

**English 222/ Religious Studies 216**  
**Literature of the Bible**  
**Fall 2001**  
**M-W, 3:30-4:50**  
**Science 104**

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The world is charged with the grandeur of God.  
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;  
It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil  
Crushed. Why do men then now not reck his rod?  
Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;  
And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil  
And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell: the soil  
Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.

And for all this, nature is never spent;  
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;  
And though the last lights off the black West went  
Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs--  
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent  
World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.

So wrote Gerard Manley Hopkins in perhaps the most concise poetic summary of the Bible ever written. The world of the Bible--Jewish and Christian--is a world charged with the forceful personality of Yahweh. This single, "jealous" God--whose name is unpronounced in Hebrew and means "I am that I am," or simply "I am"--has brought all things into being. And he is continually active, shaping and sometimes invading the trade-seared lives of his recalcitrant human creatures. For biblical writers as for Hopkins, all history--from the first fresh dawn of creation, to the last lights off the black west, to the brown brink morning of a new heaven and a new earth--is a process fatally marred by human beings, but also redeemed by the ever-bright wings of the brooding Spirit of God.

Unsurprisingly, this biblical way of seeing has inspired not only poets, but also composers and visual artists from the dawn of the biblical era. One can still see fourth-century frescoes of Christ the Good Shepherd on the walls of Roman catacombs; and the biblical narratives of Yahweh's intervention in human life have been given color and form by countless Jewish artists, as well as by Christian artists as diverse as Giotto, Fra Angelico, Botticelli, Michelangelo, Rembrandt, and Bernini. Indeed, the Bible is one of the two great well-springs of European music, literature, and art. Works ranging from *Paradise Lost* to Camus' *The Fall* must be understood in its light. And the same is true for works of art, from Giotto to Mark Rothko and Paul Klee.

Moreover, the Bible is *itself* (among other things) a work of art: a compendium or anthology of literary texts of incredible richness and variety. Within its covers we will find cosmology, epic,

heroic and domestic tales, tragedy, lyric, and wisdom literature; narrative, parable, epistle, and apocalypse.

Thus we will be looking at biblical narrative and images through two complementary lenses. Primarily (because time is limited and some "coverage" is essential), we'll look closely at the biblical texts themselves--a large and representative sampling from both the Hebrew Bible (to Christians, the "Old Testament") and the Christian New Testament--placing them in as full an historical context as possible. But at various points throughout the course, we also will be looking at literary reflections of those texts, and/or at images created in response to those texts by musical or visual artists. In doing so, we will be grappling with several questions: What are the points of similarity and contrast between visual and verbal ways of "seeing" divine (or any) reality? How have familiar biblical stories been understood at different points in history and in different countries--and how have those different understandings produced different works of art? What biblical texts have seemed most important and revelatory to artists at different points in art and literary history? And how have visual and verbal traditions influenced and affected each other, as artists in both have sought to convey their experience of an eternal, invisible God who has acted, visibly, within the ever-changing stream of human time?

At the outset, I want to make two *caveats*--essential, I think, to the study of a literary text that also happens to be inspired scripture to literally millions of people; an anthology of literature that also claims to be not just words about God but the Word of God itself.

Some of you reading these words may yourselves be believing Jews or Christians, interested in deepening your faith through study of your sacred scriptures. Others of you may be agnostic, even hostile toward religious faith, yet are taking this course as a "background" for further study in literature and the arts. Over the years I have been teaching this course I have normally found it a joyful and enriching experience. But I also occasionally have been accused, on the one hand, of seeking converts to the Christian faith; and on the other hand, of denigrating scripture by teaching it as "myth." I can say with complete honesty that I have sought to do neither. I have taught (and do teach) the Bible with the same "candor," the same imaginative sympathy, as I do other great texts. That is, I try to read it from within, with respect and even empathy for its presuppositions, even when those presuppositions are not my own.

I cannot deny that over time these texts have come for me to have great ethical and aesthetic (and in some sense even spiritual) power. I am not, however, a doctrinaire believer. (Lately, but only in the broadest and most cautious sense, I have been calling myself a Christian.) What I hope I have in common with each of you--Jew or Gentile, believer or agnostic--is that I *am* a human being deeply responsive to Jewish and Christian literature, art, and music. For what I ask of each of you is exactly what I ask of myself: a respectful openness to the ancient and difficult readings before us. I ask this realizing full well that, for all of us, that openness is "edgier" than with purely secular texts.

I also want to apologize in advance for what might seem a Christian bias in my approach to "Old Testament" works. As my remarks above suggest, I fully recognize that Torah is the *Bible* of the Jewish faith, not a preamble to something more; and I very much appreciate alternative readings offered by my Jewish students. Having said that, however, what I am ultimately presenting here is the well-spring (along with Greek myth) of European civilization--which, in spite of *enormous*

Jewish and Muslim contributions, was also (sometimes for better, sometimes for worse) a dominantly Christian one. That is to say that European art and literature and music is woven of the Bible as a text in which "the Old Testament conceals what the New Testament reveals"--the story that became, for instance, Handel's *Messiah*.

With those caveats firmly in place, then, let's enjoy together what is probably the richest and most varied collection of literature in the world.

**Required Texts:**

Gail R. O'Day and David Peterson, eds. *The Access Bible: New Revised Standard Version with the Apocrypha*. New York: Oxford UP, 1999.

Stephen L. Harris. *Understanding the Bible*, 4th ed. Toronto: Mayfield, 1997.

**Required Work:**

1. Reading assignments to be completed before the dates for which they are assigned (i.e. in time for class discussion--although this course may feature more lecture than some other courses).
2. Prompt and regular attendance at all class sessions, including one evening film viewing (Wed., Sept. 26 at 7:00 p.m.).
3. A reading journal in which you keep notes and generate questions on each day's readings, as well as on each day's lecture and discussion. This journal will be due at the end of the course, but may be checked in between as needed.
4. Study questions growing out of each day's reading--due each day in typed form at the beginning of class. These questions will be graded on their quality, and cannot be made up if missed.
6. Four short response papers (2-3 pages each).
7. A midterm and a comprehensive final exam--objective and essay.

**Grading Factors:**

1. Attendance, preparation and discussion	15
2. Journal and Study Questions	20
3. Response papers	30
4. Midterm	15
5. Final exam	<u>20</u>
	100%

**Grading Options:**

1. A - F

## 2. Credit/No Credit (non-majors only)

### **Manuscript Style:**

Papers are to be typed and printed on a letter-quality or laser printer. The manuscript must be double-spaced, with one-inch margins and 12-point type (courier is a standard for size; larger type and margins are unacceptable), and must be handed in on single sheets of 8 1/2 X 11 white bond paper, stapled in the upper left-hand corner. Any documentation must follow the *MLA Handbook*, copies of which are available both at the library and in the bookstore.

**Note:** Written work will be marked down one half grade for each class day after the due date.

### **Academic Honesty:**

Plagiarism occurs whenever the true author of a piece of prose, of an idea, or of a line of thought is not the person who claims to be the author. Plagiarism can occur in varying degrees, and will be penalized--in this class as in all others at the College--in proportion to its severity. Papers in which plagiarism is sufficiently serious will receive an F, and student's name will be turned in to the Dean of Students. A repeated act of plagiarism will result in an automatic F in the entire course, in addition to any action taken by the Office of Student Life (which can include suspension from the College).

A particularly common and egregious form of plagiarism is the down-loading of materials from papers posted by others on various web sites. Please be aware that faculty have the tools to identify any work unfairly borrowed from the web--as well as other sources.

If you are in doubt about the need for documentation of borrowed material, please feel free to consult me or any other professor in the department. Also be sure that you have mastered the material in the 2001-2003 *College Catalog*, 25-28. Ignorance of this material will not be regarded as an excuse.

### **ADA Policy:**

If you have any disabling condition that may require some special arrangements in order to meet course requirements, please begin by contacting the Office of Learning Support Services. I will be happy to provide any accommodations regarded by the Director as appropriate, but am not in a position to offer such accommodations independently. Short of actual accommodations, however, please feel welcome to talk with me about anything I can do to help you succeed in the course.

### **The Schedule (subject to change as necessary):**

**Sept. 10** Introduction to the course and the biblical monomyth.

- 12 Bookends: The Alpha and the Omega. Read: Genesis 1 and 2; John 1.1-5; Revelation 21 and 22.1-5. Also read Harris, 1-33.
- 17 As By One Man: the Fall and Protevangelion. Read: Genesis 3-11; Luke 1.26-38; Romans 5.12-19; Romans 8.18-25; and Revelation 12.1-17. Also read Harris, 63-84. (Part II, 37-62, highly recommended.)
- 19 Covenant People: the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; Sarah, Rebecca, and Rachel. Read: Genesis 12-50 (the rest of the book); and Hebrews 11.1-22. Also read Harris, 84-94.
- 24 Hebrew Epic: the Exodus, Part I--the Great Escape. Read: Exodus 1-15; and Psalms 105, 114, 136. Also read Harris, 94-99.
- 26 The Exodus, Part II--the Wilderness Journey and Decalogue. Read: Exodus 16-40 (rest of the book); Numbers 13-14 and 20-24; Deuteronomy 1-11 and 31-34 (end of the book). Also read Harris, 99-115.

**Evening (7:00): Screening of Krzysztof Kieslowski's *Dekalog*, episodes 1, 2, and 10 (three hours). Meet in the Ball Cinema (Hoover 100). Refreshments will be served.**

- Oct.** 1 Versions of Heroism in the age of the Judges: Samson and Ruth. Read Judges 13-16 (Samson); the book of Ruth. Also read Harris, 116-128; 215-19.
- 3 The Birth of the Monarchy: Samuel, Saul, and David. Read: 1 and 2 Samuel (entire); 1 Kings 1.1-2.11; and 1 Chronicles 10-29. Also read Psalms 51 and 103, and Harris, 128-136. Dekalog response due (Response # 1).
- 8 Solomon in All his Glory: Read Matthew 6.19-33; 1 Kings 2-11; 2 Chronicles 1-9. Also read Harris, 136-55.
- 10 Grace under pressure in ages of exile and domination: Daniel, Susanna, Judith, and Esther. Read: Daniel 1-3; Susanna, Apocrypha, pp. 173-75; and Bel and the Dragon, Apocrypha, pp. 216-18; Daniel 4-12 (rest of the canonical text). Then read Esther (OT, pp. 624-33; Apocrypha, pp. 38-51); and Judith (Apocrypha, pp. 19-37). Also read Psalm 137 and Harris, 156-61; 221-23; 235-39; 245-55; 258-59.
- 15 Grace under pressure and comic Theodicy: Tobit. Read Tobit (entire), Apocrypha, pp. 1-18, and Harris, 255-57. Second response paper due.
- 17 Theodicy (2): Job. Read Job (entire). Also read Psalms 22, 39, and 88, and

Harris, 195-98; 200-207.

22 Midterm Exam (comprehensive to date).

24 Hebrew Lyric Poetry: The Psalms. Read Harris, 212-15. Then read Psalm 29; 121, 126; 8, 19, 24, 47, 84, 98, 100, 136, 148, 150; 1; 63 and 130; 42-43, 44; 23, 46, 91, 103, 104, 121, 139.

29 Hebrew Epithalamion: The Song of Songs. Read the Song of Songs (Jerusalem Bible hand-out). Also read Harris, 219-20.

31 Hebrew wisdom: the proverbs of "Solomon" and the sages. Read Proverbs 1-31 (entire book), and Harris, 198-200. Paying special attention to the personification of Wisdom in chapters 1 and 8, write a paragraph defining wisdom and bring it as the basis for class discussion.

**Nov.** 5 Hebrew wisdom into Greek: Wisdom and Ecclesiasticus (or the Wisdom of Jesus the Son of Sirach). Read Wisdom (or "The Wisdom of Solomon"), Apocrypha, 52-79; and Ecclesiasticus (Sirach) Prologue; 1-6; 10-18; 24-26; 33-35; 37-41; 51 (Apocrypha, 80-156). Also read Harris, 261-65, and 278-90.

What continuities do you see in the personification and definition of Wisdom? What do you see that is new to the tradition?

7 Vanity of Vanities: The Preacher. Read Ecclesiastes (entire book) and Harris, 208-11. Third response paper due.

12 Introduction to New Testament Literature: The Infancy Narratives and the Magnificat. Read: John 1.1-5, 1.9-14, 1.16-18; Colossians 1.15-20; Philippians 2.5-11; Matthew 1.1-2.23; Luke 1.1-2.52. Also read Harris, 307-316; 341; and 358-59. (Harris' full commentary on the three synoptic gospels, 317-65, optional but recommended).

14 The Nativity in Art and Literature. Read: hand-outs of Nativity texts. Special slide presentation.

19 New Testament Wisdom: the "Sermon on the Mount." Read Exodus 20.1-21; Matthew 5-7; Luke 6.17-49 (end of the chapter). Also read Harris, 334-35; 343-46; 352-56.

21 The Kingdom of God: Teachings and Parables of Jesus. Read: Matthew 13; 20.1-16; 21.18-22.14; Luke 10.25-37; 11.1-13; 12.13-34; 13.6-9; 13.18-30; 14.7-16.31 (end of the chapter); 18.1-34.

26 Word Become Flesh: The Gospel of John (1). Read: John 1.1-11.54. Also read Harris, 365-80.

28 The Gospel of John (cont.). Read: John 11.55-21.25. Fourth response paper due.

**Dec.** 3 New Testament History and Epistle: Paul and the Apostles. Read Acts 1-2 (on the birth of the church); Paul's letter to the Colossians 1.15-20 and 3.1-4; Philippians 2.5-11; Romans 5-8; I Corinthians 12-13; II Corinthians 2.14-3.18; and Ephesians 1-3. Also read Hebrews 1 and review Hebrews 11-12.2. Harris, 400-449 and 456-59, highly recommended.

14 5 New Testament Apocalypse: A New Heaven and a New Earth. Read: Matthew 22.1- to and Matthew 24-25; I Thessalonians 4.13-5.11; I Corinthians 15; and the Revelation John (entire). Also read Harris, 468-78.

7 Friday. Optional review of course.

**Dec.** 13 (Thursday) 1:00-3:00, Final Exam.