

**Gina Pecoraro**

**NT503 Final Exam**

**1. Why is it important to understand historical-critical issues, such as authorship, recipients, and dating (even if we cannot determine these details definitively)? 1 to 2 paragraphs.**

First, it is important to understand these issues for the sake of emboldening the church's faith and for usage in apologetics. The uncertainty in some of these lanes of research could be used as fuel for doubt and scepticism in both believers and nonbelievers if not handled appropriately. Patzia and Powell explored some of these uncertainties while remaining grounded in the truth that the Bible is the inspired word of God. For example, both raise the issue of pseudepigrapha yet explain how common it was in the ancient world. Both explained the intention as well that "they did not write to deceive their readers; rather, they wished to preserve and continue Paul's apostolic authority in generations following his death" (Patzia, 119). I am led to believe that the ambiguity is not meant to deplete one's faith, but to spur them onto greater faith in the sovereignty of a God who works through all people and ultimately deserves the glory from what is produced and preserved.

Understanding the dating of New Testament books is crucial as well because it impacts the depth and interpretation of the texts' meanings. Powell emphasized that every New Testament book was written under Roman rule. This gives a better picture of the issues the authors would have been writing about. The very specific influences of Jewish culture and the Roman helenistic world are present in the texts and readers can see texts responding to Jews, Gentiles, gnostics, epicureans, and more. Understanding their context helps us to more appropriately apply it to ours.

**2. Present a well-reasoned argument for your ministry context as to what is significant for people's faith and interpretation of a Gospel for spiritual growth about the phenomenon that the Church has 4 canonical gospels? 1 paragraph**

*(For context, I am not currently in ministry. I am a public school teacher in this program as a passion project but quite involved in my church and open to one day moving into ministry if the Lord sees fit. I will write this paragraph in reference to my church's congregation.)*

Powell emphasizes multiple times in chapter five that the four canonical gospels present specific portraits of Jesus. Each author wanted to present the person of Jesus in a purposeful way. When moving onto a new gospel, it is like taking an object and turning it to look at a new side. It is still the same object (still the same Jesus) but now a new view is offered. My church needs to enter each gospel willing to learn about the picture of Jesus that is uniquely presented by that

author. This will require a focus on the specific context of the author, recipients, and socio-historical setting surrounding the gospel we are in. We must also be able to identify the type of text that is in front of us (parable, miracle story, passion narrative...) to be able to interpret more accurately. For example, parables are not meant to be taken literally but to teach a basic principle.

**3. When reading the letters of Paul, one must consider the relationship between the Church's context (the recipients) and the argument Paul makes in a specific letter.**

**a. Explain the reason why this is an essential step in reading Paul's different letters with competence. 1 paragraph.**

Paul's arguments were specific to the recipients. One clear example is 2nd Corinthians. He is answering to the unique issues at hand between him and the Corinthian church. Paul did not know when writing this letter explaining his grief with them and defending himself that this letter would become canonized. As readers today, we must keep in mind that Paul's letters were purposefully pointed to a specific audience of that day. This helps us to accurately apply principles we learn when reading. If we identify our churches or society in a similar situation, we may turn to these letters for direction and encouragement.

**b. Focusing on Galatians, discuss the relationship between the context and the theological points emphasized. Be sure to be specific about the context and explain why these theological issues best addressed them. 1 to 2 paragraphs.**

The Northern Galatian Theory places the date of the letter to the Galatians after the council in Jerusalem. The issues of justification by keeping the law and circumcision were already discussed at this council. Paul had also evangelized to the recipients of the letter before this council. They had already come to faith in Christ by believing in His grace yet had begun to abandon this after some ideas about the necessity of circumcision began to infiltrate the believers (similar to the beliefs of Judiazers). Paul emphasized that one is saved by grace alone and that relying back on works actually impedes the salvation they once had.

Paul also felt the need to emphasize that salvation is a free gift of grace to all. Gentiles in the Galatian population were being encouraged to get circumcised either to guarantee their salvation or as a step in enriching their relationship with God. Paul once again points out that this is foolish and only deepens the divide between Jews and Gentiles that Jesus ripped away with His sacrifice. The Holy Spirit is a gift to all believers that begins and sustains holiness in them, not the law.

**4. By the end of this course you should be more aware of the diversity of the New Testament, as well as how the message of each book complements God's overarching purpose of reconciliation with humanity. Diversity is a hot-button issue today and education is often construed as the domain of elitists, and that includes Seminary educated pastors and teachers. It is important you are clear about the extent and limitations of diversity.**

**a. Is diversity a problem for interpretation, or do you see a value to these different voices for the proclamation and ministry of the contemporary Church? Explain. Remember the unique presentations of the Catholic or General epistles. 1 paragraph.**

Diversity only becomes a problem when one cannot open their mind and heart to the reality that God works uniquely through all people. So, it is a problem often because this is hard for us to do. Each denomination has differing views on topics presented in the Catholic epistles and members engage in fiery debates over these things. It takes great humility and belief in the sovereignty and wisdom of God to face the different beliefs of denominations and have peace in one's soul. Believers are called to do whatever it takes to live in unity, as one body. It is strange we read the same words and use them to divide. Diversity brings richness and emphasizes the call to love your neighbor and brother in Christ, especially when they believe differently than you. Diversity also brings the limitation of not fully feeling like one body sometimes. If groups of people are standing passionately on different issues, it is hard to truly feel together.

**b. Describe what steps you would take if an interpretation on a passage of Scripture was not the same as yours, and what you would do if a commentary or denomination challenged what you have always understood. 1 paragraph. This question goes to method more than content, which is a graduate level focus of critical thinking. It helps to think about how you would handle an issue ahead of time so that you are prepared to respond wisely and opened to the Spirit's guidance (1 Timothy 3:16-17).**

First, I would pray for humility. I would acknowledge the possibility that I could be wrong, the issue could be more complex than I previously thought, and that I might be missing something. I would approach the passage and interpretations as a student and ask God to teach me about Himself and His truth. Then, I would read well-respected commentaries on the view that is new to me. I would search for the place they are coming from-who do they believe God to be and what do they value? I would need to step into empathy in some way. I would ask my peers in ministry for their thoughts and share my new-found resources

with them. If I end up open to the new perspective and unsure of what the “right” answer may be, I would pray and ask God if I truly need to know the answer to it-or if it is okay for me to be humbled by the ambiguity of the topic.

5. **OPTIONAL:** “One thing I would like the professor and/or ATS to know about my experience in this course is: It is obvious how well thought out this course was. I was shocked starting with the first week how much time was invested into the weekly lessons. It is obvious this course is a labor of love. Thank you very much for all that you put into creating comprehensive lessons that challenged the heart, mind, and spirit. Everytime my mind felt stretched and the unknown answers of the New Testament felt heavy, there was always something within the lesson-the devotional or a supplemental video, that provided encouragement to the heart. Thank you very much.”

## **Bibliography**

Allan Powell, Mark. *Introducing the New Testament*. Michigan: Baker Academic, 2018.

Patzia, Arthur G. *The Making of the New Testament*. Illinois: IVP Academic, 2011.