

Religious Studies 235A: Jesus in History and Culture
FALL 2018, Agnes Scott College
Tuesdays and Thursdays 10-11:15 am; TBA
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Office Hours: Tuesdays 2:30-4:30 pm and by appointment
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Course Description:

An examination of the quests for the historical Jesus, with an analysis of literary and cultural sources (especially from film, music, art), and also the ethical implications of Jesus' life and message, from the first century to contemporary times.

Course Objectives:

1. to gain a basic knowledge of the canonical and extra-canonical gospels and earliest traditions about Jesus.
2. to investigate the scholarly conversations around the historical Jesus and Christ of faith.
3. to engage in conversation with different ethical, theological, and hermeneutical (African-American, feminist, Mujerista, Asian, and other global and postcolonial) traditions, especially around doctrines of Christology and the multicultural faces of Jesus.
4. to reflect critically on contemporary cultural manifestations of Jesus in film, music, fiction, poetry, drama, popular culture, and art.
5. to formulate our own critical response to the various discourses around Jesus.

Required Texts:

1. I am going to assume that everyone in a 200-level biblical studies course will have access to a copy of the Bible, preferably the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV; it's the standard translation in academia: e.g. The People's Bible, Oxford Annotated or HarperCollins or Oxford Annotated Study Bibles).
2. John Dominic Crossan, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography*, HarperCollins, 1994.
3. Miguel A. De La Torre, *The Politics of Jesus: A Hispanic Political Theology*, Rowan & Littlefield, 2015.
4. Stephen Prothero, *American Jesus: How the Son of God Became a National Icon*, Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2004.
5. Christopher Moore, *Lamb: The Gospel According to Biff, Christ's Childhood Pal*, William Morrow, 2004.
6. Other readings are on Moodle and books for research (especially films and books on the bible and film) on library reserve. Films are also on reserve to keep them available to all of us.

Course Requirements:

1. **Attendance and Class Participation:** This course is a seminar, and your presence and preparedness is necessary and valued. You will be responsible for doing “background searches” on the topics we are covering in class; this means you are to look outside the course readings in order to get an overview of the issues. We will be engaging in both whole class and small group work, so there will be various opportunities to participate. You will also be a peer-editing partner on all papers and you will evaluate each other at the end of the semester. You are allowed 2 absences in this course; further absences will affect your participation grade; more than 7 absences will result in failure of the course.

2. Assignments:

A portfolio project answering the question, “Who do you say that I am?” (Mark 8:29) will represent your work in the course this semester. A portfolio is any notebook you choose to keep and organize all drafts and revisions and research notes. The components of the portfolio are as follows:

- A. *An initial reflection:* 2-3 pages on your encounter with the gospels and Jesus in history and culture. Writing prompts and other exercises will be given in class to get you started. **Date due: September 4 at class time.**
- B. *A research paper on a text/passage in Mark’s gospel:* You are to write a 5-6 page (approximately 1000-1500 words) exegesis paper on a verse or passage in Mark of your choice relevant to the study of Jesus. The one-paragraph proposal (in which you include a solid thesis statement) plus one page bibliography (5-6 sources—books plus articles from journals or books) for the paper is due on **September 25**. The paper is due on **November 13** by 5 pm. See attached guidelines for writing exegesis papers; there will also be an overview in class of this process. You have an opportunity to do one **revision** on this paper, due within one week after I hand the paper back to you. **Presentation days of your research are either: October 25, October 30, or November 1.** You are to bring to class a **1-page summary or a poster and/or visual of your research** on the day you present.
- C. *A critical film paper* (4-5 pages; approximately 1000 words) on **one** of the *films* in the course OR on a theme in two to four films. See guidelines for writing on films. NOTE: all films and several film studies books are on 2-hour reserve in McCain library and can be watched in the library. A bibliography of at least 5 sources is required for this paper. The film paper is due on or before **Nov. 13**.
- D. *An issue paper or critical book review* (3-4 pages; approximately 800 words) on **one** scholarly book or novel from the course, with due dates one week after class discussion of the book: Crossan (due **Oct. 1**) or Prothero (due **Nov. 19**) or Moore (due **Dec. 3**) about Jesus. A bibliography of at least 5 sources is required for this paper.

- E. A *final reflection* 3-4 pages on “Who do you say that I am?” due on the day you present (**Nov. 29, Dec. 4 or 6**). This paper is to document your thinking over the course of the semester and is to include your interaction with the course material (including a bibliography of at least 5 non-Internet/non-required course texts sources). Presentation days of the final reflection are: **Nov. 29, Dec. 4 or 6**). You will give a 7-10 minute presentation, and you are to bring a **1 page summary or a poster and/or other visual (e.g. PowerPoint) of your research** for the class on the day your present.
- F. Your final portfolio is due **Dec. 3 by 5 pm**.

Note: Papers (first drafts and revisions) will be returned within 2 weeks of when you hand them in.

There is a revision option for all papers. Be sure to use the CWS and peer editors for editing your first drafts before you submit them. With a CWS tutor’s note, you may extend due dates an additional 3 days to complete a writing assignment. Christopher Bishop is the go-to reference librarian in McCain Library.

Late Paper Policy: for every day late (including weekends): 1/3 letter grade will be taken off.

3. Grading: 100%

Class attendance, participation, leadership, peer editing: 20%

Initial reflection on “Who do you say that I am?”: 10%

Mark Paper: 20%

Film Paper: 20%

Book Review: 20%

Final Reflection: 10%

- 4. Course Evaluation: A representative from the student leadership group in the Department of Religious Studies, Safe Agnes Scott Students (SASS), will be present the second class day to lead us in a syllabus reading and on for a midterm evaluation. We will also be periodically evaluating our process of learning throughout the semester.

5. Safe Agnes Scott Students (SASS):

SASS is a student leadership group that emerged in the Department of Religious Studies in order to assist in creating “safe and brave enough” and honorable spaces in the classroom. SASS helps us create a democratic classroom space in which students and professors are mutually accountable to each other in the learning process. The SASS representative will be working with students on evaluations (at midterm), and also on a syllabus review the second day of class. The representative is also available outside of the classroom to discuss any questions or concerns (i.e. questions about assignments, or concerns about race, gender, sexuality, religion, etc.) that students don’t feel comfortable bringing to

the professor, or other students. Conversations are held in confidence, but professors will be alerted to any general or specific concerns as needed.

DATE	Course Schedule	
TH- Aug 30	Introduction to the Course and to Each Other; Setting Class Agreements.	
TU- Sept 4	Who Do You Say That I Am? The Gospel of Mark Visit by Safe Agnes Scott Students (SASS)	Read for today: The Gospel according to Mark Due today! Your 2-3 page paper on “Who Do You Say That I Am?”
TH- Sept 6	The Gospel of Mark, Part II + Exegesis Workshop, Part One!	Reading for today: Mark (again!) (+ background search material notes) <i>background search</i> : come to class prepared to discuss the main issues (historical, socio-political, literary, etc.) of this gospel (NOTE: A ‘background search’ entails looking in bible dictionary articles and/or commentaries and/or New Testament introductory texts to get an overview of the topic; several introduction to New Testament textbooks are on reserve in the library or outside my office on the bookcase).
TU- Sept 11	Exegesis workshop, Part Two	Bring to class: a gospel text (from the four canonical gospels) that interests you
TH- Sept 13	Exegesis workshop, Part Three	
TU- Sept 18	Other Gospels	Read for today: The Gospel of Thomas; do a background search on “Gnosticism”
TH- Sept 20	The Quests for the Historical Jesus	Reading for today: John Dominic Crossan, Prologue, chs. 1-2
TU- Sept 25	Lives of Jesus	Reading for today: Crossan, chs. 3-5 <i>Due today at class time: a paragraph of why you picked this text + a list of your main questions + a working bibliography of five or more sources</i>
TH- Sept 27	The Crucified God	Reading for today: Crossan, chs. 6, 7, Epilogue <i>Note: If writing on Crossan, your paper is due Oct. 1.</i>

TU- Oct. 2	Was Jesus a Feminist?	Read for today: Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, “To Realize the Vision: Feminist Jesus Discourses;” and Leonard Swidler, “Jesus Was a Feminist”: http://www.godswordtowomen.org/feminist.htm ;selection from James Morrow, <i>Only Begotten Daughter</i> on Moodle.
TH- Oct. 3	Jesus and Masculinity	Read for today: Stephen Moore, “On the Face and Physique of the Historical Jesus” on Moodle
TU- Oct 9	Queering Jesus	Read for today: Dale Martin, “Sex and the Single Savior” and excerpts from Terrance McNally’s play <i>Corpus Christi</i> on Moodle
TH-SU Oct 11-14	FALL BREAK!	
TU- Oct 16	Jesus in Material Culture	Read for today: article by David Morgan on Moodle
TH Oct 18	Film in class: Jesus at the Movies: <i>Jesus of Montreal</i> (dir. Denys Arcand, 1989) (first 70-ish minutes)	
TU- Oct 23	<i>Jesus of Montreal</i> (second part)	Reading for today: Richard Walsh article (on Moodle)
TH- Oct 25	Presentations of exegesis papers	One third of the class
TU- Oct 30	Presentations of exegesis papers	One third of the class
TH- Nov 1	Presentations of exegesis papers	One third of class
TU- Nov 6	Jesus the Resurrected	Read for today: Stephen Prothero, <i>American Jesus</i> , Introduction, chs. 1-2
TH- Nov 8	Jesus the Manly Man	Read for today: Prothero, chs. 3-4
TU- Nov 13	Jesus Re/incarnate	Read for today: Prothero, chs. 5-6 <i>Note: Film paper due on or before this date.</i>
TH- Nov 15	Multicultural Jesus	Read: Prothero, chs. 7-8 and Conclusion <i>Note If writing on Prothero, your paper is due Nov. 19.</i>

TU- Nov 20 AAR/SBL	Jesus Grows Up: A Discussion of Christopher Moore's <i>Lamb</i>	Reading for today: first half of <i>Lamb</i>
TU- Nov 27	Jesus Grows Up Even More: A Discussion of Christopher Moore's <i>Lamb</i>	Reading for today: second half of <i>Lamb</i> <i>Note: If writing on Lamb, your paper is due Dec. 3.</i>
TH- Nov 29	Who do you say that I am?: Presentations of final reflections by a third of the class.	
TU- Dec 4	Who do you say that I am?: Presentations of final reflections by a third of the class.	
TH- Dec 6	LAST DAY OF CLASS: Who do you say that I am?: Presentations of final reflections by second half of class.	Note: your final reflection paper is due the day you present and the whole portfolio is due before or on Dec. 10 at 5 pm.

Summary of Due Dates

- **Initial reflection paper: Sept. 4**
- **Exegesis paper: Presentations on October 25, 30, Nov. 1; abstract and topic and working bibliography due Sept. 25; papers due Nov. 13.**
- **Film paper: due before or by Nov. 13.**
- **Critical review of a book in the course: Crossan (October 1); Prothero (Nov. 19); Moore (Dec. 3).**
- **Final Reflection: Nov. 29, Dec. 4, Dec. 6.**
- **Final portfolio: Dec. 10 by 5 pm.**

Some Decent* Web Sites to Explore

First, look at the databases on the McCain Library database site, especially **ATLA (American Theological Library Association)**.

www.jesusarchive.com

has the latest news on the scholarly front with some interesting links.

www.ntgateway.com/jesus

links to just about all the scholarly sites; check out the link to the “Jesus at 2000” debate for the Luke Timothy Johnson and John Dominic Crossan argument:

www.ntgateway.com/xtalk/debate.html

www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion

has basic background information (historical, archeological, maps, etc.) on their four part series, “From Jesus to Christ” (on reserve in McCain Library)

www.westarinstitute.org/Jesus_Seminar/jesus_seminar.html

The site of Robert Funk’s Westar Institute and the Jesus Seminar. Interesting material. Check out their explanation on how/why they do the voting on the sayings and acts of Jesus.

www.imdb.com

The Internet Movie Data Base—a great resource for information about films and many reviews. Look especially at Roger Ebert’s site (under external reviewers).

www.unomaha.edu/~wwwjrf

The Journal of Religion and Film site. Several Jesus films reviewed (check in current reviews for some good articles such as, “The Celluloid Savior”). You can also search by film’s name.

* please note: most of the web sites on or about Jesus are not scholarly. Many range from mildly humorous to very offensive. In your research, please stick to the academic end of the web sites.

SUGGESTIONS FOR WRITING EXEGESIS PAPERS

- Exegesis is a close, critical reading of a text. Pick a verse or several verses that form a coherent unit and that are of interest to you to investigate further. You'll be reading in/with/around/outside of/through the biblical text. You'll be looking at the major scholarly theories but also leaving room to use your imagination and play!
- First, read the passage several times; use different translations (NNRSV; NRSV; NIV; Jerusalem). Are there key issues or problems with the passage—then list them. Why did you choose this passage? What are your presuppositions? What approach/es do you wish to take and why?
- Look up terms, locations, genres, criticisms (textual, form, literary, tradition, social-scientific, feminist, liberationist, narratological, etc.) in Bible dictionaries, e.g. *The Harper's Bible Commentary*; *The Mercer Dictionary of the Bible*; *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*; *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*.
- Search for the passage and relevant terms in the library catalogue and at Columbia Theological Seminary's library (www.ctsnet.edu -- click on "library"). Also check for journal and anthology articles on the ATLA database (go to <http://library.agnesscott.edu> - click on Electronic Resources—on the left-hand side; click on Full text and Citation databases—middle of the page; scroll down to the citation databases; you'll see ATAL listed on the page; click on the link to open). For NT articles you may also look in the journal, *New Testament Abstracts*, which we have in our library. In addition to books and biblical commentaries (books written about an entire biblical book), you will need to include journal articles as well as articles in books in your bibliography.
- **Set the passage in context:**
 - What cultural information is helpful in reading this text? Does the text reveal anything about the ancient social world? (politics, economics, gender relations, etc.)
 - Study the passage in its literary context—where is it in the biblical book? In other words, what comes before and after? What is the literary format of the material (parable, speech, narrative, short saying, miracle story, etc.)? What do you know about the book in which it appears? (for example, take Mark 1.15: what do we know about the author, the date, the broader context of Mark's writing; the parallels with the other gospels?).
 - What main questions does the text evoke?
- **Form of the paper:**
 - Introduction: in your first paragraph set up your thesis for the paper—where you're going, what your plan is (especially the method/s you're using and why), and how you're limiting your discussion.
 - Describe the context of your passage early on in your paper—along with your major questions.
 - Engage the main scholars who've written on this issue (show some of the history of interpretation of this passage) and then give your critical evaluation.
 - Conclusion: Come to your own reading of the text, backing up your thesis and mapping the future terrain (theoretical and hermeneutical) for reading this passage.