

JESUS, PETER, PAUL, AND MARY: THE BEGINNINGS OF CHRISTIANITY

RELI-121-01

Fall 2018

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Office: Old Main 105
Office Hours:
Monday 1:15-2:45

Class meeting: MWF 9:40-10:40

Library 250

COURSE DESCRIPTION

In this course we examine the diverse literature of the New Testament along with some other early Christian texts that did not become part of the Christian “canon.” We will learn about historical-critical approaches that help you situate New Testament texts in their social, political, and historical contexts and understand the reception and “uses” of these texts among diverse communities of faith in the United States. We will pay special attention to how the various authors of the New Testament produced Jewish-Christian difference, participated in discourses of race and ethnicity, and understood the role of women within their communities.

We will employ contemporary modes of interpretation to explore the formation of identity not only in the first and second centuries of Christianity but also in the present U.S. context. This course will foreground biblical interpretations of traditionally marginalized groups in the U.S., examining, for example, the interpretations of New Testament texts in slave sermons from the Ante-bellum South, 20th- and 21st-century African-American, Asian-American, and Latinx interpretations of the bible, feminist, post-colonial and liberationist theologies, and queer and trans theologies. One of the central concerns of the course will be to determine how liberationist and identity-perspective approaches to biblical study help us to be better historians and interpreters of the early Christian world. We will thus explore how the sustained engagement of biblical interpretations from diverse U.S. communities augments the understanding of identity and difference in biblical times. Likewise, we will explore how analyses of difference and power in the ancient Mediterranean world help us to rethink and contextualize approaches to difference in the contemporary U.S.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. I expect you to attend class regularly and participate actively in class discussion. Active participation in discussions depends on (a) the completion of the daily reading assignments, (b) your contributions to in-class discussion, and (c) your weekly posting of a question or comment to our discussion forum in Moodle (75-100 words).
2. On Oct. 19, you will have a midterm examination that you may complete on Moodle during a four-hour period anytime of the day. The exam will be in essay

format, and it will be open-book and open-note. Our class will not meet on the 19th.

3. A final “exegesis” paper (8-10 pages) that employs a particular mode of interpretation in the U.S. will be submitted electronically to the instructor on the last day of class (Dec 12). In preparation for the final paper, you will hand in a prospectus (one paragraph summary of topic), brief outline, and bibliography on Nov. 26th. You will have an opportunity to give a brief presentation on your research in the last days of the semester. Active participation in all stages of presentation and composition of the final project are expected.

EVALUATION

25% of your grade is based on class participation, including weekly moodle postings.

25% is based on the midterm examination.

50% is based on the final paper and the proper completion of the stages leading up to it.

ATTENDANCE POLICY

Regular attendance and punctuality are required. If you are absent due to illness or a school-sponsored event, please notify me by email before class. You are allowed only one discretionary absence. Each further absence will negatively affect your grade. If you are late to class more than twice, your tardiness will count as an absence.

OFFICE HOURS

My office hours are on Monday 1:15-2:45 and by appointment. If you cannot make it to my office hours, please email me and we will arrange to meet at another time that is convenient for you.

TECHNOLOGY IN THE CLASSROOM

We will use technology in the classroom to view images, explore relevant websites, and acquaint ourselves with the material culture of the ancient Mediterranean world. During class, I expect you to bring a notebook, pen or pencil, and all relevant course documents and texts, including your notes on the text under study. Please do not have your laptop, tablet, or phone open in class.

SPECIAL ACCOMMODATIONS

I am committed to providing assistance to help you be successful in this course.

Reasonable accommodations are available for students with documented disabilities.

Contact the Disability services office by emailing disabilityservices@macalester.edu or call 651-696-6974 to schedule an appointment to discuss your individual needs. It is important to meet as early in the semester as possible; this will ensure that your accommodations can be implemented early on in the semester.

COURSE MATERIALS

The New Oxford Annotated Bible: New Revised Standard Version with the Apocrypha, ed. Michael D. Coogan, (New York: Oxford University Press). The *Harper Collins Study Bible* NRSV is also a great choice.

Cain Hope Felder, *Stony the Road We Trod: African American Biblical Interpretation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991).

SCHEDULE OF READINGS

Week 1 & 2: Introduction to Course, Historical and Interpretive Contexts

Sept 5 (Wed.) **Introduction to course**

No readings

Sept 7 (Fri.) **What does it mean to interpret the bible?**

Dale Martin, "The Myth of Textual Agency" (Moodle)

Sept. 10 (Mon.) **Greek and Roman Contexts**

Jas' Elsner, "Art and Religion" (Moodle)

Ancient Avatars due on Moodle by class time.

Sept. 12 (Wed.) **Jewish Contexts**

Essays from the *Jewish Annotated New Testament* (all on Moodle):

Shaye Cohen, "Judaism and Jewishness"

Jonathan Klawans, "The Law"

Lee Levine, "The Synagogue"

Sept. 14 (Fri.) **Our Earliest Document**

1 Thessalonians

*Critical Terms Worksheet due.

Week 3: The Life and Teachings of Jesus

Sept. 17 (Mon.) Gospel of Mark

Sept. 19 (Wed.) Gospel of Mark (Continued)

Sept. 21 (Fri.) Amy-Jill Levine, "Jesus and Judaism"

*Saturday, Sept. 22 Miguel de la Torre, "Embracing Hopelessness"

Week 4: Jesus and the Theology of Liberation

Sept. 24 (Mon.) Gustavo Gutiérrez, "Toward a Theology of Liberation"

Miguel de la Torre, "For Unto You is Born this Day a Liberator"

Sept. 26 (Wed.) Readings from *Handbook of U.S. Theologies of Liberation*, ed. Miguel de la Torre

*Student reports on individual chapters

Sept. 28 (Fri.) **No Class Today**

Week 5: Matthew

Oct. 1 (Mon.) The Gospel of Matthew (entire)

Oct 3 (Wed.) The Gospel of Matthew (continued)

Oct 5 (Fri.) Musa Dube, Selections from *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretations of the Bible*. (Moodle)

Week 6: Luke/Acts

Oct 8 (Mon.) The Gospel of Luke (entire)

Oct 10 (Wed.) Acts (selections)

Demetrius Williams, "'Upon All Flesh': Acts 2, African Americans, and Intersectional Realities," OR

Gay Byron, "Ancient Ethiopia and the New Testament: Ethnic (Con)texts and Racialized (Sub)texts"

Oct 12 (Fri.) **International Roundtable:**

9-10: "Challenging and Understanding Conceptions of Race in Muslim Communities" (Harmon Room, library)

9-10 Confronting Whiteness in the Classroom (Davis Court, Markim Hall)

10:15-11:45: Plenary Speaker: *Race, Skin Color and Genetic Ancestry: Implications for Biomedical Research on Health Disparities*, Rick Kittles, Professor and Founding Director of the Division of Health Equities within the Department of Population Sciences (John B Davis Lecture Hall, Campus Center)

Week 7: Signifying on Scripture: African American Biblical Interpretation

Oct 15 (Mon.)

Cain Hope Felder, "Race, Racism, and the Biblical Narratives," *Stony the Road We Trod*, 127-145

Vincent Wimbush, "The Bible and African Americans: An Outline of an Interpretive History," in *Stony the Road We Trod*, 81-97.

Recommended (optional): James Cone, "Cultural Ideology, Afrocentrism, and Biblical Interpretation" (Moodle)

Vincent Wimbush, "Knowing Ex-centrics/Ex-centric Knowing"

Oct. 17 (Wed.) Jacquelyn Grant, "Womanist Theology: Black Women's Experience as a Source for Doing Theology, with Special Reference to Christology" (Moodle)

Oct. 19 (Fri.) **Midterm exam**

Week 8: John

Oct. 22 (Mon.) The Gospel of John (entire)

Oct. 24 (Wed.) The Gospel of John (continued)

Oct. 26 (Fri.) **No class.** Enjoy Fall break.

Week 9: Queer Theologies and Queer Interpretation

Oct. 29 (Mon.) *Bible Trouble: Queer Reading at the Boundaries of Biblical Scholarship* (selections)

Oct. 31 (Wed.)

Tat-sion Benny Liew, “Queering Closets and Perverting Desires: Cross-Examining John’s Engendering and Trans-gendering Word Across Different Worlds” (Moodle)

Nov 2 (Fri.) Library Research Day (and continuing the Corinthian Correspondence)

Library Session: BRING AN NT PASSAGE THAT YOU WISH TO RESEARCH

Class will meet at 9:40 in the Library Instruction Classroom, DeWitt Wallace Library, 2nd floor, Room 205

Week 10: Paul

Nov 5 (Mon.) 1 Thessalonians, Galatians

Nov 7 (Wed.) 1 Corinthians

Joseph A. Marchal, “Female Masculinity in Corinth? Bodily Citations and the Drag of History,” (Moodle)

Nov 9 (Fri.) Romans

Jae Won Lee, “Paul and Ethnic Difference in Romans”

OR

Denise Buell and Caroline Johnson Hodge, “The Politics of Interpretation: The Rhetoric of Race and Ethnicity in Paul”

Week 11: Paul and Pauline Legacies

Nov. 12 (Mon.) Philemon

Mitzi J. Smith, “Slavery in the Early Church” (Moodle)

Lloyd Lewis, “An African American Appraisal of the Philemon-Paul-Onesimus Triangle,” in *Stony the Road We Trod*

Nov. 14 (Wed.) Ephesians; Colossians

Clarice Martin, “The *Haustafeln* (Household Codes) in African American Biblical Interpretation: ‘Free Slaves’ and ‘Subordinate Women,’” in *Stony the Road We Trod*

Nov. 16 (Fri.) 1 Timothy; Titus

Week 12:

Nov. 19 (Mon.) **No Classes** / Professors at Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion/ Society of Biblical Literature

Nov. 21-25 **Thanksgiving Break**

Week 13: Mary

Nov. 26 (Mon.) Luke 1-3; John 20; The Gospel of Mary

***Prospectus, Bibliography, and Outline due by class time** (Electronic submission to professor)

Nov. 28 (Wed.) Antti Marjanen, “Mary Magdalene, a Beloved Disciple”

OR

Mary Rose D’Angelo, “‘I have seen the Lord’: Mary Magdalen as Visionary, Early Christian Prophecy, and the Context of John 20:14-18.

Nov. 30 (Fri.) The Gospel of Thomas (Moodle)

Optional: Elizabeth Castelli, “I Will Make Mary Male”

Week 14: Feminist, Womanist, *Mujerista*, and the Apocalypse

Dec. 3 (Mon.)

Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, “Toward a Feminist Critical Method,” 41-67.

Ada María Isasi-Díaz, “Preoccupations, Themes, and Proposals of *Mujerista* Theology,” (Moodle)

Gay Byron and Vanessa Lovelace, “Introduction: Methods and the Making of Womanist Biblical Hermeneutics”

Dec 5 (Wed.) Revelation

Dec 7 (Fri.) Eric A. Thomas, “The Futures Outside: Apocalyptic Epilogue Unveiled as Africana Queer Prologue”

Week 15: Student Presentations

Dec 10 (Mon.) Student Presentations

Dec 12 (Wed.) **Last Day of Classes:** Student Presentations

***Final exegesis paper due** (Electronic Submission to Professor by midnight)

