

Jesus and the Gospels

Religion 114**Classroom:** 114 Comenius Hall**Class times:** MW 2:35–3:45pm**E-Mail:** radine@moravian.edu**Professor:** Jason Radine**Office:** 202 Comenius Hall, ext. 1314**Office Hours:** MW 11:00–12:00

and by appointment.

Course Content

Jesus is without doubt the most famous historical person worldwide, but in fact he remains an enigmatic, mysterious figure whose meaning and message is hotly debated today. The purpose of this course is to try to answer the following questions:

- 1) What can modern historical methods tell us about Jesus?
- 2) Why do the Gospels present different views of him?
- 3) What can we know about what Jesus *really* thought and said?
- 4) What can we learn from Gospels that did not make it into the Bible?
- 5) What did non-Christian authors from antiquity think about Jesus?

There are not necessarily any single answers to these questions, so we will bring in a variety of viewpoints into the class. In addition to primary sources (the Bible and non-canonical gospels) there are three books assigned that present three different views of the historical Jesus from three serious and historically-committed biblical scholars. These will provide a good sample of the range of opinion on who Jesus was and what he believed and said. Biblical study is a dynamic and ever-changing field, so we can expect new discoveries to appear even in this semester!

Goals of the Course

1) *An Understanding of the Complexities of the Question of Who Jesus Was:* There are a variety of possible ways of seeing and understanding Jesus, and a major goal of this course is for students to learn about that variety.

2) *Biblical Literacy:* The knowledge of significant figures and ideas in the Bible, biblical literacy is declining in American society even as the Bible continues to be drawn into social and political discussions, often with little knowledge of its actual contents. Students in this course will learn biblical literacy, a vital area of knowledge for full participation in today's public discourse.

3) *The Academic, Scholarly Method of Biblical Criticism:* While many students may be familiar with the methods of reading the Bible in faith communities, this course will introduce the critical methods of modern academic scholarship (see "Approach" below for further details). Students in this course will learn how to use the critical method to uncover the history, ideologies, and theologies in the biblical texts.

4) *Close Reading Skills*: Many of the most interesting and revealing details within the Bible are missed by readers not reading closely. This course will demonstrate the methods of close reading, wherein small details are brought to the surface rather than glossed over. This skill is useful in a virtually limitless range of life tasks.

5) *Analysis of Contrasting Arguments*: This course will be examining the debate on the historical Jesus and the Gospel messages using several well-thought-out theories. Students in this course will enhance their skills in distinguishing these positions and understanding the complex arguments that they bring to the questions. Students will learn how to read sophisticated arguments and come to their own conclusion.

Approach

The approach will be literary and historical, not religious, as the biblical and non-biblical texts will be studied like any other works of ancient literature. This course will employ the scholarly, academic approach of biblical criticism, without privileging any particular religious view. “Biblical criticism” does not refer to negatively criticizing the Bible, but instead to the careful analysis of biblical texts using the most current methods from a variety of disciplines. This approach, used in biblical criticism in colleges and universities around the world, attempts to be as neutral as possible, and to let the biblical texts speak for themselves, even if it runs counter to later religious traditions. While you are not required to agree with the presentations of biblical texts and beliefs in this class, you are required to understand them and be able to demonstrate that understanding in exams.

Required Texts

- 1) The New Revised Standard Version translation of the Bible, with Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books (Oxford University Press).
- 2) *Familiar Stranger: An Introduction to Jesus of Nazareth* by Michael J. McClymond, Eerdmans Publishing, 2004.
- 3) *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium* by Bart D. Ehrman, Oxford University Press, 1999.
- 4) *Jesus: Uncovering the Life, Teachings, and Relevance of a Religious Revolutionary* by Marcus J. Borg, HarperOne Press, 2006.
- 5) *The Other Gospels: Non-Canonical Gospel Texts* edited by Ron Cameron, Westminster John Knox Press, 1982.
- 6) Occasional handouts, especially on the non-Christian sources on Jesus that we will be studying at the end of the semester.

Grading and Class Policies

- 1) Six exams, a mix of essay and short-answer, each worth 13%.
- 2) Bi-weekly take-home essays (typed, 12pt font, double spaced, 1-2 pages), generally assigned on Wednesdays and due on Mondays. The essays will be based on questions drawn from the textbooks that I will give out. 20% of the grade altogether. Plagiarized papers will receive F grades, and will result in a one-letter grade reduction for your course grade overall at least, and a failing grade in the class at most.
- 3) Active, in-class participation is 2% of the grade. Cell phones must be silenced in class, and texting is not allowed.
- 4) Readings, which should be done by the day on which they appear on the syllabus; that is, before class.
- 5) Attendance. After two unexcused absences, each further unexcused absence will reduce your overall course grade by one third of a letter. Two times late unexcused counts as one unexcused absence.

Lecture and Readings Schedule

Introduction and Background

Introduction	January 18 th
The Jewish Background to the Life of Jesus <i>Readings: McClymond chapters 1&2</i>	January 20 th

The Synoptic Gospels

The Gospel of Mark <i>Readings: Mark 1-5, McClymond chapters 3&4</i>	January 25 th
The Gospel of Mark <i>Readings: Mark 6-10, McClymond chapters 5&6</i>	January 27 th
The Gospel of Mark <i>Readings: Mark 11-16, McClymond chapters 7&8</i>	February 1 st
Gospel of Mark Exam	February 3 rd
The Gospel of Matthew <i>Readings: Matthew 1-9, McClymond chapters 9&10</i>	February 8 th
The Gospel of Matthew <i>Readings: Matthew 10-19, McClymond chapters 11&12</i>	February 10 th

The Gospel of Matthew <i>Readings: Matthew 20-28, McClymond chapters 13</i>	February 15 th
Matthew Exam	February 17 th
The Gospel of Luke <i>Readings: Luke 1-8, Ehrman chapters 1&2</i>	February 22 nd
The Gospel of Luke <i>Readings: Luke 9-16, Ehrman chapters 3&6</i>	February 24 th
The Gospel of Luke <i>Readings: Luke 17-24, Ehrman chapters 7&8</i>	March 1 st
Luke Exam	March 3 rd
The Gospel of John <i>Readings: John 1-7, Ehrman chapters 9&10</i>	March 15 th
The Gospel of John <i>Readings: John 8-14, Ehrman chapters 11&12</i>	March 17 th
The Gospel of John <i>Readings: John 15-21, Ehrman chapters 13&14</i>	March 22 nd
John Exam	March 24 th
Non-Canonical Gospels	
<i>Gnostic Gospels</i>	
The Gospel of Thomas Cameron, Borg chapter 1	March 29 th
Dialogue of the Savior, Gospel of the Egyptians Cameron, Borg chapter 2	March 31 st
The Gospel of Peter, the Acts of John Cameron, Borg chapter 3	April 7 th
<i>Jewish Gospels</i>	
The Gospels of the Hebrews, Ebionites, Nazoreans Cameron Gnostic Gospels exam	April 12 th

Prequel Gospels

The Protoevangelion of James, the Infancy Gospel of Thomas April 14th
Cameron, Ehrman chapter 5.

Gospels of Jesus' Relationships

The Secret Gospel of Mark April 19th
Cameron, Borg chapter 4

The Gospel of Philip April 21st
Handout, Borg chapter 5

The Gospel of Mary April 26th
Handout, Borg chapter 6

Jewish and Roman Sources April 28th
Cameron, Borg chapter 7, Ehrman chapter 4

Final Exam (Non-Canonical Gospels) 8:30am! May 3rd