Introduction to the New Testament

Tuesday / Wednesday / Thursday 6:00 – 9:00 pm
Location: Lincoln Center TBD

Instructor: Dr. Ben Dunning
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Office: LL 921A (mailbox in LL 924)
Office Hours: By appointment (schedule by e-mail or in person before / after class)

Course Description

This course will provide a basic historical introduction to critical issues in the study of the New Testament. What are the contents of these texts that make up the second portion of the Christian Bible? In what ways do they reflect the major issues, concerns and struggles that were taking place within the earliest forms of Christianity? How did they get to be grouped together in a single book called the “New Testament”?

On a more general level, we will also be using our focus on the New Testament as an opportunity to ask some broader intellectual questions regarding theology and historical study: what does it mean to study a religious text “critically”? How do the questions we will ask about the New Testament’s social and historical context relate to its ongoing role as scriptural and/or authoritative in the Christian tradition? And what are some of the ways that readers today bridge the gap between the New Testament’s ancient Greco-Roman context and their own contemporary interpretation and application? We will explore these questions through careful study of the New Testament texts themselves, while also attending to issues of historical context, methodology and interpretation.

Objectives

- To develop the basic exegetical skills necessary for analyzing New Testament, ancient Christian, and other religious texts.

- To explore what it means to interpret a religious text critically and to investigate what is at stake in the assumptions and arguments that drive different critical approaches to New Testament literature.
∙ To gain familiarity with the biblical texts themselves, as well as the social and historical contexts of the ancient Mediterranean world in which these texts were written.

∙ To identify key terms, names, places and dates relevant to the study of the New Testament.

Course Expectations

∙ Regular attendance and participation in class discussions are required. Because this is a condensed summer course, attendance is absolutely vital. More than one unexcused absence will have a negative effect on your grade. (Note below that attendance and participation count for 15% of your final grade.) I will handle excused absences on a case by case basis – please contact me directly if you need to miss class for a legitimate reason. In the event of excessive absences (combining both excused and unexcused), I reserve the right to penalize your grade beyond the 15% allotted for participation. Students who regularly attend class but rarely participate will receive a participation grade no higher than “B-.”

∙ Please read the assigned texts on the weekend before and/or during the appropriate week for each topic. I am particularly concerned that you study the primary texts from the New Testament and other early Christian sources (as opposed to the secondary scholarly texts by Ehrman and others) as carefully and thoughtfully as possible. Come to class prepared to ask questions and discuss issues raised by your reading.

NB: Since this is a regular semester-length course that I am adapting to the summer session, I reserve the right to make adjustments in the reading schedule as the class progresses.

∙ Because we will spend some of our time in discussion around the assigned texts for the day, it is absolutely imperative that you bring your New Testament with you to every class meeting. (If you do not regularly have a New Testament for classroom exercises, this will have a negative effect on your participation grade.)

Requirements

Your overall grade will be calculated as follows:

Paper (4-6 pages – due in class 7/31) 25%
Midterm Exam 30%
Final Exam 30%
Attendance/Participation 15%
Under the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1973, all students, with or without disabilities, are entitled to equal access to the programs and activities of Fordham University. If you believe that you have a disabling condition that may interfere with your ability to participate in the activities, course work, or assessment of the object of this course, you may be entitled to accommodations. Please schedule an appointment to speak with someone at the Office of Disability Services (Rose Hill – O’Hare Hall, Lower Level, x0655 or at Lincoln Center – Room 207, x6282).

Books Available for Purchase

The following required readings are available for purchase at the bookstore. They will also be put on reserve at the library.

The New Oxford Annotated Bible (New Revised Standard Version)
Note: I prefer that you use the New Revised Standard translation of the Bible for this course – however, other editions besides the New Oxford Annotated are acceptable.

Marcus J. Borg and N.T. Wright, The Meaning of Jesus: Two Visions
Bart D. Ehrman, A Brief Introduction to the New Testament
Bart D. Ehrman, Lost Scriptures: Books that Did Not Make It into the New Testament
John G. Gager, Reinventing Paul

Schedule

Week 1 (7/2, 7/3)  Syllabus and Course Requirements

Introduction: Why study Christian Scripture “critically”?

Backgrounds

Reading:
• Ehrman, 1-59
• The Gospel of Mark (also Ehrman 60-76)

Week 2 (7/9, 7/10, 7/11)  The Gospels

Reading:
• The Gospel of Matthew (also Ehrman 77-94)
• The Gospel of Luke (also Ehrman 95-111)
Week 3 (7/16, 7/17, 7/18)  
The Gospels (continued)  
Reading:  
• The Gospel of John (also Ehrman 112-127)  

7/17 – Midterm Exam  

After midterm:  

Jesus in History and Theology  

Other Visions of Jesus  

Reading:  
• Borg and Wright, *The Meaning of Jesus*, 3-27, 111-168  
• *The Infancy Gospel of Thomas* (Lost Scriptures, 57-62)  
• *The Gospel of Thomas* (Lost Scriptures, 19-28)  
• *The Gospel of Philip* (Lost Scriptures, 38-44)  

Week 4 (7/23, 7/24, 7/25)  
Acts and Christian Narrative History  

Paul: Church Crises and a Problematic Apostle  

Paul’s Gospel  

Reading:  
• The Acts of the Apostles (also Ehrman, 165-181)  
• 1 Corinthians (also Ehrman, 216-226)  

• start reading:  
  Galatians (also Ehrman, 233-241)  
  Romans (also Ehrman, 250-263)  
  John Gager, *Reinventing Paul* (21-75)  

Week 5 (7/30, 7/31, 8/1)  
[If necessary:] Paul’s Gospel (cont.)  

The Pauline Tradition and Early Christian Gender Trouble  

Christians and Jews  

[If time:] The End of the World
**Paper due in class Tuesday 7/31**

Reading:
- If necessary, finish Galatians / Romans and Gager
- Ephesians, 1 Timothy (also Ehrman, 272-276, 276-282)
- *Acts of Thecla* (*Lost Scriptures*, 113-121)
- Hebrews (also Ehrman, 297-307)

If we are ahead of schedule [TBD the previous week]
- Revelation (also Ehrman, 334-347)
- *Apocalypse of Peter* (*Lost Scriptures*, 280-287)

**Final Exam – 8/6**