RELS 106 Writing Assignment

As stated in the course syllabus, 20% of your final grade is based upon an 8-10 page typed essay. Here are the details for completing this assignment.

A **REQUIRED ROUGH DRAFT** of your essay is due in **class on Monday, November 26**. Failure to bring a draft to class on November 26 will result in a ten-point deduction from the paper's final grade.

The **FINAL COPY** of your essay is due in **my office (Boyle 450) no later than 5:00 PM on Tuesday, December 4**. Late work will be assessed a penalty.

Your essay should consist of two parts:

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**Part 1:**

*Clearly state* two or three thoughts or opinions you had concerning the Bible prior to taking this course. (For example you could talk about your prior thoughts concerning what kind of book the Bible is, how one ought to read it, what it says to us about God, or the meanings of particular biblical stories/pasages. These are only suggestions. You may very well have others of your own.)

Next, for each of the things you discuss, you are to select **specific examples from the course** and discuss how they either **changed or reinforced** your prior thoughts on the Bible.

This part of the paper should be around 4-5 pages in length.

**Part 2:**

Using the description of the college-level Bible class in Barbara Brown Taylor’s article, “Caution: Bible Class in Session,” and **discuss** how accurately Taylor’s description of her students’ experience in class matches your own experience in RELS 106.

In your discussion, be sure to include why you think your experience either did or didn’t **match those of Taylor’s students**.

This part of the paper should also be around 4-5 pages in length.

To write the second section of the paper, you are to use the discussion questions for Taylor’s article that we went over in class. For your convenience, I have reproduced them here:

1. Taylor observes that “Most of my students profess to live by the Bible without ever having read more than 50 pages of it.” Is that true of yourself?

2. What does Taylor mean when she says that “parents...preachers...Bible study leaders...movies such as *Left Behind*...all have more power than the text.” Can you think of an example from this course?

3. Taylor connects the fact that when students realize “that they see what they have been taught to see...they are on the edge of a dangerous decision.” What is the decision? How is it connected with realizing that one sees what one is taught to look for?
4. Why is it difficult for people to get their questions about the Bible answered in their religious communities?

5. Taylor lists the following questions that can arise from academic study of the Bible—*How reliable was the oral tradition? What was lost in translation? Where there are two accounts? Which one is true? Who decided what would be in the Bible and how dependable were those people?* Have any of these questions occurred to you this semester? If so, how have you tried to answer them?

6. Why can’t a college course answer the fundamental question about the Bible’s status as the word of God?

7. “When they pay attention to what is actually on the page, they generally find that scripture does not so much support their religious ideology as call it into question, leaving them nowhere to turn but to the God beyond their concepts of God.” What do you think this means? Restate it in your own words. Is this something that describes your experience in this course?

8. Brown writes, “Bible studies tend to serve up more for the heart than for the mind.” Do you agree? Is this a good thing or not?

9. “[O]nce you know things you cannot ever go back.” Is this true? Is it a good thing or not? Is it necessary, or is there a way you can avoid having to know some things about the Bible you’d rather not know?

10. What does Taylor mean when she uses the theological image of a fall—but not from innocence into sin but rather “from innocence toward the promise of a deeper life of faith”?

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**Your grade will be determined based on the following criteria:**

- Your discussion of course material: Is it accurate? Sufficiently detailed? Appropriate?
- Your application of Taylor’s description to your own experience in class.
- Your use of examples to illustrate your points.
- Your use of clear and consistent reasoning to support your points.
- How clearly your essay is written and organized.
- How closely your essay adheres to the directions given in this assignment.

Please note that this is not the kind of assignment that you can slap together at the last minute with any hope of its being good.

*Cito scribendo non fit ut bene scribatur; bene scribendo fit ut cito.*

(“Write quickly and you will never write well; write well and you will soon write quickly.”) Quintilian, ca. 35-95 CE