



RLST 2220: New Testament and Early Christianity

Millsaps College, Spring 2009
CC 24, MW 2:45-4:00 PM

Instructor: J. Blake Couey
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Office: CC 9 (ext. 1079)

Hours: MW 1-2 PM; T 10:30 AM-12 PM; and by appt

Course Description and Goals

The New Testament is both a familiar and remote collection of documents, originating in the social and religious environment of the ancient Greco-Roman world, yet informing religious communities and influencing intellectual and cultural traditions that extend to the present. This course seeks to orient students to the content and scholarly interpretation of these and other early Christian texts, with attention to their impact upon the development of later Christian traditions. Although the subject is too large to be explored in depth in a single semester, the course will hopefully provide a foundation (and a desire!) for further study of biblical literature.

By the end of the semester, students will have gained

- a working knowledge of the content, socio-historical context, literary conventions, and scholarly interpretation of the writings of the New Testament;
- an awareness of the historical development of, and diversity within, early Christianity/Christianities;
- the capacity to read biblical texts more carefully and critically;
- an appreciation for the religious, intellectual, and ethical influence of the writings of the New Testament—for good and for ill!—on subsequent cultures, including our own.

Textbooks

The following textbooks are required for purchase:

- *New Oxford Annotated Bible with Apocrypha* (3d ed.)

If you already own a recent English translation of the Bible (English Standard Version; New American Bible; New International Version; New Jewish Publication Society Version/Tanakh; New Revised Standard Version; etc.) you may use it instead. The following are not acceptable for this class: King James Version, the Living Bible, the *Message*, or New Living Translation. If you have questions about a particular version, please consult the instructor.

You should bring your Bible to every class meeting.

- Bart D. Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings* (4th ed.) [= Ehrman I]

Readings for **Feb. 18** and **March 30** will come from the following text, which is on reserve in the library:

- Bart D. Ehrman, *The New Testament and Other Early Christian Writings* (2d ed.)
[= Ehrman II]

Readings for **March 4** will be distributed by email one week prior to the class.

Requirements and Assignments

Participation and attendance: It should go without saying that consistent class attendance, preparation, and participation in discussion are essential on your part. You owe this not only to yourself but also to your classmates, as the overall experience of the course depends upon the preparation of each student. The participation component of your grade will take into account both the frequency and quality of your contributions to class discussion.

Please let the instructor know in advance about any foreseen absences. You are allowed two absences for the semester. Any absences beyond this will negatively affect the participation component of your grade, and the impact will increase exponentially with each absence. If you miss more than eight classes, you will not pass the course.

Quizzes: Brief quizzes will be given throughout the semester. Some will be announced and will cover specific material; others will be unannounced and will cover the assigned readings for that class meeting more broadly. Your lowest quiz grade at the end of the semester will be dropped. Students will only be allowed to make up missed quizzes in the event of an illness or emergency or a pre-approved, excused absence, at the instructor's discretion.

Written Assignments: From time to time, informal written reflections (usually one paragraph) will be assigned. These will receive a grade of "check," with "check minus" or "check plus" reserved for exceptional cases.

You are required to write longer responses (2 pages) to the Summers Lecture on **February 10** (11:30 AM, AC Recital Hall) and to the film *Cotton Patch Gospel*, which will be shown in class on **February 23**. The first half of each response should summarize the lecture or film, while the second half should contain your reactions and critical evaluation.

You will also write two formal essays (4-5 pages), in which you will be expected to make a specific claim (thesis) appropriate to the parameters of the assignment and craft an argument in support of this claim. The essays should be typed and must conform to standards of formal academic writing. Essays with excessive grammatical or typographical errors may be docked a letter grade and/or returned to the student for immediate revision.

The first essay, due by noon on Friday, **March 13**, will address the question, "Who was Jesus?" You may answer the question from any perspective that you like, but you must support your claim with evidence from the gospels (both canonical and non-canonical). The second essay will be due by noon on **April 3**; in it, you will attempt to answer the question posed by Bart Ehrman: "Do Jesus and Paul represent the same religion?" (Ehrman I, 374). Again, support your answer with abundant textual evidence. Essays may be submitted by email or left in the box on my office door.

Student Presentations: On **April 8, 13, and 15**, students will give class presentations on selected non-canonical Christian texts (i.e., writings that circulated among early Christians but were not included in the Bible). Each presentation should be no longer than ten minutes and should include information about the book's historical background, content, and literary features. Creativity is strongly encouraged, but not at the expense of substance. The texts are available in the collection by Ehrman that is on reserve in the library; you will have the chance to indicate your preferences for particular texts later in the semester.

Exams: Two exams will be given during the course: a midterm on **February 25** and a final on **April 30**. Both exams will include short-answer sections that deal with objective content and essay sections that require reflection upon and synthesis of larger issues relating to the course. The final will be cumulative in scope, but weighted toward material covered after the midterm.

Grading

Your course grade will be determined according to the following breakdown:

Attendance/Participation	15%
Quizzes/Short Writing Assignments	10%
Presentations	10%
Essays	30%
Midterm	15%
Final	20%

The grade scale for the course is: A (93-100); A- (90-92); B+ (87-89); B (83-86); B- (80-82); C+ (77-79); C (73-76); C- (70-72); D+ (67-69); D (60-66); F (0-59).

Course Schedule

Week One

- M (1/12) Course Introduction –What is the New Testament?
READ Ehrman I, 1-16, 487-500
- W (1/14) The Background of the NT
READ Ehrman I, 17-55

Week Two

- M (1/19) NO CLASS – Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday
- W (1/21) The Gospel of Mark
READ Mark 1-16; Ehrman I, 75-91

Week Three

- M (1/26) The Synoptic Problem
READ Ehrman I, 56-74, 92-100
- W (1/28) The Gospel of Matthew
READ Matthew 1-28; Ehrman I, 101-120

Week Four

- M (2/2) The Gospel of Luke
READ Luke 1-24; Ehrman I, 121-140
- W (2/4) Luke's Sequel (Acts)
READ Acts 1-28; Ehrman I, 141-162

Week Five

- M (2/9) The Gospel of John
READ John 1-21; Ehrman I, 163-184
- T (2/10) Summers Lecture: "How the Bible is True" by Luke Timothy Johnson**
11:00 AM, AC Recital Hall (**attendance required**)
- W (2/11) NO CLASS
- F (2/13) Response to Summers Lecture due by noon**

Week Six

- M (2/16) Johannine Letters
READ 1 John 1-5; 2 John; 3 John; Ehrman I, 185-203
- W (2/18) Other Gospels
READ Gospel of Thomas and Infancy Gospel of Thomas (Ehrman II, 116-123, 127-131 [reserve]); Gospel of Judas (online: <http://www.nationalgeographic.com/lostgospel/pdf/GospelofJudas.pdf>); Ehrman I, 204-223

Week Seven

- M (2/23) Film: *Cotton Patch Gospel* (**late class**)
- W (2/25) Midterm**

Week Eight

- M (3/2) The Historical Jesus?
READ Ehrman I, 224-290
Response to *Cotton Patch Gospel* due at beginning of class
- W (3/4) Jesus of History, Christ of Faith
READ Marcus Borg, *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time*, 20-45; Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Real Jesus*, 141-166, 174-177 (distributed via email)

Week Nine

- M (3/9) Paul and 1 Thessalonians
READ 1 Thessalonians 1-5; Ehrman I, 291-323
- W (3/11) The Corinthians Correspondence
READ 1 Corinthians 1-16; 2 Corinthians 1-13; Ehrman I, 324-339
- F (3/13) Essay 1 due by noon (Who was Jesus?)**

Week Ten

- M (3/16) NO CLASS – Spring Break
- W (3/18) NO CLASS – Spring Break

Week Eleven

- M (3/23) More Letters of Paul (Galatians, Philippians, and Philemon)
READ Galatians 1-4; Philippians 1-4; Philemon; Ehrman I, 339-355
- W (3/25) Paul's "Gospel" (Romans)
READ Romans 1-16; Ehrman I, 356-368

Week Twelve

- M (3/30) Paul vs. Jesus?
READ Acts of Paul and Thecla (Ehrman II, 177-182 [reserve]); Ehrman I, 369-379
- W (4/1) Deutero-Pauline Letters
READ Ephesians 1-6; Colossians 1-4; 2 Thessalonians 1-3; 1 Timothy 1-6; 2 Timothy 1-3; Titus 1-3; Ehrman I, 380-401
- F (4/3) **Essay 2 due by noon (Jesus vs. Paul?)**

Week Thirteen

- M (4/6) Women in Early Christianity
READ Ehrman I, 403-415
- W (4/8) Christians and Jews
READ Hebrews 1-13; Ehrman I, 416-434
Student Presentations: Epistle of Barnabus

Week Fourteen

- M (4/13) Christians and Pagans
READ 1 Peter 1-5; Ehrman I, 435-453
Student Presentations: Letter of Ignatius; Martyrdom of Polycarp; Martyrdom of Perpetua
- W (4/15) Christians and Christians
READ James 1-5; 2 Peter 1-3; Jude; Ehrman I, 454-468
Student Presentations: Didache; 1 Clement

Week Fifteen

- M (4/20) Christian Apocalyptic Literature
READ Revelation 1-22; Ehrman I, 469-485
Student Presentations: Shepherd of Hermas; Apocalypse of Peter
- W (4/22) Concluding Reflections: NT and Early Christian Diversity

Final Exam on Thursday, April 30 at 9:00 AM

Course Policies

Honor Code: The pledge signed by all students upon entering Millsaps College is as follows:

As a Millsaps College student, I hereby affirm that I understand the Honor Code and am aware of its implication and of my responsibility of the Code. In the interests of expanding the atmosphere of respect and trust in the College, I promise to uphold the Honor Code and I will not tolerate dishonest behavior in myself or in others.

Each examination, quiz, or other assignment that is to be graded will carry the written pledge: "**I hereby certify that I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid on this assignment. (Signature)**" The abbreviation "Pledged" followed by the student's signature has the same meaning and may be acceptable on assignments other than final examinations.

It is the responsibility of students and faculty to report offenses to the Honor Code Council in the form of a written report. This account must be signed, the accusation explained in as much detail as possible, and submitted to the Dean of the College.

Accommodations: If you have any needs or require accommodations related to a disability, please contact Patrick Cooper (coopeap@millsaps.edu; ext. 1228) to register for disability services. Accommodations will not be granted until a meeting with Patrick has taken place, each semester, and letters have been received by your instructor.

Classroom Etiquette: Make every effort to be on time for class. Tardiness is disruptive and disrespectful to your classmates and to the instructor. Consistent tardiness will significantly lower your participation grade.

The use of cell phones, MP3 players, or other electronic devices is absolutely prohibited during class. The use of laptop computers for notetaking is strongly discouraged; laptops create barriers that impede class discussion. Talk to me if you have legitimate reasons for needing to use a laptop during class.

Timeliness of Assignments: Any late assignments will be docked one letter grade. Daily reflection papers will not be accepted more than one week after they were due. If you do not turn in an essay on time, please talk to me immediately. Extensions can be granted if circumstances require them, but they must be requested before the paper is due.

If you find yourself falling behind, or if you are struggling to process the material, or if you do not understand a particular assignment or requirement, please talk to me—the sooner, the better!

Email: Email is my preferred means of communicating with the class, so check your Millsaps email account daily.