

The Sermon on the Mount

Focal Point Seminar, IDS 101, Section 208

Winter, 1998

DePaul University

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Hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 1:00-2:00, and by appointment

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A. INTRODUCTION AND OBJECTIVES

Welcome to one of the many "Focal Point Seminars" offered in DePaul's Liberal Studies (general education) program. These seminars concentrate on a particular person, place, text, object or event significant to our world because of its impact on how we live, think, or determine our values. A Focal Point Seminar approaches its topic with the idea that understanding is deepened through the discovery, engagement and synthesis of multiple perspectives. The course introduces students to the nature of university-level inquiry by "problematizing" initial interpretations of the topic, so that our present assumptions might be developed, extended and, in some ways, challenged or perhaps reinforced by our careful consideration of diverse possibilities. Thus understood, the Focal Point Seminars are truly "practice sessions for the life of the mind." As educated persons we always strive to see other persons, places, texts, objects and events in increasingly deeper and increasingly less superficial ways. Through reading, writing and discussion, we will try to do that in this course.

Our course explores the Sermon on the Mount. We will investigate this classic text in terms of its roots in Judaism and the Greco-Roman world, its interpretations in the Christian tradition, in other religions, and in philosophy, the arts and literature. This text, like other "classics," has had a profound and kaleidoscopically diverse history of reception and influence. The text does not "belong" to Christianity. The Sermon on the Mount (SM) illustrates the phenomenon of a "deep symbol," a "classic" (vs. a mere period piece) with a surplus and excess of meaning, evoking an inexhaustible multiplicity of readings, responses and effects.

Our specific learning goals are as follows:

1. to gain **accurate knowledge** about the important themes, figures, texts and other materials we consider – including interpretations of the SM from modern biblical scholarship, from the Christian theological tradition, from philosophical and literary perspectives, from non-Christian religions, and with a focus on such issues as war and peace, and interpretations of the Lord's Prayer – so that you are able to present and support significant facts correctly, clearly and thoroughly;
2. to develop **accurate analyses** of the positions considered, explaining how complex arguments and interpretations are constructed;
3. to propose **plausible comparisons** between the different perspectives considered, suggesting viable

- connections, applications and patterns;
4. to construct your own **articulate and respectful assessment** of the substance of this course, and of the viewpoints of others, developing and supporting your own reasoned evaluations and creative responses, based on clearly formulated criteria;
 5. to develop your capacity for clear and effective **writing**;
 6. to develop your capacity for clear and effective **verbal** communication.

B. STUDENT REQUIREMENTS

1. **Assignment preparation.** Come to each class having done the readings, taken careful notes, and having tried your best to find out the meanings of terms and concepts in the readings that are unfamiliar to you. At the start of every session, I will ask for a show of hands from those who have completed the readings.
2. **Class discussions.** Asking questions, raising concerns, offering your own ideas during class discussions is a crucial component of the learning process. You will be expected to be an active participant in classroom conversations. Furthermore, in addition to discussions during scheduled classroom times, we will be setting up an electronic discussion group for the members of this course in order to facilitate further conversation outside of class. While your participation in this electronic forum will be encouraged, it is not required and if you choose not to participate it will not affect your grade adversely.
3. **Logbook.** You will be required to keep a "logbook" throughout the autumn quarter. According to Webster's Dictionary, the standard definition of a "logbook" is "a daily record of a ship's speed or progress or the full record of a ship's voyage including notes on the ship's position at various times and including notes on the weather and on any important incidents occurring during the voyage." Think of the ship as you, of this course as the voyage, then set sail with the metaphor. Your logbook is the place for you to think critically and creatively, ask hard questions, and explore in writing your understanding of and response to the major themes and issues considered in our course.

While the **papers** (see item 4 below) will be the primary public *products* of your work, they will be direct outcomes of an ongoing writing *process* that begins and evolves in your logbook. Discussions, films and readings will influence what you write there. And the relationship works both ways, as your participation in discussions will be shaped by previous logbook entries. Often I will guide you in the writing, asking you to make particular sorts of entries during class time as well as outside of class.

Your logbook should be clearly divided into *two separate sections*, designated as **RAW NOTES** and **REFLECTIVE ENTRIES**. In the Raw Notes section, you will record your *initial* summaries of the contents of the readings and class sessions, listing and defining key terms and concepts. In this section, you will also jot down your *initial* questions, observations, criticisms, applications, and other forms of general and specific reaction to the reading or class session. This section of the logbook is the place to "get it all down on paper" so you won't forget important facts or insights you might need later.

The Reflective Entries section is where you pause, and step back from the immediate and initial experience of taking notes on a reading or ongoing classroom session. Here, you gather your thoughts, sort through the facts and initial impressions recorded earlier, and engage in more focused and sustained thinking – in writing. This section will consist of individual, dated entries, in the form of full sentences and paragraphs.

I will ask you to make many short Reflective Entries during class time. Entries made in class will be of varying lengths. In addition, you will be required to make at least **two Reflective Entries outside of class per week. Each entry made outside of class must be at least 1½ pages in length.** All Reflective Entries must be dated and written on standard 8½ x 11 college ruled paper (or typed if you prefer). Be sure to indicate clearly in your logbook whether Reflective Entries are made "outside of class" or "in class." **Bring the complete logbook (both sections) with you to every class session. I reserve the right to collect logbooks at any time during the quarter.**

4. **Papers.** You will be asked to write three papers, each approximately **6 pages, typed and double-spaced.** These papers will allow you to demonstrate competence in the first 5 of the 6 learning goals listed in part A of this syllabus and, as already noted, the papers will allow you to deepen and extend work begun in your logbook. Specific assignments and guidelines will be given in separate handouts.

Paper 1 assigned: January 20 Due in class: January 27

Paper 2 assigned: February 12 Due in class: February 19

Paper 3 assigned: March 12 Due in my office: By noon, March 20

C. FACULTY/STUDENT COMMITMENTS

I promise to use whatever talent, energy and knowledge I have to help awaken your intellectual curiosity; to encourage and respect you; and to help you to extend your capacities for careful and insightful thinking, reading, writing and speaking. I promise to meet with you whenever necessary, and to respond to your work as honestly and promptly as possible.

If you remain registered for this course I will take that as your promise to strive to be open to new ways of seeing the world; to respect the learning process by your timely attendance and careful preparation of readings, using your logbook as a principal and continuous means of discovering for yourself ways in which you can vigorously participate in and stimulate discussion; and to respect the experiences, beliefs and informed opinions of others in the class even as you challenge us to think more carefully and insightfully.

D. GRADING

- 20% of your final grade will be based on an assessment of your overall **course preparedness and involvement**, including regular and prompt attendance and informed participation in class discussions. *Students arriving late for class, missing class or not indicating that they have completed the assigned readings will receive a lower grade in this area.*
- 20% of your grade will be based on an overall assessment of your **logbook**, taking into account the number of entries made and the degree of intellectual engagement shown.
- Each of the three **papers** will be worth 20% of the final grade.

E. ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Plagiarism, like other forms of academic dishonesty, is always a serious matter. This course adheres to the university's policies on plagiarism as stated in the current *Student Handbook*. Consult the manual, "Writing in the Liberal Studies," for instructions about proper citation or acknowledgment of the work of others in class assignments.

F. REQUIRED TEXTS

1. Warren Carter, *What are they Saying about Matthew's Sermon on the Mount?* New York: Paulist Press, 1994. This text is available from the LPC Bookstore and is also on reserve in the Richardson Library.
2. *The Sermon on the Mount Course Reader*. This bound set of photocopied readings can be purchased for \$13.50 from the Department of Religious Studies Secretary in SAC 432, Monday through Thursday from 8:00 AM until 6:00 PM, or Friday from 8:00 AM until 4:00 PM. One copy of the *Reader* is also on reserve in the Richardson Library. However, it is strongly recommended that you purchase both Carter's text and the *Reader*, and bring them with you to class on the days they are being discussed.

G. SCHEDULE OF TOPICS, READINGS AND DUE DATES

1. Interpretation Theory and the Notion of a Focal Point Seminar

Tuesday, January 6

Syllabus and excerpts from films depicting the SM.

2. Interpretations from Modern Biblical Scholarship

Thursday, January 8

READINGS: Reader selection #1, "The Sermon on the Mount," in *Gospel Parallels: A Comparison of the Synoptic Gospels With Alternative Readings from the Manuscripts and Noncanonical Parallels*, pp. 24-38; & Carter, pp. 1-34, "Introduction," & "The Sources of the SM."

Tuesday, January 13

READING: Carter, pp. 35-77, "The Structure of the SM" & "The Function and Socio-Historical Setting of Matthew's SM."

Thursday, January 15

READING: Carter, pp. 78-129, "The Content of the SM: Part I" & "The Content of the SM: Part II."

3. Interpretations from the Christian Theological Tradition

Tuesday, January 20

READING: Reader selection #2, St. Augustine, *Commentary on the Lord's Sermon on the Mount, with 17 Related Sermons*, pp. 80-108. **PAPER 1 ASSIGNED.**

Thursday, January 22

READING: Reader selection #3, Martin Luther, *The Sermon on the Mount (Sermons) and The Magnificat*, pp. 105-129.

Tuesday, January 27

PAPER 1 DUE. Film: *Mother Teresa*.

4. Philosophical Interpretations

Thursday, January 29

READING: Reader selection #4, Karl Marx, *On Religion*, pp. 41-42, 69-89.

Tuesday, February 3

READING: Reader selection #5, Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, pp. 11-37.

5. A Literary Interpretation

Thursday, February 5

READING: Reader selection #6, Annie Dillard, "An Expedition to the Pole," in *The Annie Dillard Reader*, pp. 21-47.

6. Contemporary Interpretations Related to War and Peace

Tuesday, February 10

READING: Reader selection #7, Stanley Hauerwas, "A Sermon on the Sermon on the Mount" & "Lust for Peace," in *Unleashing the Scripture: Freeing the Bible from Captivity to America*, pp. 63-72, 126-133.

Thursday, February 12

READING: *Reader* selection #8, Daniel Berrigan, *The Trial of the Catonsville Nine*, pp. vii-xi, 81-123.
PAPER 2 ASSIGNED.

Tuesday, February 17

READING: *Reader* selection #9, *The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response. A Pastoral Letter on War and Peace*, pp. 9-37.

7. Interpretations of the Lord's Prayer

Thursday, February 19

PAPER 2 DUE. The Lord's Prayer in music and liturgy.

Tuesday, February 24

READING: *Reader*, selection #10, Bishop Dmitri, *The Kingdom of God: The Sermon on the Mount*, pp. 99-128.

Thursday, February 26

READING: *Reader*, selection #11, Leonardo Boff, "And Do Not Bring Us to the Test," "Save us from the Evil One" & "Amen," in *The Lord's Prayer: The Prayer of Integral Liberation*, pp. 97-122.

8. Non-Christian Religious Interpretations and Christian Responses

Tuesday, March 3

READING: *Reader*, selection #12, Mahatma Gandhi, "Encounters with Christianity" & "The Message of Jesus" in *Gandhi on Christianity*, pp. 3-30.

Thursday, March 5

READING: *Reader*, selections #13 & #14, Thich Nhat Hanh, "A Peaceful Heart" in *Living Buddha, Living Christ*, pp. 74-86; & Pinchas Lapide, "Abrogation of the Law?", "The Higher Law" and "Hate Your Enemy?" in *The Sermon on the Mount: Utopia or Program for Action?* pp. 41-48, 76-95.

Tuesday, March 10

READING: *Reader*, selections #15 & #16, Martin Luther King, Jr., "Pilgrimage to Nonviolence" in *Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story*, pp. 90-107; & "Loving Your Enemies" in *Strength to Love*, pp. 49-57.

Thursday, March 12

READING: *Reader*, selection #17, Diana L. Eck, "The Imagined Community: Spiritual Interdependence and a Wider Sense of 'We'" in *Encountering God: A Spiritual Journey from Bozeman to Banaras*, pp. 200-231.

PAPER 3 ASSIGNED.

PAPER 3 IS DUE BY NOON ON FRIDAY, MARCH 20 IN MY OFFICE, SAC 430.