NT 1003 Introduction to New Testament
Dr. Barbara Green, O.P., instructor (DSPT)
Fall 2015; 3 units
Mondays, Thursdays: 2:10-3:30; DSPT 18

Central Course Question: How can we best deepen our knowledge, understanding, and experience of the materials comprising the New Testament?

Course Outcomes: You will be appraised in terms of your capacity and skill to demonstrate the following:
• familiarity with the basic components of NT study, at a critical, graduate level;
• ability to contextualize the materials in terms of 1st century (and broader as needed);
• familiarity with the Hebrew Bible/OT as it adds depth to NT;
• ease and skill with critical tools needed for study of ancient texts;
• write short assignments with focus, clarity, precision, skill;
• suitable awareness of the impact of these texts on countless people over millennia;
• a capacity to connect these materials to your own life in some suitable way.

Course Requirements: Please expect to attend every class, prepared with the assignments done and ready to participate helpfully for the group (your attendance and preparation). Expect as well to complete five short writing assignments (due a week after we complete the section) and to have a summative question to respond to at or near the end of the course.

Required Materials: Please bring a NT (ideally, a Bible) to each class session, as well as any materials that I have provided you for a particular session. Our main textbook will be Mark Allan Powell, *Introducing the New Testament: A Historical, Literary, and Theological Survey* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009; ISBN is 978-0-8010-2868-7; $ 29; this book has a highly useful website to provide more resources. Recommended books are listed at the end of the syllabus, so that you can see what is reliable and available via library reserve. You need not bring the rest of the books, but let them rest and recover at home after you have spent intensive time with them before class, readying themselves for another round of study.

Grading: Your grade will accumulate as follows: One eighth (1/8) for each short written assignment, 1/8 for attendance and preparation both pre- and post- Reading Week, 1/8 your final question to discuss orally. Thus, they all count evenly, but a slope (up or down) will be noted.

Relevant Policies: Be advised of several:

• Students are expected to attend every class, prepared and participating helpfully for the whole group; if you need to miss a session, please inform the instructor by e-mail either before or shortly thereafter; no notification will be construed as an un-excused absence. When you miss a session, it is your responsibility to find out what you missed and get any handouts that were available; you might have a “buddy” that will do automatically this for you/yours for him or her.

• Expect that you will be asked to participate in every class, so be prepared for it.
• All written work must be presented in conformity with Kate L. Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007) (or if you have started your program since 2013, use the 8th edition). It will also be carefully written, edited as necessary, proofread, and presented in hard copy at the start of the class session when it is due.

• Assignments need to be completed and turned in on time and will be graded down if they are late; assume no revision option. Exceptions to deadlines are sometimes possible but rare and gained ahead of time. Anticipate that I can be helpful to you, but possibly not at the last minute. Schedule early what you might need.

• Be sure you know, understand, and follow the policies on academic honesty that are pertinent to GTU, DSPT and your own school.

• The GTU and DSPT policies relating to disability pertain and are available on websites.

**Course Communication:**

• To make an appointment with the instructor, please e-mail: bgreen@dspt.edu or telephone (510 883-2076). Brief matters can be handled after class. There are no standard office hours but your requests for consultation time will be addressed promptly. In general, I am available Mondays through Thursdays but not Fridays. My office is at DSPT, room 208.

• Assume that you will work collaboratively with the instructor (consultation appointments are encouraged), with other students, with a partner or two on assignments (if you wish); a list of your names and e-mail addresses will be available once you have released that information for us to share.

**Course Schedule:** This will hold in general; specifics will be provided as we arrive at each book.

**ONE: INTRODUCTIONS AND SETTINGS** [check assignment #1, due at the start of class #4]

class #1 September 10  
read: Powell chs. 1-2

focus question: how to begin this lap of study? what’s expected? what’s available?

relevant critical tools: historical and sociological information

anticipate class process: questions about the syllabus; discussion: coping with the gap between ourselves and the texts we will be reading
class # 2 September 14
read: Powell 2, 3

focus question: what is the value of distinguishing approaches and tools? suppose they feel stiff?

relevant critical tools: getting a sense of what’s available and how to know what to use

anticipate class process: we will practice on the tools, trying to get a feel for them

assignment # 1: As you read carefully Powell, chapters 1-2, name what you hear to be his question about how the world of us/you, reading can successfully connect with the much earlier world of NT origins. Then, with one example, develop the basic point that you think he wants to make, commenting in your last paragraph what you think of his mode of starting us off (due start of class # 4).

TWO: THE JESUS EVENT AS PRESENTED IN THE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS
[check assignment #2, given after class # 7, due at the start of class # 9]

class # 3 September 17
read: Mark
Powell chs. 4, 6

focus question:
what is a gospel, and how do they seem to have come into existence?
what is the basic framework or floor plan for Mark’s Gospel? (As you read through it, make an outline of it;)

relevant critical tools:
outlining Mark (literary, possibly historical [redaction])
let’s focus briefly on a few characters distinctive to Mark, to see how he draws them and why we respond as we do (this is a literary tool): look at the characters in Mark 5

anticipate class process:
we will talk about the relationships among the synoptic gospels;
we will practice on one of Powell’s quizzes (not to count it but to note our ways of studying)
we will spend some time on Mark’s order, since it will be shared, roughly, by Matthew and Luke)
class # 4-5 September 21, 24  assignment # 1 due at the start of class #4:

read:  Matthew
       Powell ch. 5

focus questions:
   in what ways is Matthew similar to Mark, and what sections of material are distinctively Matthean?
   what are some ways in which Matthew highlights the Old Testament aspect of what Jesus is saying and doing?
   what are the characteristic features of Matthew’s first discourse, the (so-called) Sermon on the Mount, chs. 5-7?

relevant critical tools:
we will note ways in which Matthew clearly relies on Mark for plan/structure, but how he adds his own insight as well, structuring into a set of five plus introduction and conclusion (literary);
we will also focus on the ancient and contemporary (historical and hermeneutical/existential/theological) question of Judaism and Christianity, noting how Matthew deals with Jewish leaders.

anticipate class process: we will after reviewing the ways in which Matthew is similar to and different from Mark, one on each day, spend time on Matthew’s Sermon on the Mount and on his tirade against Jewish leaders (23), so come prepared with questions on those passages

class # 6 and 7: September 28 October 1
read:  Luke
       Powell ch. 7

focus questions:
   how does Luke “customize” the basic synoptic frame?
   what are parables (and what are they not, many sermons to the contrary)?
   what are some features of the gospel that hint to us that Luke is thinking about the passing fo the first generation of Christians as they give way to a second (or third)?

relevant critical tools:
historical tools of source and redaction; literary tools of genre and characterization; historical and literary issues of how we, reading later, can detect pressing concerns of the evangelists’ day, if we are alert to them;

anticipate class process: we will work on the “journey narrative” of 10-19 and on some themes distinctive to Luke
assignment for this unit #2: Choosing one of the passages provided on your supplemental assignment sheet which you will receive as we manage this material, indicate how the interaction among characters works, calling attention to the passage’s position in its gospel, its use of characterization, its distinctive-to-the-evangelist features, its theology; conclude by naming your own best insight and by raising a question that was not explored. Due at the start of class # 9.

THREE: EARLY DAYS AFTER THE RESURRECTION
[check assignment #3, given after class # 9, due at the start of class # 11]

class # 8 and 9: October 5, 8
read: Acts: for the first day, read chs. 1- and for the second, start at 9 and go to the end Powell ch.9

focus questions:
how does Acts present challenges of moving on in the ostensible absence of Jesus? how does Luke’ re-use of patterns suggest relationships among characters and events?

how is Paul shown as, in many ways, the central character in the early church? what are the contours of his life, in general, as presented here? what adventures does he have, and how do they relate to those of Jesus and other leaders?

relevant critical tools:
historical/social data and perspective of the decades after the ascension of Jesus literary patterning in order to suggest theological points blend: envisioning the life of Paul as presented here (cf. as discernible in the letters) feminist criticism and Luke

anticipate class process:
we will work with the basic character of the sub-genres of this book, which is distinctive in the NT canon, noting some of its plausible sources; we will talk about some of the particular problems associated with the life of Paul as presented in Acts, since there are problems here that don’t match what Paul tells us in the letters; we will take on the question of early Christians and the Roman empire

assignment for this unit #3: In Acts, it can be said that God is the main character, pictured as acting powerfully behind the scenes. Select one of the passages provided on the supplement sheet and respond to this general assertion as guided by information on that sheet. (Note: the syllabus, drafted in summer, has a difficult time imagining exactly where we will be in terms of our class process, hence the need to refine the assignment a bit as we get closer); due at the start of class # 11.
FOUR: CONCERNING AND CONTENTIOUS MATTERS HANDLED BY WAY OF CORRESPONDENCE

class #10 and 11 12 13 : October 12, 15, 19, 22  New Testament Letters: Paul
see end of class # 13 for assignment # 4, on Paul, due at the start of class # 15

class # 10 October 12:
read:  Paul: 1 and 2 Thessalonians
Powell chs. 10, 11, 19, 20

focus questions:
what’s urgent for us to know before we start the study of Paul’s letters?

why do we need to appreciate the particular context of these two early letters, to know what is worrying them and how Paul responds—when it may not be an urgent question for us?

relevant critical tools:  historical contexts; historical/literary information on matters of eschatology and 1st century beliefs and hopes; form/genre (both historical and literary); the “authenticity” question (since many hold that 2 Thessalonians is not “authentic”

anticipate class process:
come prepared with any questions you need to raise about the background issues (provided you on a separate sheet);
be ready to hear the letters as dialogical: Paul responding to concerns he knows his community has; look for what Timothy seems to have reported to Paul; what corrections Paul offers; how the Thessalonians seem to have become even more panicked; how Paul tries to straighten them out

for class # 11 October 15:
read:  Paul: 1 and 2 Corinthians and Philemon
Powell chs. 13, 14, 22

focus question:
how is this pair of letters, like the Thessalonian correspondence, dialogical, with our missing some of the dialogue? What is at stake? See if you can name what Paul is most eager to convince them to correct, what he thinks their basic misstep is;
how does ethics, for Paul, proceed from his basic set of beliefs? how does he offer this blend? what kind of literary language does Paul use, and how does it develop into theology?

in reading Philemon, which we will not be able to spend a lot of time on, see if you can anticipate some ways in which Paul’s rhetoric/language is powerful and persuasive in this matter; is he radical or conservative about the issue of slavery among Christians?
relevant critical tools:
all the historical information we can bring to bear, including source and redaction skills as well as macro information; the peculiar (distinctive) sense of classic (Greco-Roman) rhetoric and how it works in letters, which are specific and also float free (now, probably then sometimes too);

anticipate class process: we will try to hear the voices in the letter (Paul’s and the Corinthians’) and also to single out the main support beams of theology/ecclesiology here (resurrection and Eucharist)

class # 12 October 19:
read: Paul Romans and Galatians
       Powell chs. 12, 15

focus question:
what appear to be the main teachings of Romans, as we understand what the circumstances of its writing were?
how have some famous interpreters read it from their own angles of perception?
why do some of the same issues receive much stronger treatment in Galatians?
how does some of the newer work on these letters offer us new insight into what Paul is saying to those to whom he is speaking?
what can we say useful about the long and bitter heritage of anti-Judaism occasioned by the (mis)understanding of some of this language?

relevant critical tools: all of them, including reception of these difficult things over the lifetime of the Judaism as it overlaps with the Christian church

anticipate class process: we will work to make these two major Paul themes as clear as possible

class # 13 October 22:
read: Paul Captivity (Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians) and Pastorals (both Timothy, Titus)
       Powell chs. 16, 17, 18, 21

focus question: what other key points does Paul propose, and how are they both situational and also of ongoing importance?

relevant critical tools: all of our Paul skills, and relatively little focus on the “authenticity” question, which seems among the least important ways to spend our time

anticipate class process: since we will be managing six letters, granted small ones, we will look for the most crucial teachings of each
assignment # 4: You will write on one key theme in Paul, indicating why it is best understood as both specific to its community and general as well, and how Paul is both clear on it and spacious. You will have a syllabus supplement for it; due at the start of class # 15

class # 14-15: November 2, 5  Other Named Letters [= not Paul or John]
read:  James, 1-2 Peter, Jude
       Powell ch. 24-26, 28

focus questions:
how do these letters resemble and re-intonate other biblical passages?
does James contradict anything in Paul?
why was Martin Luther somewhat cool toward this letter of James?
who are 1 Peter’s aliens and exiles?
are there any problems in honoring the emperor?
what are the household codes?
what does it seem the letter of Jude is talking about?
can you feel the passage of time and the shifts of generations?

relevant critical tools: intertextuality; reception

anticipate class process: we will talk about the issues raised in the letters but also look at ways in which they re-position other biblical language (this is a major feature of biblical writings);

if, by chance, we need more time on Paul, we will add that in here (as we start these letters)

FIVE: LATER PERSPECTIVES, ISSUES AND TEXTS  Attributed to John (plus Hebrews)
       see end of class # 18 for assignment # 5, on John, due at the start of class # 20

class # 16-18: November 9, 12, 16
read:  Gospel of John (and the three Johannine letters)

class # 16: November 9
read:  John 1-12, with particular focus on chs. 4 and 9
       Powell ch. 8

focus questions:
how is this gospel organized and does it proceed?
what does it lack that was present in the synoptics, and what does it offer that they lack?
map the encounters between Jesus and others, especially in 4 and 9, and note how the evangelist sets up the dialogue in terms of symbols; how does it work?
relevant critical tools:
primarily literary theological, but within the historical context;
the double-focus of gospels as set in the 30s but written at the end of the century, decades later;
challenges to appropriation

anticipate class process:
we will do close study of the two encounters after considering the structure of this half of the gospel

class # 17: November 12:
read: John 13-21, with particular focus on 13 and 20

focus questions:
how does the “supper scene” (13-18) proceed—offering what key points? omitting what event?
why is the washing of the feet said to be the equivalent of the Eucharist?
how does the Johannine arrest, trial and death differ from what they synoptics said?
what major theological/spirituality points are offered in ch. 20?

relevant critical tools:
as above

anticipate class process:
we will do close study of the two encounters after considering the structure of this half of the gospel

class # 18: November 16:
read: the three Letters of John
Powell ch. 27

focus questions:
what do the letters suggest about the circumstances and experience of the community of “John”?
how do the letters give us more insight into some of the issues we reviewed in the synoptic gospels (so as set in the lifetime of Jesus) and some of the stresses that Paul tells us about?

relevant critical tools: synthesis of historical and literary material

anticipate class process:

assignment # 5 With reference to tensions visible in John 9 and hinted at in the Letters (e.g., n Jn x), talk about the issues that seem to be emerging by the end of the first century when these materials were likely produced; due at the start of class # 20
class # 19: November 19: The Letter to the Hebrews
read:  the Letter to the Hebrews
       Powell ch. 23

focus questions:
what do we need to understand about OT cult in order to understand the claims made in this
piece (not really a letter, likely not to Hebrews)?
what are some of the hazards of the "better than" set of claims that runs through the letter?
how is the piece addressed to Hellenists: both knowing a lot about Judaism and also able to
appreciate Greek/Roman modes of arguing?

relevant critical tools:
historical: understanding and appreciating ancient (biblical) cult praxis as best we can

anticipate class process:
we will struggle to get access to the base the author presumes we have

class # 20-21: November 23 and 30
read:  Revelation
       Powell ch. 29
       articles on the genre (Grabbe, Helyer)

focus question:
how can we best manage this book?
what difference does genre make, to read it as an apocalypse?
what sorts of conventions does it assume we understand?
why does this sort of literature (and its offshoots) appeal?

relevant critical tools:
historical setting that is being referred to in the codes of the book;
literary symbols, especially those that come from the earlier biblical material;
back to the early tool we use of being clear about the structure of the book (literary);

anticipate class process:
the best thing is (for our first class) to read the whole book and make a chart of its structure (feel
free to be assisted by a commentary; Powell, oddly, doesn’t give us a structure or much of
a detailed plan);
for our second session we will look more closely at a few passage (to be determined);
SIX: SPECIAL QUESTIONS AND CONCLUSIONS
We will see what’s needed here to allow us to revisit key issues or develop some additionally

classes #22-24: December 3, 7, 10
read:
focus question:
relevant critical tools:
anticipate class process:
assignment

class #25 December 14

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Available for your further consultation: Recall that your Powell presents great bibliographies for
every topic relevant; more locally, the following may be found on GTU closed reserve; on
general library reserve/library use only, or on the exegesis shelf (in each case, basically “there”
when you go to use them).

general: (as we approach these topics, I may specify additional material)

_________. The Jewish Annotated New Testament. NRSV translation with extensive notes,
provided by Jewish NT scholars.

exegesis shelf)

Abingdon, 2013. (on order for lib res)

Green, Joel B. And Lee Martin McDonald, eds. The World of the New Testament: Cultural,

Powell, Mark Allan. Jesus as Figure in History. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2d.
on Synoptic Gospels and Acts:


on Paul:


on John (Gospel, letters, Revelation):

Schneiders, Sandra M. *Written that You May Believe: Encountering Jesus in the Fourth Gospel*.

on other: