

Fall 2015

ENGL 2377

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English 2377.601: The Bible as Literature

Fall Semester 2015, Tuesday 6-8:45 p.m.

Dr. Lisa Verner, LA 329

Office Hours: MWF 8-9 a.m., 11 a.m.-noon, and by appointment

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“Many modern readers know at least something about barbarians and the fall of the Roman empire, but many more readers will know a fair amount about early Christianity. To such readers I must now say, Would you please leave everything you think you know about Christianity at the door? We really must start over.”

James O'Donnell, from The Ruin of the Roman Empire

“But the cultures of the ancient Near East are the direct ancestors of our own in many respects, especially as mediated through the Bible. To take just one example, nearly every genre found in biblical literature, from the creation account and Flood story through proverb, parable, historical narrative, letter, law code, love poem, and prophecy, has an ancient Near Eastern antecedent or parallel. Hence, knowledge of the ancient Near East, and of the classical world as well, is essential for readers and interpreters of the Bible.”

Michael D. Coogan, from The Oxford History of the Biblical World

“Christianity ‘sat upon’ Judaism by claiming to be the ‘true Israel.’ Saint Paul is commonly regarded as the initiator of this claim . . . From a very early time, Jews were dismissed by Christians as custodians of a false Israel. The New Testament ‘sat upon’ the Old Testament, the New Covenant upon the Old, and so on. . . . That this pattern provides the structure of Jewish-Christian conflict only proves how deeply rooted in Judaism the Church is.”

James Carroll, from Constantine's Sword: The Church and the Jews

Texts: The Oxford Study Bible, eds. Suggs, Sakenfeld, and Mueller, Oxford UP.

ISBN 978-0195290004

Online texts for which the instructor will provide the URL

Course Goals: The course aims to give the student an understanding of the Bible as a literary and historical work, *not* as the revealed word of God. To this end we will study the Old and New Testaments, the Apocrypha, and two alternative (i.e., “heretical”) gospels. We will read and discuss depictions of heroism, love, spiritual and literal journeys, familial relations--in short, the subjects that make up much of the literature of all times and cultures. We will also consider these biblical texts as political and historical documents produced and interpreted under specific cultural circumstances.

Student Learning Outcomes: i.e., the stuff you will learn.

By the end of the semester, students will be able to: 1-identify and effectively analyze the literary elements of biblical texts; 2-construct an analytical argument about biblical literature; and 3-illustrate an understanding of the historical and cultural influences on biblical texts.

Grades: The student will write two 4-5 page papers and complete a midterm and final, each of which counts 20% of the student's final grade; the remaining 20% of the student's final grade will be come from short quizzes given at the beginning of each class. These quizzes will be entirely factual; they are meant simply to make sure that students are actually reading the assigned texts. Students will take thirteen quizzes, and the instructor will average the student's ten best quiz grades. Please note that if you are late or absent and miss a quiz, that zero will count as the lowest grade. Constructive class participation and improvement may also positively affect the student's final grade. Papers are due on the day indicated on the syllabus and on the paper assignment itself unless otherwise noted; late papers will not be accepted. The student must complete all four assignments in order to pass the class. Papers should be typed, double-spaced, with one-inch margins and twelve-point font; the midterm and the final should be written in ink on 8 ½ by 11-inch notebook paper. The upper left-hand corner should look like this:

Student's Name Here

Date

English 2377/Dr. Verner

Then double-space and type an appropriate title, centering it above the first paragraph. Then double-space, indent, and begin the essay. Paper grades are final. Whereas students are not required to use outside sources in their papers, should you choose to do so, all quotations, paraphrases, and summaries must be documented in MLA style, with in-text citations and a "Works Cited" page. All outside sources must be of a scholarly nature--that is, articles from peer-reviewed journals or books issued by respectable publishing houses. If the student wishes to use an internet source, the student must get approval from the instructor first. The use of unapproved online sources, *including dictionary and encyclopedia entries*, will result in a grade of F on the paper. (Journal articles retrieved from the UNO library's online databases are not actually internet sources and may be used without instructor approval.) Failure to document outside sources correctly in MLA style will result in an F on the paper. Guidelines for citing sources in MLA may be found in the *MLA Handbook* or through Purdue University's Online Writing Lab at <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/>.

Plagiarism: For reasons I am at a loss to explain, I have observed a greater incidence of plagiarized papers in ENGL 2377 than in any other course I have taught. Plagiarism would seem to run contrary to the very nature of this course, and if students are not afraid of the instructor, one would hope they might pause at incurring the wrath of the Almighty. Let me be absolutely clear on this point: papers determined to be plagiarized, in whole or in part, will receive a grade of zero, and the plagiarized paper, along with all evidence I have discovered substantiating the charge of plagiarism, will be sent directly to the dean of judicial and student assistance. Since students must complete both paper assignments in order to pass the class, a student who plagiarizes will receive an F in the course, regardless of the student's numerical average. I will not discuss this with the student first, nor will I give the student an opportunity for a "do-over." For an explanation of plagiarism and academic dishonesty, please go to <http://www.uno.edu/student-affairs-enrollment-management/documents/academic->

dishonesty-policy-rev2014.pdf . This explains the concept of plagiarism and its consequences fairly thoroughly. *Please note: since successful completion of all four assignments is required to pass the class, this means that any student who plagiarizes will receive a grade of F for the class.* Should you have any further questions about plagiarism and its consequences, please ask the instructor.

Attendance: Attendance is mandatory, especially in a class that meets once a week. The student is allowed one absence over the course of the semester, after which the student's final grade will be penalized one full letter grade for each additional day missed. To "excuse" an absence, the student must return to class with a note from a doctor. The instructor's attendance book is the final authority on student absences.

Student Conduct: Students are expected to behavior courteously to each other and to the instructor at all times. See the student code of conduct at:
http://sacs.uno.edu/compliance-certification/docs%5CUNO_Student_Handbook.pdf

Electronic Devices: All electronic devices—cell phones, Ipods, handheld video games, et cetera—should be turned off and put away for the duration of the class; the sole exception to this rule is the use of laptop computers for the purpose of taking notes **only**. Texting, playing video games, listening to music, checking email and surfing the net not only prevent students from devoting their full attention to lecture and discussion but are also ***profoundly rude behaviors that are a direct and personal insult to the instructor and to other students***. If the instructor detects a student texting, playing video games, or otherwise using technology for any unauthorized purpose during class, the instructor will deduct 2 points from the student's *final grade* for each infraction. In addition, the instructor does **not** give permission to have her classes videoed in any way, including with camera phones. The instructor will consent to voice recordings of discussion and lecture provided the student has asked for and received individual permission to do so. These provisions should not be taken lightly as an entire legal category, intellectual property law, is devoted to this sort of thing, and violation of the instructor's intellectual property rights is an actionable offense.

Disability Services: University policy provides, on a flexible and individualized basis, reasonable accommodations to students who have disabilities that may affect their ability to participate in course activities or to meet course requirements. Students with disabilities are encouraged to contact their instructors and/or the Office of Disability Services 248 University Center, Amy King, Director, Student Accountability, Advocacy Affairs, and Disability Services, (504-280-6222 or aaking@uno.edu) to discuss their individual needs for accommodations.

Disclaimer: This is neither Sunday school, nor Hebrew school, nor Catechism class. Whereas everyone's religious convictions will be respected, such convictions are not sufficient historical or *literary* proof when analyzing the Bible as a work of literature. Please be forewarned that you may find some interpretations odd, counter to your religious beliefs, or even offensive. Keep in mind that our consideration of the literary qualities of such adaptations is not meant as an affront to anyone's religious convictions.

Schedule of readings: All books of the Bible come from The Oxford Study Bible.

August

25 Introduction to class; go over syllabus; begin Genesis, chapters 1-4.

September

1 Continue Genesis; Exodus; Numbers 11-14.

8 Deuteronomy chapters 33 & 34; Joshua; Judges.

15 1 & 2 Samuel.

22 1 & 2 Kings.

29 Daniel chapters 1-6; Jonah; Ruth; and Esther.

October

6 Midterm exam.

13 Introduction to Apocrypha; 1 Maccabees. Paper one due.

20 Daniel and Susannah; Judith.

27 Introduction to New Testament; Matthew chapters 1-4 and Luke chapters 1-4.

November

3 Mark and Luke.

10 John; Acts; Galatians; Romans 1.

17 1 Corinthians; 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus.

24 *The Gospel of Mary* (translated by Karen King) available at http://www.maryofmagdala.com/GMary_Text/gmary_text.html ; *The Gospel of Judas* (translated by Kasser, Meyer, Wurst, & Gaudard) available at http://www.nationalgeographic.com/lostgospel/_pdf/GospelofJudas.pdf

December

1 Revelations; paper two due; review for final exam.

The final exam will take place in our classroom on Tuesday, December 8, 2015, 8-10 p.m. I do not know why the registrar's office in its wisdom scheduled the exam at this time. I am not happy about it either, so please do not complain to me about it.

Please be advised: Paper assignments and other important documents in addition to this syllabus will be posted on Moodle; students are responsible for reading ALL documents that appear on Moodle. The instructor will inform students when a new document has been posted; make sure to check Moodle on a regular basis.