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Jesus Across Cultures

Instructor

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The high priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teaching. Jesus answered, "I have spoken openly for all the world to hear. . . .But why ask me? Ask my hearers what I taught: they know what I said."

Description and Objectives

This course invites you to continue the examination of the nature and function of religion in human life, begun in Religious Studies 100, by entering into a study of some of the significant interpretations of Jesus of Nazareth that have developed in various religious and cultural contexts over nearly two thousand years. In addition, we will examine a variety of contemporary christological developments occurring in diverse contexts around the globe--in Latin America, Asia, Africa and North America. Throughout the quarter, we will be reflecting on the phenomenon of plurality itself, hoping to achieve some understanding of why religious and cultural traditions are diverse and changing. Our specific goals:

1. To gain **accurate knowledge** about christological developments in particular times and contexts; to be able to present and support important facts correctly, clearly and thoroughly.
2. To develop and support informed **analyses** and **comparisons** of the major figures and movements considered in the course; to be able to explain how complex realities are constructed and fit together; to be able to suggest viable connections, applications and patterns, drawing upon your own knowledge and experience, where appropriate.
3. To propose and support **evaluations** of and **creative responses** to the ideas, issues and themes considered in the course; to be able to assess respectfully their usefulness, meaningfulness or truth by providing a reasoned judgment based on clearly formulated criteria; to be able to combine ideas in an interesting manner to present your own perspective.

This course asks you to become an **active learner**, critically appropriating and personally responding to the ideas at hand. In all of the courses I teach, I advocate an educational approach that seeks **conversation**--both literal and metaphorical--in order to increase understanding and improve our shared situation. In any authentic conversation, one **considers seriously** the conversation partner, in the hope of **deepening and widening** one's present understanding--and from new understanding comes more intentional choices about how to live one's life. A process like this is risky, since one's present **assumptions and worldview** might be revised or challenged, and one might decide, as a result, to live one's life differently.

One can engage in conversation with persons, of course, but also, in a way, with texts, events, places and even objects. All might "speak" to us or "show" something to us, suggesting new ways of being, thinking and living in the world. I believe that "conversation," understood as a deliberate and self-conscious interaction with

interesting and compelling possibilities, is at the very heart of the educational experience. And, as I hope you will discover, religions provide some of the most interesting and compelling possibilities you will ever have the good fortune to encounter.

Required Texts

1. Gerard S. Sloyan, *The Jesus Tradition: Images of Jesus in the West*. Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1986.
2. Priscilla Pope-Levison and John R. Levison, *Jesus in Global Contexts*. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1992.
3. Leonardo Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator: A Critical Christology for Our Time*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1978.
4. C. S. Song, *The Tears of Lady Meng: A Parable of People's Political Theology*. Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1981.
5. Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing: Theological Reflections on Christianity in Africa*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1986.
6. Rita Nakashima Brock, *Journeys by Heart: A Christology of Erotic Power*. New York: Crossroad, 1988.

These items are available in the Lincoln Park Campus Bookstore. They are also on Reserve in the Lincoln Park Campus Library.

Procedures and Grading

1. **Conversation Starters.** Before each class session, you are to complete all assigned readings, and then prepare a "Conversation Starter" that has three parts:
 - a. **The gist.** Write one or two sentences that set forth what you believe to be the **central thesis** or theses of the reading assigned for the session under consideration. Do not simply copy from the text, but state the core thesis or theses as clearly as possible, in your own words. What, on the whole, is this reading trying to say?
 - b. **Key terms/phrases.** Now that you've stated "the gist," what are the specific "building blocks" this reading uses to make its central point or points? Make a brief list of the key terms or phrases (usually 5-10) found in the assigned reading, and write very brief explanations of each. These explanations need not be in complete sentences, and they may all be strung together in one "paragraph" to conserve space on the page.
 - c. **Response questions.** Compose **at least three** questions that probe more deeply into the significance of the text. Ideally, these should be "real" questions, questions you find interesting, questions that point to areas about which you really "need to know." These questions should:
 - ask about possible **comparisons** between this text and something else we have considered in this course, or which you have considered in other courses;
 - ask for **evaluations** of the meaningfulness, usefulness, or truth of the text;
 - ask about the plausibility of particular, **creative responses** to the text; and always
 - focus on **specific** points.

Each Conversation Starter is to be **one page** (no longer), **typed** and single-spaced. The **date** of the class session to which each sheet corresponds is to appear at the **top** of the page. Your name is **not** to appear on the front. Write your name on the **back** of the sheet.

At the start of each session, two Conversation Starters for that session, produced by members of the class, will be distributed to all class members, the copies having been made in advance. Responsibilities for this will rotate among all members of the class.

At each session, **all** Conversation Starters produced by **all** members of the class will be collected by the instructor. Grades of "satisfactory" or "unsatisfactory" will be given, and the sheets will be returned at the next class session. **Incomplete** or missing sheets will be given grades of "unsatisfactory." 2-3 grades of "unsatisfactory" will lower your final grade for this course by **one letter**, 4-5 by **two letters**, and 6 or more will result in a failing grade. **Sheets turned in after class will not be accepted.** If you have to miss class, and wish to receive a grade of "satisfactory" for that session's Conversation Starter, you must, **before class**, either:

- deliver your sheet to the instructor's office (SAC 447--slide it under the door); or
- fax it to the instructor at 312/362-5324 (and call the instructor at 312/362-5436 to let him know); or

Conversation Starters written throughout the quarter should be kept in one file/folder, and brought, as a collection, to every session.

2. Class Participation. Frequent and informed **participation in class discussions** is essential. This is an excellent way to confirm your knowledge and to try out your analyses, comparisons, evaluations and creative ideas in an interactive and respectful forum. Your Conversation Starter should serve as your point of entry into the class discussions.

At the end of the quarter, I will make a judgment about the overall frequency, consistency and quality of your preparedness and participation in class. Your overall grade for participation will count for **20% of your final grade** for this course.

3. Tests. Three tests will be given. Each will have two parts: one part written outside of class (**essay**), and one part written in class (**short answer**). Each test will be **cumulative**, that is, they will cover all material studied in the course up to the date of the test. These tests will build on the Conversation Starters, and will allow you to demonstrate achievement of the **goals** of the course (accurate knowledge, clear analyses and comparisons, well-supported evaluations and creative responses--see part A above).

Dates:

January 19: Take-Home portion of Test 1 assigned.

January 24: Take-Home portion of Test 1 due; In-Class portion administered.

February 9: Take-Home portion of Test 2 assigned.

February 14: Take-Home portion of Test 2 due; In-Class portion administered.

March 9: Take-Home Portion of Test 3 assigned.

March 16 (8:45 a.m.): Take-Home Portion of Test 3 due; In-Class portion administered.

Test 1 will count for 25% of your final grade for this course; Test 2 will also count for 25%, and Test 3

will count for 30%.

4. **A note about grading.** In evaluating each aspect of your work, I will make a judgment about the degree to which you demonstrate achievement of the **goals** of the course (accurate knowledge, clear analyses and comparisons, well-supported evaluations and creative responses--see part A above), and I will use the following grading system: A = excellent, B = very good, C = satisfactory, D = poor, F = failing.

Academic Integrity

Plagiarism and cheating, like other forms of academic dishonesty, are always serious matters. This course adheres to the University's policies on plagiarism and cheating as stated in the current Bulletin/Student Handbook. Consult the manual, "Writing in the Liberal Studies," for instructions about proper citation or acknowledgement of the work of others in class assignments.

Schedule

Matters of Interpretation

THURS JAN 5: Introduction & Syllabus. Film, *The Changing Image: Portraits of Christ*.

TUES JAN 10: Francis Xavier D'Sa, "Ecumenism and the Problem of Religious Language" (**photocopied material**) & **Sloyan**, pages 1-8.

Western Interpretations and "the Christian Tradition"

THURS JAN 12: **Sloyan**, pages 9-44 (The "Apostolic Fathers"; Early Apocryphal Images of Jesus; From the Church Fathers to the Early Middle Ages).

TUES JAN 17: **Sloyan**, pages 45-80 (The Difference Francis of Assisi Made; Some Medieval English Mystics; Voices from the Troubled Times of the Renaissance and Reform).

THURS JAN 19: **Sloyan**, pages 81-115 (The Move into Modernity; The Modern Critics and Their Heirs; Some Contemporary Images of Jesus). **Test 1 Take-Home portion assigned.**

TUES JAN 24: Test 1 In-Class, and Take-Home Portion Due

Interpretations in Latin America

THURS JAN 26: Pope-Levison, pages 11-54 (Conversations in Christology; Jesus in Latin America), & **Boff**, pages 63-79 (Jesus Christ, Liberator of the Human Condition).

TUES JAN 31: **Boff**, pages 158-177, 206-246 (The Christological Process Continues: The Accounts of Jesus' Infancy--Theology or History?; Where Can we Find the Resurrected Christ Today?; What Name can we Call Jesus Christ Today?).

THURS FEB 2: **Boff**, pages 247-295 (Jesus Christ and Christianity: Reflections on the Essence of Christianity; Epilogue: A Christological View from the Periphery).

Interpretations in Asia

TUES FEB 7: Pope-Levison, pages 55-88 (Jesus in Asia), & **Song**, pages 1-48 (The Parable; The Wall

Every Stone of which Cost a Human Life; The Wall Made no Progress; A God Called National Security; Plea With Tears; Power of Tears).

THURS FEB 9: Song, pages 48-69 (Encounter With Truth; A Grand Finale), & C. S. Song, "Oh, Jesus, Here with Us!" (**photocopied material**). **Test 2 Take-Home portion assigned.**

TUES FEB 14: Test 2 In-Class, and Take-Home Portion Due

Interpretations in Africa

THURS FEB 16: Pope-Levison, pages 89-127 (Jesus in Africa), & **Oduyoye**, pages 1-44 (Early Christian Theology in Africa; The Modern Missionary Movement and Christian Dogma in Africa).

TUES FEB 21: Oduyoye, pages 45-96 (Expressions, Sources, and Variants of African Theology; Conventional Dogmatics on African Soil; Theology from a Cultural Outlook; Created and Redeemed; Except God).

THURS FEB 23: Oduyoye, pages 97-149 (Jesus Saves; Covenant and Community; Feminism: A Precondition for a Christian Anthropology; Trinity and Community; Postscript).

Interpretations in North America

TUES FEB 28: Pope-Levison, pages 128-164 (Jesus in North America), & **Brock**, pages ix-24 (Introduction; The Character of Being Human and the Making of Human Character).

THURS MAR 2: Brock, pages 25-70 (The Heart of Erotic Power: The Incarnation of Divine Love; The Feminist Redemption of Christ).

TUES MAR 7: Brock, pages 71-108 (The Gospel of Mark: Erotic Power at Work; The Gospel of Mark: Erotic Power in the Shadows; Epilogue: Journeying by Heart).

THURS MAR 9: Concluding Reflections. Test 3 Take-Home portion assigned.

THURS MAR 16, 8:45 a.m.: Test 3 In-Class, and Take-Home Portion Due

Select a location 

http://www.wlu.ca/~wwwaar/syllabi/jesus_across_cultures-carlson.html

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