

Fresno Pacific University
Division of Biblical and Religious Studies
MIN 486 Topics: Theology, Culture and U2 (2 units)
Fall 2006

Session #1, August 29, 2006
Introduction

- I. Introduction
 - A. Review syllabus
 - B. Discuss time change
 - C. Discuss Parker Palmer quote as a basis for understanding our purpose for being in class.

“To sit in a class where the teacher stuffs our minds with information, organizes it with finality, insists on having the answers while being utterly uninterested in our views, and forces us into a grim competition for grades – to sit in such a class is to experience a lack of space for learning.

“But to study with a teacher who not only speaks but listens, who not only gives answers but asks questions and welcomes our insights, who provides information and theories that do not close doors but open new ones, who encourages students to help each other learn – to study with such a teacher is to know the power of a learning space.”

To Know as We are Known: Education as a Spiritual Journey, Parker Palmer (71)

- II. The Process of Exegesis
 - A. John Franke’s working definition of theology (*The Character of Theology*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005.)
 1. "Christian theology is an ongoing, second-order, contextual discipline that engages in the task of critical and constructive reflection on the beliefs and practices of the Christian church for the purpose of assisting the community of Christ's followers in their missional vocation to live as the people of God in the particular social-historical context in which they are situated." (44)
 2. Emphasize
 - a. Ongoing
 - b. Second-order (scripture is first-order)
 - c. Contextual
 3. This “ongoing” sense of theology will become important as we hear the voices of U2 speaking to us from outside of our context.

B. W. Randolph Tate's use of Paul Ricoeur's three step process of interpreting a text.

1. World behind the text

- a. "A visit to the world behind the text is indispensable for the interpreter. Any literary work of art (at least any good literary work of art) will extend to the reader an open invitation to discover something about reality. By what is said *in* texts, there will be communicated something *through* texts. But content of the text and its message are clothed in the terms, ideas, symbols, concepts, and categories which are current in the author's world. If the interpreters do not give serious attention to that world behind the text, whatever they say about the world within the text – the literary context – will be less than it should be." Randolph W. Tate, *Biblical Interpretation: An Integrated Approach* (Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1997) 61.

2. World in the text

- a. "The ability to recognize [genres] enhances a reader's appreciation for the literary artistry of literature. The absence of this ability heightens the risk of misrepresentation of the text's message. This is true whether the text is Chaucer or the author of Job. ...The interpretation of a text is exactly that – the interpretation of the whole and not just the stringing together of the interpretations of disjointed individual units. A narrative, a poem, a gospel, an apocalypse, or an epistle is a single generic whole, and each must be approached with full knowledge of the conventions and dynamics characteristic of it." Randolph W. Tate, *Biblical Interpretation: An Integrated Approach* (Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1997) 78.

3. World in front of the text

- a. In developing his theory of the reader's role in relation to the text's encyclopedia, Eco focuses on what he calls the "model reader." The fact is, however, none of us are model readers. Moreover, no two readers are identical; neither are we ever individually the same reader twice. While some readers may share common areas of agreement, each reader has an individual imagination and as such fills out a text in individualistic ways. *Biblical Interpretation: An Integrated Approach* (Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1997) 183.

4. Good interpretive skills will help us exegete literature, including poetry and song lyrics. Caution: we must treat each song as a whole unit and as a part of a larger whole as well.

III. How to Exegete a Song: "City of Blinding Lights"

A. Watch opening clip from *Vertigo 2005 Live from Chicago* (including Arcade Fire and "Everyone")

B. World Behind the Text

1. What is the context for the writing of this song?

2. 9/11/01 terrorist attack and the U2 concert in NYC on 10/24/01

3. Play commentary from VH1 *All Access* show featuring U2 (:23-:28 on VHS tape)
 4. Where were you when the towers fell? Do you remember the feelings?
- C. World In the Text
1. Hand out lyrics to “City” and ask for feedback.
 - a. What themes, keywords, ideas emerge, repeat?
 - b. Are there any illusions to scriptures or biblical concepts?
 2. Discuss Bono's experience at the photo exhibit 20 years earlier as another inspiration for the lyric. He walked into an Anton Corbijn exhibit – a whole room of larger-than-life pictures of himself. Bono reflected on how young and idealistic he was back then.
 3. Back behind the text:
 - a. Why would U2 select Arcade Fire's, “Wake Up?” to open the concert?
 - b. Handout out lyrics and show “Wake Up” video.
 4. What is the prelude to “City of Blinding Lights?” (“Everyone...”)
- D. World In Front of the Text
1. My experience in inner-city L.A. working with the homeless population leaves me with similar sentiments.
 2. I understand the song in a way (possibly) that was not entirely intended yet is very appropriate.
 3. Other connections from students’ perspectives.
 4. What does the meaning of “Blessings not just for the ones who kneel, luckily” mean?
 5. Is an answer found in Matthew 5:45?
 - a. 43 "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' 44 But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. 46 For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? 47 And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? 48 Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

IV. Conclusion

- A. This semester we will work at creating a space for learning.
- B. We will examine the ongoing, contextual nature of theology and its value for assessing culture, particularly North American culture.
- C. We will use good interpretive skills as we examine scripture and the lyrics of U2.
- D. “City of Blinding Lights” becomes an example of how a song is inspired, the meaning it can originally have for the band, and the meaning it can come to have for the listener.