RS 305 : Exegetical Papers

Your writing assignments for the semester are to write three short exegetical papers, of slightly increasing length each time.

What is an exegetical paper? Exegesis is the art of "drawing out" the meaning of a particular text. It is a word used especially by biblical scholars who are attempting to understand ancient religious texts on their own historical and theological terms, rather than on the terms of the present-day reader. (In fact, the antonym of exegesis is "eisigesis," which means "reading into" a text, or seeing things in the text that may not really be there.)

These three short commentaries (worth 10, 15, and 20 points each) will acquaint you with the literature of biblical commentary, give you practice thinking and writing exegetically, and will help you delve deeper into the New Testament. They will also give you practice using the insights of cultural anthropology that we learned at the beginning of the semester (Malina). The subject matter should relate to the biblical books we are reading and discussing in class. In other words, try not to jump ahead, or fall behind.

Due Dates

- Oct 1, 10 points, 2-3 pp. : Select from one of the following: 1 & 2 Thessalonians; 1& 2 Corinthians; Galatians and Philippians
- Nov 5, 15 points, 3-4 pp. : Select from one of the following: Mark, Matthew, Luke, Acts
- Dec 3, 20 points, 4-5 pp. : Select from one of the following: Johannine Literature; Pastoral letters; General Letters

Format

While you can write in almost any format you like (as long as its narrative, and not poetry!), your paper should include the following elements, and not be longer than the allotted pages:

1. Introductory paragraph which sets the stage somehow
2. The historical context: this might be the "occasion" on which Paul wrote a letter; the setting in which the gospel was written; the audience for whom the letter or gospel was written; any historical details that will put the passage in the proper historical context. If possible, please incorporate the insights from cultural anthropology we studied from Bruce Malina.
3. The literary context: put the passage in the context of the bigger picture. This means, where does it occur in the book you are studying (beginning? middle? end?); how does it advance the plot or argument of the writer? is it setting the
The textual context: are there any words that are problematic? translation difficulties (such as we saw with Philippians 2:5-6)? do your Bible or commentary indicate any issues or questions? This is optional, but worth considering.

Your analysis of what the passage means, given the contexts you have identified above. I want to see your analysis, not that of the biblical commentators!

Requirements

1. I'd like you to use at least one different biblical commentary for each assignment. (This means you should end up reading at least three different commentaries by the end of the semester.) This will help you with the historical, literary, and textual contexts noted above. Acceptable biblical commentaries are listed in the course reader. Do not use any online commentaries without prior approval! Your paper will be marked down if you do.

2. I'd like you to read least two different translations for each assignment you complete. (This means you should end up reading six different Bibles by the end of the semester.) This will help address the textual context noted above.

3. Make sure you read the entire biblical book in which the passage occurs. Study the chapter in which it occurs and the chapters immediately preceding and following your passage. This will help you with the literary context.

4. The paper should give credit to any sources you quote or use. Here are some examples of what I mean:

Bible : Source and Translation

"As Jesus and his disciples went on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha welcomed him in her home" (Luke 10:38, GNB).

Commentary

According to The Women's Bible Commentary, the traditions about Martha and Mary have given women readers mixed signals about their roles (Women's Bible Commentary, 288).

If you quote from a commentary, rather than paraphrase or report, be sure to use quotation marks!!
5. The paper should be written in proper English style and grammar. Use Spell-Check, and then READ your paper out loud. You will catch grammatical and spelling errors when you HEAR your paper.

6. Some sample exegetical papers are posted online. If you have questions, see me. I am happy to read a draft prior to your submitting the paper for credit.