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# REL. 251: Jesus in the Gospels

## Aim of the Course

The purpose of this course is to study the career of Jesus of Nazareth, as he is represented and interpreted in the four so-called "canonical" gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John), three "apocryphal" gospels (Thomas, Peter, and "Mystical Mark"), and a "hypothetical" gospel known by New Testament scholars as "Q", short for the German word Quelle, which means "source." We will also look carefully at the writings of two contemporary New Testament scholars, John Dominic Crossan and Luke Timothy Johnson, who give sharply differing interpretations of Jesus of Nazareth. We will seek to deepen our understanding of Jesus by asking such questions as the following: Who was Jesus of Nazareth? What did he teach? How did he behave? What deeds did he perform? For what did he hope? How, and why, did he die? And what significance did his followers find in him?

## Educational Priorities and Outcomes

1. Students will acquire, integrate, and apply knowledge relating to the New Testament and the origins of Christianity.
2. Students will read and analyze challenging texts, speak clearly and listen actively as we discuss those texts, and write essays explaining their understanding and interpretation of those texts.
3. Students will connect with diverse ideas and with people whose experiences differ from their own as we explore how first century C.E. Jewish and Roman beliefs and practices provided the context for Jesus' life and teachings.
4. Students will respect the ways spiritual well-being may contribute to a balanced life by learning about the life and teachings of Jesus, which have been a source of inspiration for millions of people for two millennia. *This course supports the Educational Priorities and Outcomes of Cornell College with emphases on knowledge, communication, intercultural literacy, and well-being.*

## Prerequisite

There is no prerequisite for this course.

## Class Meeting Times

After the first day of class (on which the class meets at 12:00 noon), class meetings will be held on weekdays from 12:15 to 3:00 PM.

## Course Requirements

*1. Class Participation (20% of final grade).* There are two components to this requirement, each constituting approximately 10% of your final grade.

- Your oral contributions to our class discussions. Formal focus passages will be provided for each class session. *Work on these passages carefully and thoroughly*, as you prepare for class each day—this will facilitate informed participation in class discussion.
- Additionally, regular attendance at class meetings is required. *More than one absence from class will*

*progressively lower this portion of your grade.*

2. *Midterm Exam (25%)*, which will take place on the second Wednesday of the term. The exam will contain short answer and short essay questions.
3. *A 4-5 Page Essay (25%)*, due on the third Wednesday of the term. *Late essays will not be accepted without prior consent of the professor.*
4. *Final Exam (30%)*, which will take place on the fourth Wednesday of the term. The exam will contain short answer, short essay, and longer essay questions.

### **Required Texts**

1. Robert J. Miller, ed., *The Complete Gospels: Annotated Scholars Version*, 4th ed.
2. John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant*.
3. Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Real Jesus: The Misguided Quest for the Historical Jesus and the Truth of the Traditional Gospels*.

### **Students with Special Needs**

Students who need accommodations for learning disabilities must provide documentation from a professional qualified to diagnose learning disabilities. For more information see [cornellcollege.edu/disabilities/documentation/index.shtml](http://cornellcollege.edu/disabilities/documentation/index.shtml). Students requesting services may schedule a meeting with the [disabilities services coordinator](#) as early as possible to discuss their needs and develop an individualized accommodation plan. Ideally, this meeting would take place well before the start of classes. At the beginning of each course, the student must notify the instructor within the first three days of the term of any accommodations needed for the duration of the course.

### **Academic Honesty**

Cornell College expects all members of the Cornell community to act with academic integrity. An important aspect of academic integrity is respecting the work of others. A student is expected to explicitly acknowledge ideas, claims, observations, or data of others, unless generally known. When a piece of work is submitted for credit, a student is asserting that the submission is her or his work unless there is a citation of a specific source. If there is no appropriate acknowledgment of sources, whether intended or not, this may constitute a violation of the College's requirement for honesty in academic work and may be treated as a case of academic dishonesty. The procedures regarding how the College deals with cases of academic dishonesty appear in The Catalogue, under the heading "Academic Honesty."

### **Course Calendar**

*Note: The reading assignments listed in this course calendar are to be completed PRIOR to that day's meeting of the class.*

#### **WEEK 1**

**Monday:** Getting oriented

##### ***I. What do the Gospels SAY?***

**Tuesday:** (a) Mark (Miller, ed., *The Complete Gospels*, pp. xi-xii, 19-60, 461-462).

(b) Michael Holmes, "To Be Continued... The Many Endings of the Gospel of Mark" (MOODLE).

**Wednesday:** Sayings Gospel “Q” (Miller, pp. 16, 257-278).

**Thursday:** Matthew (Miller, pp. 61-120).

**Friday:** Luke (Miller, pp. 121-184).

## **WEEK 2**

**Monday:** John (Miller, pp. 203-254).

**Tuesday:** Thomas, Peter, “Mystical Mark” (Miller, pp. 279-304, 393-400, 411-415).

**Wednesday:** MIDTERM EXAM.

## ***II. What do the Gospels MEAN?***

**Thursday:** A "Radical" Interpretation of Jesus: John Dominic Crossan.

Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, Prologue, Chapter 11 (also glance briefly through Appendices 1-6, pp. 427-461, to see how he sets things up there).

**Friday:** Crossan, Chapter 12-Chapter 13, p. 313.

## **WEEK 3**

**Monday:** Crossan, Chapter 13, p. 313-Chapter 14, p. 367.

**Tuesday:** Crossan, Chapter 14, p. 367-Epilogue.

**Wednesday:** ESSAY DUE AT THE BEGINNING OF CLASS.

In-class viewing of the film *Jesus Christ Superstar* or *Godspell*.

**Thursday:** A "More Traditional" Interpretation of Jesus: Luke Timothy Johnson.

Johnson, *The Real Jesus*, Preface-Chapter 2.

**Friday:** Johnson, Chapter 3-Chapter 5, p. 117.

## **WEEK 4**

**Monday:** Johnson, Chapter 5, p. 117-Epilogue.

**Tuesday:** Review session (optional).

**Wednesday:** FINAL EXAM.

## **A List of Reference Resources Available in the Library**

*The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 6 vols. (Ref 220.3 An21)

*Eerdmans Bible Dictionary* (Ref 220.3 Ee72)

*Harper's Bible Dictionary* (Ref 220.3 H231)

*International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 4 vols. (Ref 220.3 In8)

*Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, 5 vols. (Ref 220.3 In83)

*Mercer Dictionary of the Bible* (Ref 220.3 M534)

*Oxford Companion to the Bible* (Ref 220.3 Ox2)

*New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 3rd ed. (Ref 220.5204320 N42h)  
*The New Revised Standard Version Concordance* (Ref 220.520433 K824n)  
*Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible* (Ref 220.7 Ee72 2003)  
*Harper's Bible Commentary* (Ref 220.7 H234)  
*Interpreter's One-Volume Commentary on the Bible* (Ref 220.7 In84)  
*New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (Ref 220.7 N42)  
*The Oxford Bible Commentary* (Ref 220.7 Ox2b)  
*The Women's Bible Commentary* (Ref 220.7082 W842)  
*New Interpreter's Bible*, 12 vols. (Ref 220.77 N42)  
*Oxford Bible Atlas* (Ref 220.9 M451o)  
*Women in Scripture* (Ref 220.92 W842m)  
*The Five Gospels* (Ref 226.066 F586)

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