Psychological Insight into Scripture: New Directions in Biblical Studies

An introduction to psychological biblical criticism, exploring the contributions of analytical psychologists C. G. Jung, Sigmund Freud, and Viktor Frankl, along with insights from cognitive, developmental and behavioral psychology, toward an understanding of the human psyche (soul) and its role in the history of the Bible and biblical interpretation. It will examine biblical stories (from Adam and Eve to the Wedding at Cana), biblical religious experience (dreams, visions, conversion, speaking in tongues) and biblical portraits (Ezekiel, Paul, Moses, and Jesus). It will also study the transaction between biblical texts and readers, noting therapeutic and pathogenic effects. Activities include sessions with Walter Wink’s “transforming Bible study.”

“Everything to do with religion, everything it is and asserts, touches the human soul so closely that psychology least of all can afford to overlook it.” - C. G. Jung

“The fate of the world is determined by what happens in the human soul.”
- Hans Carossa

“We do not yet grasp what historical forces brought forth and determined early Christianity. But beside and within this external history there is an inner history . . . . Anyone who thinks that this religion can be illumined historically and factually without psychological reflection is just as much in error as one who pretends that everything about this religion can be said in this fashion.”
- Gerd Theissen

“. . . Words not only convey something, but are something . . . [they] have color, depth, texture of their own, and the power to evoke vastly more than they mean; . . . words can be used not merely to make things clear, . . . but to make things happen inside the one who reads them or hears them.”
- Frederick Buechner

Books for Purchase
- Miller, John W. *Jesus at Thirty: A Psychological and Historical Portrait*. Minneapolis: Augsburg/Fortress, 1997. (=Miller)
Objectives

1. To understand Scripture as a soul book, produced by the soul (psyche), addressed to the soul (psyche), for the care and cure of the soul (psyche). The word psyche occurs over a hundred times in the New Testament, referring to the living “self.” This means that the Bible is to be seen not only as the product of historical, social, literary, and revelatory processes. It is quintessentially the product of a psychic process in which conscious and unconscious factors are at work in the biblical authors and their communities, in the texts they have produced, in readers and interpreters of these texts and their communities, and in the historical “effects” Scripture has had on the lives, minds, and “souls” of individuals and cultures over the centuries, for both good and ill.

2. To come to an informed historical and semantic understanding of the words “soul” and “psyche” in Aristotelian, Greco-Roman, biblical, and contemporary usage.

3. To examine the story of the emergence of the new discipline of psychological biblical criticism, beginning in the late 1960s in the context of the new developments in biblical scholarship in the last three decades (e.g., feminist, liberationist, ideological, and cultural criticism), with a survey of the new literature in the field.

4. To explore the foundational contributions of Carl Jung, Sigmund Freud, and Viktor Frankl to a fuller understanding of the self, and also to a psychological critical approach to the Bible, with special emphasis on its rich repertory of myths, legends, history, laws, psalms, proverbs, prophetic vision, gospels, parables, letters, and apocalypses.

5. To consider the contributions of cognitive, developmental, and behavioral psychology and object relations theory to biblical understanding.

6. To explore the exegetical agenda of a psycho-spiritual approach to the Bible, with attention to select themes: biblical symbols and archetypes; psychodynamic factors at work in biblical narrative; the psychology of biblical personality portraits (e.g. Jesus of Nazareth, King Saul, Ezekiel, Paul, and Judas Iscariot); the psychology of biblical religious experience (e.g. glossolalia, dreams, conversion); the psychology of biblical ethics; and biblical psychology.

7. To explore the hermeneutical agenda of a psycho-spiritual approach to the Bible, with attention to select themes: the effects of texts on readers; the effect of readers on texts; the “performance” of texts through drama, music, liturgy, soup kitchens, and creeds; and the history of biblical effects, both pathogenic and therapeutic.

8. To experiment with Walter Wink’s Transforming Bible Study approach as a workshop demonstration of the psychodynamics at work between text and reader.

Requirements.

1. Attendance, and classroom exchange is as important as the reading. (1/6 of grade) (BYOB, each session)

2. Book Review*: Credit participants are to make one 15 minutes book review presentation (with a written copy of the review submitted to the instructor as a basis for grading, one week after the oral report). See the attached Book Review Selection sheet and bring a list of your top three choices for the “lottery” selection on the opening class session. The review is to include the following: (a) a substantive précis or overview of the book in relation to this course, (b) a brief discussion of five to ten ideas you have found worth thinking about, explaining why, and (c) an evaluation of the book in terms of its contribution to the work of this course (d) the presentation of one important issue for class discussion. The reviewer is encouraged to prepare some “visuals” (hand-outs, chalk-board
outlines, overhead projector transparencies, etc.) or a class participation exercise to enhance communication. (2/6 of the grade).

3. Final Project*: A 15 page paper due on a date in late December or early January, to be determined in class. Grades due Jan. 6, 2016. A 3x5 topic proposal, including proposed title and descriptive paragraph of proposed objectives, due on Nov. 26. (3/6 of grade)

* Required of credit and CEU participants only. All academic papers are to conform to conventional technical, grammatical, and stylistic standards referred to in the General Guidelines for a Research Paper. The Hartford Seminary Grading Guidelines will be the standard of evaluation for the course.

Class Meeting Schedule and Assignments

Sept. 14 Prospectus: Where Psychology and Biblical Studies Meet
Read “Approaching the Unconscious,” the first essay in Man and His Symbols (New York: Doubleday, 1964), or one of many other editions). Please come prepared with five ideas, issues, or problems for class discussion. Also, read Rollins and Kille, Psychological Insights Into the Bible: Texts and Readings (pp. v, xii-xiv, xv-xix) on the goals of psychological biblical criticism as insight into Scripture and the readers of Scripture.

Sept. 21 Carl. Gustav Jung: Exploring Symbols and Archetypes and Walter Wink’s “Transforming Bible Study”
PowerPoint presentation on the place where psychology, scripture, and religion meet in the life and thought of C. G. Jung.
Read PIITB, chapter 6, Biblical Symbols and Archetypal Images, 99-113. Each chapter of PIITB contains an introduction and three to five “readings.” For each, come prepared to comment on one or all of the following (a) “A Summary In A Sentence” (what the author’s trying to get across); (b) a “Find” (something that struck you and is worth commenting on); c) a “Question.” The units to be read next session are the (1) introduction and (2) the articles by Patrick Henry on Water symbolism; (3) Rollins on Biblical archetypes; (4) Elizabeth-Ann Stewart on “Jesus the Holy Fool”
Read Wink, Transforming Bible Study, the preface and first two chapters (pp. 11-42). Jot your response to questions on the assignment sheet (to be distributed in class): “Walter Wink’s ‘Transforming Bible Study’ and This Course.”
Wink class exercise on Luke 12:22-31 on “Anxiety”

Sept. 28 Freud, the Man, the Mission, and Scripture
Read PIITB, and chapter 3, “Freud and Jung,” 40-55. An introduction plus articles by Rollins, Rashkow (3), and Newheart on what’s to be gained from reading the Bible through a Freudian or Jungian lens.
Read the class handout excerpt of Freud’s Future of an Illusion, jotting your responses on the accompanying question sheet.
Oct. 5  The Contribution of Viktor Frankl’s Existential Psychotherapy and Logotherapy: Its Relevance for Biblical Understanding

Read PIITB, chapter 4, “Behavioral, Learning, Object Relations and Developmental Approaches,” 56-78, and What do we learn about the light that different schools within the field of “psychological studies” bring to our understanding of the Bible? Bring examples from the readings. (assignment continued on next page).

Read the handout on excerpts from Viktor Frankl’s Man’s Search for Meaning, jotting responses to the sheet of questions/reflections.

Wink class exercise on Mark 2:13-17: Eating with Sinners

Oct. 12  Psychological Biblical Studies From The First To The 21st Centuries: An Historical Overview With A Footnote On Eugen Drewermann’s Signal Contribution

Read Rollins and Kille, Psychological Insights Into the Bible: Texts and Readings, Chapter One: “Past, Present, and Future” (pp. 3-4, and Readings 1.2 and 1.3 by Fletcher and Rollins on pp. 11-21). Special handout: Review of Matthias Beier, A Violent God-Image: An Introduction to the Work of Eugen Drewermann by W.G.Rollins. Also, take a stroll through the “Glossary” of theological and psychological terms (pp. 265-273). Check terms on which you want more light.

Oct. 19  Psychology and Exegesis: Biblical Genres and Biblical Texts in Psychodynamic Perspective

9.2, Story of Jonah, 166-170;
9.3, Ten commandments, 171-74;

Wink class exercise on Matt. 25:14-30, Parable of the Talents.


Read Intro. 175-77;
10.1, Wedding at Cana, 177-80;
10.2, Christ and Antichrist, 181-88;
10.3, Theology of Paul, 188-91].

Nov. 2  Biblical Religious Experience in Psychodynamic Perspective, Part One

11.2, Psychology of the Prophets, 199-204;
11.3, Healing, 204-210],
Reading by Donald Capps on “Psychological Biblical Criticism.

Wink class exercise on”Plucking Heads of Grain on the Sabbath”. Mar. 2:23-28

Nov. 9  Biblical Religious Experience in Psychodynamic Perspective, Part Two

Read PIITB, Chapter 12, “Biblical Religious Experience: The Demonic and Exorcism, Glossolalia, and Conversion”
Intro. 212-13;
12.1, “Gerasene Demonic, 214-19;
12.2, Glossolalia – Language of the Unconscious? 219-25;

. Special section on Paul and the Psychology of Biblical Ethics
Nov. 26  Biblical Personalities in Psychological Perspective: Ezekiel, Paul, Moses and Jesus  
Read PIITB, Chapter 7, “Biblical Personalities: Ezekiel and Paul,” 116-37,  
    Intro. 116-18  
    7.1 Seeking Ezekiel, 118-26  
    7.2 Psychological Perspectives on the Life of Paul, 127-136    
Chapter 8, “Biblical Personalities: Moses and Jesus”  
    Intro. 138-141  
    8.1 Moses and Yahweh 141-149  
    [8.2 Jesus at Thirty, 149-156]  
Term Project Proposal Due

Nov.30  Assignment in John W. Miller, Jesus at Thirty: A Psychological and Historical Portrait,  
    Chap. 2. The Starting Point  Ch. 5 Jesus and His Mother  Ch. 8, Generativity 
    Ch. 3 The Turning Point  Ch. 6 Satan  Ch. 9 Jesus at Thirty 
    Ch. 4 Jesus and His Father  Ch. 7, Sexuality 
.Wink exercise on Blind Bartimaeus, Mark 10:46-52

Dec. 7  Psychology and Hermeneutics: What Texts Bring to Readers and Readers to Texts  
    Intro. 79-81  
    5.1 The Psychology of Biblical Interpretation, 81-86  
    5.2 Viewpoints: Perspectives of Faith and Christian Nurture, 86-95  
    5.3 Personality Type and Scripture, 95-96  
.Class handout on Psychological Insight into Hermeneutics along with additional reading of Donald Capps, “Psychological Biblical Criticism: Envisioning Its Prospects” in the Rollins Festschrift, 53-61

Dec. 14  The Pathogenic and the Therapeutic in Biblical Texts and Interpretations  
Read PIITB, Chapter 13, “Biblical Effects: The Pathogenic and Therapeutic,” 230-47,  
    13.1 The Evolution of a Pauline Toxic Text  
    13.2 ‘The Bible Made Me Do It:’ Text, Interpretation and Violence  
    13.3 Basic Types of Pastoral Care and Counseling: Resources for the Ministry of Healing and Growth. (1984)  

Dec. 21  On the Nature and Habits of the Soul in Biblical Perspective: Retrospect and Prospect  
Read Chapter 14 Biblical Psychology: On The Nature And Habits Of The Soul  
PTIIB(248-64)  
    14.1 What is Biblical Psychology?  
    14.2 Biblical Psychology in Paul and the Old Testament  
    14.3 The Human Being: Jesus and the Enigma of the Son of the Man  
BOOK REVIEW SELECTION LIST FOR CREDIT STUDENTS
(Should you wish to report on a book not contained in this list, contact Professor Rollins by e-mail or phone for possible approval)


Le Donne, Anthony. *Historical Jesus: What Can We Know and How Can We Know It?* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011.


Additional Select Bibliography on Psychology and the Bible


Heron, Laurence T. *ESP in the Bible*. Garden City, NT: Doubleday, 1974.


Le Donne, Anthony. *Historical Jesus: What Can We Know and How Can We Know It?* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011.


Scharfenberg, Joachim. *Sigmund Freud and His Critique of Religion.* Translated by 0, C. Dean, Jr. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988,


Spiegel, Yorick. *Psychoanalytische Interpretationen biblischer texte.* Munich: C. Kaiser, 1972,


