

JESUS ONLINE

Instructor: Professor Lynne Darden

Office: Douglass/Cook Campus

Loree Building

70 Lipman Drive, Rm 130

lsdarden@rci.rutgers.edu

Course Description

The aim of this course is to study the various identity constructions of Jesus of Nazareth in the New Testament that were based on the historical, political, social and religious experiences of the early Christians. We will examine how these diverse portrayals of Jesus served to interpret and respond to the life situations of the earliest Christians, a people living within the context of the Roman Empire. Therefore, we will be able to discern how the Roman ideological context influenced the development of the many different faces of Jesus in the New Testament. By our reflections on these issues we prepare ourselves for thinking critically about the various different ways that Jesus has been interpreted in later contexts, including our own cultural contexts.

Therefore, a large portion of this syllabus engages in the academic study of the Gospels, the texts that tell of Jesus' birth, life and death. While many faith communities understand these writings as a source of divine guidance and a tool for personal reflection, these *are not* the foci of this course. This course welcomes students from all faith traditions and religious backgrounds and it is expected that we all treat each other with the respect and dignity each one of us deserves in our thread discussions.

Course Objectives

- Students will obtain familiarity with the complex depictions of Jesus of Nazareth
- Students will develop a set of analytical tools for developing and assessing the interpretation of the gospels, the most popular and culturally significant texts of the New Testament writings
- Students will obtain a deeper understanding of the major critical issues in the interpretation of this literature including questions of authorship, translation and canon formation
- Students will engage the issue of how ancient Christian religio-political understanding about Jesus influences the shape of modern cultures

Required Texts:

Marcus Borg: *Jesus: Uncovering the Life, Teachings and Relevance of a Religious Revolutionary*

Richard Horsley: *Jesus and Empire: The Kingdom of God and the New World Disorder*

Stephen Prothero, *American Jesus: How the Son of God Became a National Icon*

All of the above books are available in paperback on Amazon.com for about \$10/each.

Also required is a New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) of the bible. This is the version that the Society of Biblical Literature (the academic guild of biblical scholars) mandates for the academic study of the New Testament because this translation is closest to the original language of the New Testament, Koine Greek. Please do not use: KING JAMES

VERSION, NEW KING JAMES VERSION, NIV, NAB, etc. These versions alter the text significantly in their translations. As a result, these translations often do not accurately convey the nuances of the ancient texts. Also be sure that the bible is AN ACADEMIC STUDY BIBLE AND NOT A CHURCH STUDY BIBLE. A CHURCH STUDY BIBLE PLACES EMPHASIS ON CHRISTIAN FORMATION. FOR EXAMPLE, IF YOUR BIBLE ASKS QUESTIONS BASED ON "WHAT WOULD JESUS DO?" OR PRESENTS GUIDELINES FOR SPIRITUAL GROWTH THEN THAT BIBLE WOULD BE UNSUITABLE FOR USE IN THIS COURSE.

Strongly Recommend: *HarperCollins Study Bible*. New Revised Standard Version. Fully Revised and Updated (with Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books and Concordance) edited by Harold Attridge, (HarperSanFrancisco, 2006). This is the bible that is recommended by the biblical guild. Soft cover available for about \$27.00. See Amazon. Com. The New Testament is also available online. Try www.NTGateway.com. Remember NEW REVISED STANDARD VERSION (NRSV) ONLY!

There is also a webliography listing various useful websites that you should browse. Several of these websites are required readings/viewings for particular units. Those websites which are required will be listed on the syllabus and on the unit.

Course Requirements

Chat Sessions: you are required to participate in a weekly chat discussion that I will facilitate and will be based on the weekly readings. The chat room can be found in the "Live" link on the online menu at the top of the screen. This will be in synchronous time which means that we are all required to gather in the room at a specific time each week. **The day/time: TBD**

Weekly One or Two Single- space page(s) E-journals: the purpose of the e-journals is to encourage personal reflection upon the material covered in the course. Students will need to keep an e-journal throughout the course and they should be submitted in the individual unit drop box by **Fridays at 11:00 p.m.** The weekly unit assignment will inform you of the e-journal requirement for that week. Students will be graded down if e-mail journals are not turned in on time. The e-journals should be in response to the particular questions that will be posted in each unit.

Exams: There will be a final exam to be discussed at a later date.

Grading: Chat 40%; E-journals 40%, Final 20%. **Important note:** Since this is an online course your participation is graded by the regular chat sessions and the timely posting of your e-journals **on** the site.

Week 1: A Man Born in Obscurity: Introduction to Jesus of Nazareth

Readings: Borg, chapter 1: "Jesus Today: Telling His Story," pgs. 1-14, chapter 3: "The Gospels: Memory and Testimony," pgs. 27-50
Horsley, "Introduction," pgs. 1-14, Chapter 3, "Toward a Relational Approach to Jesus," pgs. 55-78
Prothero, "Introduction," pgs. 1-16.

Website: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/watch/?autoplay>. Watch the first hour of Part One of the video which details how the Roman Empire shaped Jesus' life.

Week 2 : The Roman Empire: The Religio-Political Environment of Jesus' Time

Readings: Horsley, chapter 1: "Roman Imperialism: The New World Order," pgs. 15-34
Borg, chapter 4: "The Shaping of Jesus: Jewish Tradition in an Imperial World," pgs. 77- to the top of 92
Prothero, "Enlightened Sage," 19-42;

Websites: Timeline and Contextual Background on PBS Roman Empire Webpage

http://www.pbs.org/empires/romans/special/timeline_01.html

PBS Roman Empire Webpage

[http:// www.pbs.org/empires/romans](http://www.pbs.org/empires/romans)

Societal Stratification: Slavery and Gender: "Resisting Slavery in Ancient Rome"
– Keith Bradley

http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ancient/romans/slavery_01.shtml

"Roman Women: Following the Clues" – Suzanne Dixon

http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ancient/romans/roman_women_01.shtml

"Social Pecking Order in the Roman World" – Valerie Hope

http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ancient/romans/social_structure_01.shtml

Musonius Rufus "Why Women Too Should Study Philosophy"

<http://www.stoa.org/diotima/anthology/wlgr/wlgr-philosophers.shtml>

"Religion in the Roman World" – Marianne Bonz

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

Week 2: Resistance and Rebellion: The Jewish Context in the Roman Empire

Readings: Horsley, chapter 2: "Resistance and Rebellion in Judea and Galilee," pgs. 35-43
Borg, chapter 4: "The Shaping of Jesus: Jewish Tradition in an Imperial World," pgs. 92-108; chapter 9: "Resistance and the Domination System," pgs. 225-260

Website: The Jewish Roman World

<http://religiousstudies.uncc.edu/people/jtabor/jewishworldjesus.html>

Website: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/watch/?autoplay>.

Watch Chapter 11 (1:38:24) The Catastrophic Jewish Revolt 66-70 c.e.

Week 3: The Gospels: Memory, Metaphor and Method

Readings: Borg, chapter 3: "The Gospels: Memory, Metaphor and Method," pgs. 51-76;
Horsley, chapter 4: "God's judgment of the Roman Imperial Order, pgs., 79-104; chapter 5: "Covenantal Community and Cooperation, pgs., 105-128

Website: New Testament Gateway: <http://www.ntgateway.com/>

Week 3: Who Do You Say That I Am?: The Synoptic Jesus and the Problem

Readings: Borg, chapter 6: "The Big Picture: The Synoptic Profile of Jesus," pgs. 137-164; Prothero, "Sweet Savior," pgs. 43-86

Website: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/watch/?autoplay>.
Watch the first 46 minutes of **Part two** of the video (chapter 1-5)

Website: Scroll down to Podcast 2:1 on this site. The podcast is entitled Introduction to Early Christian Portraits of Jesus
<http://www.philipharland.com/Blog/category/podcasts/page/2/>

Week 4: The Secret Messiah Part I: The Gospel of Mark

Readings: Mark 1:1-8:30 (the first 8 chapters of the gospel of Mark (NRSV)).

Website: <http://www.ntgateway.com/gospel-and-acts/gospel-of-mark/introduction-to-marks-gospel/>

Week 4: The Secret Messiah Part II: The Gospel of Mark

Readings: Mark 8:31-16:20 (the rest of the gospel)

Website: Same as Week 6

Week 4: Jesus' Birth and Baptism in Matthew and Luke

Readings: Matthew 1:1-4:25; Luke 1:1-4:44
Borg, chapter 5: "The Shaping of Jesus: His Experience with God," pgs., 107-136
Prothero, "Manly Redemmer," pgs. 87-123"

Website: Introduction to Matthew:
<http://www.ntgateway.com/gospel-and-acts/gospel-of-matthew/introduction-to-matthews-gospel/>

Introduction to Luke:
<http://www.religion-online.org/showchapter.asp?title=1116&C=1230>

Week 5: Jesus' Life in Matthew and Luke

Readings: Matthew, chapters 5 and 6; chapters 24 and 25
Luke, 4:16-to the end of chapter 7; 10:25 to 11:13

Week 6: The Logos in John

Readings: John 1-4
Prothero, "Black Moses," pgs. 200-228

Week 6: Johannine Anti-Judaism and the Crucifixion

Readings: John 8-9; 18-21
Prothero, "Rabbi," pgs. 229-266

Week 7: The Resurrection(s) of Jesus

Readings: Matthew 28
Luke 24
John 20-21
Prothero, "Oriental Christ," pgs. 267-290

Week 7: Jesus in Revelation

Readings: Revelation chapters 13, 17, 18
Context: Roman Empire and Revelation
Readings: Revelation 1, 2, 3
Context: Jesus characterized in terms of imperial domination