses demonstrate preparation and critical thinking about the material. For class participation, students provide quality questions and comments AND listen and respond where appropriate to the professor and fellow students.
- C Assignments, exams, papers, participation, and Blackboard reading responses demonstrate preparation and competency in the course material but are deficient in one of the key elements of B quality assignments, etc.
- D Shows little competency in the subject or is missing more than one key element of B quality assignments, etc.
- F Demonstrates little to no competency in the subject matter and/or is missing several elements of B quality assignments, etc.

Papers submitted late will be penalized one letter grade per 24-hour period late. (E.g., an “A” quality paper that was due Wednesday in class but was submitted on Thursday at 8 am will receive a B; if submitted at 5 pm Thursday, it will receive a C.) If the paper copy is turned in to me on time in class, the paper will not be considered late *as long as the electronic version appears on Blackboard at some time during that day*. If the paper copy is not turned in to me on time in class, the paper is late. The penalty will be determined by the date/time the electronic version is submitted to Blackboard.

Students with late papers should submit their papers on Blackboard ASAP and then bring a hard copy to me.

Students must complete all papers and exams to pass the course.

*****All suspected plagiarism will be investigated and reported to Judicial Affairs.*****



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