

RELS 281-01, Synoptic Gospels, Spring 2006

Item Type	Syllabus
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Publisher	Memphis, Tenn. : Rhodes College
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Link to Item	http://hdl.handle.net/10267/1836

RELIGIOUS STUDIES 281, SECTION 01
SYNOPTIC GOSPELS
SPRING SEMESTER, 2006

COURSE DESCRIPTION, PURPOSE, AND METHOD:

The purpose of this course is, first, to acquaint you with the scholarly study of the New Testament, specifically of the first three canonical gospels, also known as the "Synoptic" Gospels. Secondly, the course will introduce you to the means by which Jesus' sayings primarily and the events of his life secondarily became handed down in early Christian tradition to suit the needs of different Christian communities. In achieving this aim, you will also read two other gospels considered as part of the "synoptic" tradition about Jesus: the two sayings gospels known as "Q," a reconstructed source for Matthew's and Luke's gospels, and the Gospel of Thomas, re-discovered in the middle of the 20th century. Because no text ever arises without a context, you will become acquainted first with the concept of a "quest for the historical Jesus" and finally with the development of early Christianity and the formation of a biblical "canon".

The method of the course, in keeping with the liberal arts tradition of scholarship on religion, will be historical-critical. That is, we will concern ourselves chiefly with three areas in studying the Synoptic Gospels: 1) the historical milieu in which they arose and in which they were transmitted, became canonical, were lost, or suppressed; 2) careful reading, comparison and analysis of texts, insofar as is possible within the limits of their English translations; 3) interpretation (=criticism) of these texts within their contexts to discover their meaning and significance to various communities of faith. This interpretation will include the diversified portrait of Jesus that these various gospels were written to convey.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

Barnstone, Willis. *The New Covenant: Commonly Called the New Testament. Vol. I, The Four Gospels and Apocalypse*. New York: Riverhead Books, 2002.

Borg, Marcus. *The Lost Gospel Q: The Original Sayings of Jesus*. Ulysses Press, 1999.

Crossan, John Dominic. *The Essential Jesus: Original Sayings and Earliest Images*. Edison, NJ: Castle Books, 1994.

Meyer, Marvin. *The Gospel of Thomas: The Hidden Sayings of Jesus*. Interpretation by Harold Bloom. Harper San Francisco, 1992.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

1) **Reading:** Although many of the readings assigned appear short, they are often quite dense: therefore, this course is reading-intensive. *All assigned readings are to be prepared prior to the day for which they are required.* For each reading, you will be required to submit a 3X5 card on which you have written one brief thoughtful question or comment on the reading for the day. (For example: What surprised, intrigued, challenged or shocked me about the reading? What was difficult to understand?) These comments will be due at the time of the class for which the readings are assigned, and will serve as the basis for our discussions. You will not succeed in this course unless you do the readings, even if you think you are already familiar with most of them. If you know that you will be absent (e.g., for a sports event, field trip, etc.) you will need to submit your question or comment for the class missed. Please do not expect me to keep track of your submissions: that is your responsibility. Attendance and active class participation will account for 20% of your final grade. (*An unreasonable number of absences will adversely affect your grade.*)

2) **Tests:** There will be two in-class tests and a comprehensive final examination. The in-class tests are on dates shown on the syllabus. The final is scheduled for Sat., May 6, at 8:30 a.m. All tests are to be taken when scheduled. Each test and the exam are worth 20% of your final grade.

3) **Scholarly essay:** The final component of your grade is a scholarly essay, the result of your research into some topic related to the Synoptic Gospels and their place in early Christianity. Topics for the paper, as well as a complete description of the requirements, will be given out well in advance of the due date. The paper will constitute 20% of your final grade.

OFFICE AND OFFICE HOURS:

Clough 406 (phone: 843-3742)
Office hours: MWF 10:10-10:50; Tu/Th 2:00-3:00 and by appointment
E-mail: gstreete@rhodes.edu

COURSE CALENDAR

JANUARY

- Wed., Jan. 11: The "Synoptic Problem" and the Jesus of History
- Fri., Jan. 13: Film (in class): "From Jesus to Christ: Vol. I"
Read: Barnstone, "Preface: Yeshua and the Poor," 4-6; "Historical Bases of Yeshua's Life and Death," 468-492
- Mon., Jan. 16: **NO CLASS: MLK JR.'S BIRTHDAY OBSERVED**
- Wed., Jan. 18: From Jesus to Christ: The Texts and Their Composition
Read: Barnstone, "On the Gospels' Authorship," 443-456; "How Yeshua ben Yosef Became Yeshua the Messiah," 457-467
- Fri., Jan. 20: From Jesus to Christ: The Texts and Their Transmission
Read: Barnstone, "Christian Jews or Jewish Christians," 493-498; "The Old Bibles of the Early Christians," 499-506; "Old Covenant or New Covenant," 507-520
- Mon., Jan. 23: From Jesus to Christ: The Church and the Jews
Read: Barnstone, "Anti-Judaism in the New Covenant," 439-442; "The Church *Agon*," 521-526;
"A Gentleman's Agreement," 527-547; "The Evangelists As Apologists," 548-556
- Wed., Jan. 25: From Jesus to Christ: The Texts and Their Translations
Read: Barnstone, "To Soften the Blows," 557-560; "A New Translation," 8-27; "A Brief History of the Translator's Way," 430-438; "A Note on New Covenant Scripture," 40-41; "A Note on the Greek Source Texts," 42-43; "Names of God"; "Order of the Gospels"; "A Note on Transcription," 562-568
- Fri., Jan. 27: The First Gospel? Mark (Markos)
Read: Barnstone, Introductory material, 45-46
- Mon., Jan. 30: Mark
Read: Markos Chapter 1-4

FEBRUARY

- Wed., Feb. 1: Mark
Read: Barnstone, Markos Chapters 5-8
- Fri., Feb. 3: Mark
Read: Barnstone, Markos, 9-13
- Mon., Feb.6: The Lost Gospel?" Q
Read: Borg, "Introduction and Preface"; "The Lost Gospel Q"; "The Story of Q"; "A Note on the Translation"
- Wed., Feb. 8: "The Lost Gospel" Q
Read: Borg, Q 1-11
- Fri., Feb. 10 "The Lost Gospel" Q
Read: Borg, Q 12-22
- Mon., Feb. 13: "The Lost Gospel" Q
- Wed., Feb. 15: **1ST TEST**
- Fri., Feb. 17: **NO CLASS; INSTRUCTOR AT CONFERENCE**
- Mon., Feb. 20: The Gospel of Matthew (Mattai)
Read: Barnstone, Introductory material, 107-108
- Wed., Feb. 22: Matthew:
Read: Barnstone, Mattai 5-7
- Fri., Feb. 24: Matthew
Read: Barnstone, Mattai 8-13
- Mon., Feb. 27: Matthew
Read: Barnstone, Mattai 14-25

MARCH

- Wed., Mar. 1: The Gospel of Luke
Read: Barnstone, Introductory material, 201-202; Luke (Loukas) Prologue
- Fri., Mar. 3: Luke
Read: Barnstone, Loukas, Chapters 4- 6
- Mon., Mar. 6: Luke
Read: Barnstone, Loukas, Chapters 7-14
- Wed., Mar. 8: Luke
Read: Barnstone, Loukas, Chapters 15-21
- Fri., Mar. 10: Open

SPRING BREAK

- Mon., Mar. 20: The Death of Jesus
Read: Markos 14-15; Mattai 26-27; Loukas 22-23; Yohanan (John) 18-19 (in Barnstone)
- Wed., Mar. 22: **2nd TEST**
- Fri., Mar. 24: The Resurrection of Jesus
Read: Markos 16:1-8 and “supplements”; Mattai 26-28; Loukas 24; Yohanan 20-21 (in Barnstone)
- Mon., Mar. 27: The Birth of Jesus
Read: Mattai 1-4; Loukas 1-3
- Wed., Mar. 29: The Birth of Jesus
- Fri., Mar. 31: The Other “Lost Gospel”: Thomas
Read: Meyer, “Introduction,” Thomas; Film clip (in class)

APRIL

- Mon., Apr. 3: "The Living Jesus"
Read: Meyer, Thomas, Sayings 1-19 + commentary
- Wed., Apr. 5: The Living Jesus:
Read: Meyer, Thomas, Sayings 20-62 + commentary
- Fri., Apr. 7: **NO CLASS: INSTRUCTOR AT CONFERENCE**
- Mon., Apr. 10: The Living Jesus:
Read: Meyer, Thomas, Sayings 63-86 + commentary
- Wed., Apr. 12: The Living Jesus:
Read: Meyer, Thomas, Sayings 87-114 + commentary
- Fri., Apr. 14: **NO CLASS; EASTER RECESS**
- Mon., Apr. 17: The Essential Jesus?
Read: Crossan, "Prologue" and "Contexts," v-24
- Wed., Apr. 19: The Essential Jesus: Sayings and Images
Read: Crossan, "Texts & Images" and Sayings 1-36 + commentary + images
- Fri., Apr. 21: The Essential Jesus: Sayings and Images
Read: Crossan, Sayings 37-65 + commentary + images
- Mon., Apr. 24: The Essential Jesus: Sayings and Images
Read: Crossan, Sayings 66-93 + commentary + images
- Wed., Apr. 26: "Who do you say that I am?"
Read: "A Reading," Harold Bloom in Meyer, Thomas, 111-121
- Fri, Apr. 28: **NO CLASS: AWARDS CONVOCATION & URCAS**