

## **Tips on How to Teach with this Book**

### **John Drane, *Introducing the New Testament*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Fortress Press, 2011)**

There are a number of different approaches to teaching through the New Testament. Some authors take a canonical organizational approach while others more concerned with portraying the biblical chronological in their study. John Drane's, *Introducing the New Testament* conflate these two approaches in what results to be a faithful rendering of the historical situation of the New Testament books while at the same time affording the opportunity for the reader to systematically engage specific modern theological concerns and interpretations germane to the biblical text. The text has several features that make it immediately appealing to both students and instructors: maps, timelines, photos, a useful glossary and articles on special topics of interest inserted into each chapter. Each of these special features can be examined during class lectures or for inclusion in group discussions or weekly quizzes. Less obvious, but perhaps even more critical, is the author's gifted way of telling a story. The result is an engaging and deeply informative study on the New Testament events, people and theologies.

*How to teach a group that has a wide range of assumptions, beliefs and knowledge about the nature of Biblical texts:*

As with any undergraduate course in religion, students are sure to approach this course with very diverse assumptions and beliefs about the Bible. This course might be undertaken in an institution that holds to certain confessional position on the nature of Scripture. Others interested in the course may approach the text from an agnostic position with respect to the historical accuracy of Scripture. No matter what kind of background, there is a fixed corpus of general biblical knowledge that Drane assumes should be a part of any intended learning outcome for an introductory New Testament studies course. One of the most valuable aspects of this particular textbook is the author's ability to weave information about methods of Biblical scholarship, and issues surrounding those methods, into his discussion throughout the book rather than treating them as a separate topic. While a course in methods is critical for any student who wishes to pursue a major in Biblical Studies or Religion in general, it is not necessarily critical or helpful for the general education student who is taking the course simply out of interest or to fulfill a basic liberal arts requirement. By weaving the basics of what is necessary at this level throughout the textbook rather than treating it separately, the students learn about the importance of method in context -- for instance, the instructor can emphasize the importance of recognizing genre (and characteristics of different genres) each time the class moves to a new type of text; and the historical-critical method (its strengths and its limitations) can be discussed over and over throughout the semester as the class studies both the history that is revealed in the texts as well as the editor's theological perspective on that history.

Furthermore, whether at a religiously-affiliated or state institution, any New Testament class taught today is bound to include students who have a very secular view regarding Biblical texts as well as students who have very traditional views, especially regarding authorship and dating of Biblical texts. In order to teach this material with any integrity, it is essential to guide all students in seeing that the New Testament is an anthology of texts from various times and places. At the same time, it is less threatening and causes less trauma for the traditionally minded student if she or he is guided through the

range of methods and possibilities regarding interpretation within the context of discussions about the convergence of Christian and Jewish history than it is if the topic is approached separately and appears to be detached from any notion that God might actually be involved in that history. At the same time, this integrated style of teaching also has advantages for the more secularly minded student as she or he can be guided to see why it is that for many, these texts are not just historical but are also sacred.

*How to teach a group that has a wide range of background knowledge about the Bible:*

In any classroom today, the instructor is likely to run into students who have very little, if any, background knowledge about the Bible, as well as students who have strong knowledge at least regarding the main characters and heroes of those texts that tend to be taught in classes for children held at most churches and synagogues: John the Baptist, Jesus, Peter, James and John, and Paul. The gap between students, however, is not generally as difficult to bridge as it might seem. Students who are able to identify some of the main figures of the texts have rarely looked beyond the basic story, that is, they have not considered how the story fits into God's overall meta-narrative as well as the theological implications that proceed from some of the basic biblical facts they already know. They have not considered the social or literary context of the story; they have not considered the theological importance of the story of the early Christian; and they have not thought beyond the most superficial level about the theological implications of the story for people today. Thus, even those with some knowledge are rarely far ahead of those with none. Yet, the basic knowledge they do have can be put to good use by having them work with students who, often coming from eastern traditions, have no knowledge of these texts at all.

After spending time with the issues of suffering in the General Epistles, for instance, it is useful to periodically take five minutes at the end of class to have students drill one another some of the historical events resulting in persecution for the early Christ followers. It seems best to randomly select students at the beginning of the semester who will work in set groups for the entire course term. The students assigned to each group should then be checked by the instructor to ensure that each group is made up of students who came in with some knowledge and students who did not. These same groups can also be encouraged to study together outside of class, especially prior to exams. For those times, they should be given a review sheet that includes not just factual information but also historical and theological themes that have been covered. They should also be encouraged to refer frequently to the timelines provided in the textbook. For those students slightly behind on their terminology, the glossary in the back of the text can be utilized.

To bring the whole class to an equalizing level, the teacher may choose to select a short list of definitions from the glossary that students will be required to define along with the daily reading material or in the form of a class lecture handout available at the start of every class. A handout at the start of each lecture session is a convenient way to indicate to all students, regardless of their individual starting points, what are the most essential matters in any given chapter reading.

*How to teach a group that has a wide range of learning styles:*

This, of course, is a challenge shared by instructors of all disciplines. It is not unique to Biblical Studies. However, because of the vast time period and different types of texts covered when teaching the Old Testament, it is especially important to be cognizant of the fact that students do not all learn in the same way. In my own teaching, I have found it best to vary the approach as much as possible so that a student who does not grasp material when it's taught in one way might pick it up in another. For instance, given the vast amount of material to be covered and the fact that a certain baseline of knowledge is essential before any intelligent discussion can happen, lecture has a strong and legitimate place in this course. As much as possible (and this will vary according to the style of the instructor), it is helpful if the professor can make the lecture interactive, that is, by asking students questions throughout, by having students read relevant portions of text aloud or by having students come to the board to write important facts and themes that are raised. Power Point can be a very useful tool in delivering some material -- it is efficient and allows the students easy access to basic notes as well as a place where they can add their own notes. As with all good things, however, some caution needs to be taken in regard to Power Point presentations. Used too often, students tend to ignore the lecture, thinking apparently that they can come back to the material later, and/or they rely solely on the Power Point and never add their own notes.

Regardless of how one delivers lecture material, it is also important to include other modes of instruction. Films and video clips are helpful because they often make the material seem more alive to students (some useful websites have been included below for this purpose). If one can actually see the landscape of the Corinth, for instance, it is easier to picture the kind of vibrancy of the cultural landscape that Drane tries to illustrate when he talks about its cosmopolitan, maritime, commercial business, and multicultural boon.

Useful websites:

<http://oyc.yale.edu/religious-studies>

Yale Lecture Series: Introduction to New Testament History and Literature

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/>

From Jesus to Christ: The First Christians

<http://www.criticalthinking.org/>

Foundation for Critical Thinking

*How to use the "Special Articles" documents within the textbook:*

The organization of this text makes it appropriate for a traditional large classroom style format as well as small group education. For any size class, it is best for students to do the required reading prior to the class lecture. The readings are substantial, yet possible to complete in the time designated in the attached course reading assignment. Although the pages specified within each reading assignment indicates that the student should also read the "Special Articles" pages, the professor may choose to not require this section within the regular daily readings. Alternatively, these pages are ideal for small group presentation, which deliver their content throughout the school term. Some instructors may approach small group presentation with a great deal of reticence, perhaps recall their own horror stories of when they were forced into an unproductive group in their former undergraduate days. I too have such

memories. Take hope! Small groups can actually be quite engaging. With the perceived pitfalls in mind, I have crafted the below small group activity with its necessary safeguards. The Special Articles in Drane's text is material that such groups would engage as they adhere to the following guidelines:

**The Rules:** You have been split up into a group with 3-5 members. Your group has been assigned a selection within the "Special Articles" interspersed throughout the latter section of each chapter in your class text, *Introducing the New Testament*. Each group member must first read the article. Then, using the course intranet, each group member must answer the following seven questions, which coordinate with the critical thinking standards on "Critical Thinking and the Art of Close Reading" (cf. [www.criticalthinking.org](http://www.criticalthinking.org)). Once each group member has answered the seven questions, each student should respond at least two times to another peer's post in a thoughtful, grammatically consistent, engaging and helpful manner:

1. What is this article about? Summarize the article in your own words.
2. What main viewpoint is the author trying to communicate?
3. What assumption is the author making?
4. What is clear to me about the article and what points are unclear?
5. What examples in my personal life can I give to support what the article is saying?
6. How has the article challenged the way I viewed the Bible?
7. Why is the author's viewpoint important?

Responses must be relevant to the reading, while integrating what has been learned in the class' daily assigned reading and class lectures. You will need to elect a group leader and an assistant. The group leader and assistant will help to compile the gist of all the collaborative responses to form a final group statement. All group members must participate in this process. You may chose to meet face to face to decide on a group statement. Post that statement and come to class prepared to present your reading. Presentations should include the critical issues each member dealt with in order to come to the agreed conclusion and can be demonstrated to the class by the following ways:

1. A game show
2. A talk show
3. A panel of speakers addressing points in the article
4. A skit/ drama
5. A Power Point presentation (you may include graphics)
6. Etc.

**The Grading Procedures:** Your grade will be based on the significance, depth, breadth and relevance of each of your comments (See presentation rubric below). After your group presentation, each member will complete a peer-evaluation form, grading his/her peers on a scale of 1 to 10 with regard to specific indicator according to participation level (see below). In addition to the individual grade, there will also be a Group Presentation Grade. The instructor can use he/her discretion on the amount of point to deduct from each student's final Group Presentation Grade who score poorly on peer evaluations. Some of my colleagues actually assign a zero to the final project if peer evaluations consistently come in below at least an 80%.

Peer Evaluation Form

Prof. XXXX XXXX

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Peer Evaluation (10 Points Possible)

Evaluator's Name \_\_\_\_\_

Class Name \_\_\_\_\_

Group Article Title \_\_\_\_\_

This form should be turned in to the professor when the group project has been completed. Failure to email the form in a timely manner will result in a grade reduction for the student evaluator.

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List each team member, and then rate them on their group participation in each of the areas described below. Team members who score 0 as a total will receive a 0 for the entire project.

0 - non-participation    1- lowest    2 -highest

*Quality* – Completed all assigned responsibilities at the level of quality expected by the group

*Responsibility* – Completed all responsibilities in a timely manner

*Teamwork* – Worked well with other team members

*Contribution* – Contributed to the group in an equitable fashion

*Attitude* – Projected positive attitude throughout the project

Member Name	Quality	Responsibility	Teamwork	Contribution	Attitude	Total Score

Additional Comments:

Student's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

**Special Articles Group Presentation**  
**Prof. XXXX XXXX#**

Criteria	Advanced (25-23 points)	Proficient (22-20 points)	Not Yet There (19-15 points)	Not There at All (14-0 points)	Total Score
Structure of Argument	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Shows an advanced ability to connect parts or details of ideas together coherently, no contradictions</li> <li>Focuses on the most essential aspects of the issue, not the trivial</li> <li>Points satisfactorily identify issues that pertain to the question or problem being discussed.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Developing ideas.</li> <li>Simply agrees with previous ideas.</li> <li>Sometimes stimulates discussion.</li> <li>Parts mostly make sense together, no contradictions</li> <li>Mostly focuses on the important, not the trivial</li> <li>Mostly relates to the matter at hand.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Poorly developed, vague ideas that do not add to the discussion.</li> <li>Parts make some sense together but may be inconsistent; few contradictions</li> <li>Doesn't always focus on the important, gives too much attention to the trivial or obscure</li> <li>Only partially relates to the matter at hand.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Parts make little to no sense together, many contradictions</li> <li>Focuses on the trivial, not the important or essential</li> <li>Does not relate to the matter at hand</li> </ul>	<b>/25</b>
Quality of Research Work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Points are excellently articulated and understandable</li> <li>Points show specification by way of elaborations, illustrations or examples</li> <li>Propositions can be completely verified</li> <li>Points address the complexities of the issue</li> <li>Points substantially encompass viewpoints other than student's own, not one-sided</li> <li>Excellent written communication skills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Points are understandable, but some thought and re-reading is required</li> <li>Points show specification with some elaborations, illustrations or examples</li> <li>Propositions can be generally verified</li> <li>Points generally address approach the issue</li> <li>Mostly encompasses different viewpoints, not one-sided</li> <li>Acceptable written communication skills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Points are ambiguous and/or difficult to understand</li> <li>Poor written communication skills Doesn't encompass many viewpoints, somewhat one-sided</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Points are unintelligible or not present.</li> <li>Does not encompass different viewpoints, mostly one-sided</li> </ul>	<b>/25</b>
Interactivity in Delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interacts in an evaluative manner that intensively engages and generates discussion with at least one other student and/or instructor.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interacts in detail at least once with one other student or instructor.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interacts at least once with other student or instructor on a superficial level.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Does not enter discussion.</li> </ul>	<b>/25</b>
Overall Group Presentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Presentation is thoroughly prepared and highly organized.</li> <li>Collaborative effort among group members is obvious.</li> <li>Easily stimulates discussion.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Presentation displays evidence of preparation.</li> <li>The collaborative effort of the group is adequately displayed.</li> <li>Stimulates discussion.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Presentation seems slightly disorganized.</li> <li>Collaborative effort is somewhat lacking, individual parts of presentation do not flow together.</li> <li>Difficulty in stimulating discussion.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Presentation lacks organization.</li> <li>Little or no collaborative effort is demonstrated.</li> <li>Stimulates very little, if any, discussion.</li> </ul>	<b>/25</b>
<b>Grand Total for this DB Presentation</b>					<b>/100</b>

