A discussion-rich introduction to the New Testament in light of biblical scholarship and fictional and cinematic retellings of the story of Jesus and early Christianity. The approach is both critical and sympathetic, namely, instruction will be intellectually rigorous and responsive to faith-based readings of historical- and truth-claims of the Christian Bible. The ground is level in this class: believers and unbelievers, evangelicals and atheists are welcome. No prior background in biblical studies is assumed or required. The class engages the questions of authorship and redaction, historical context and cultural setting, and literary structure and theological purpose. Particular themes include the dynamic of canon formation; historical-critical method and religious belief; the synoptic problem in relation to the Gospel of John; the messianic consciousness of Jesus; early Christianity vis-à-vis Greco-Roman religions and Judaism; the role of women, gays, and slaves in formative Christianity; the use of epistolary literature in Paul; the challenge of apocalyptic material and end-of-history predictions; and the wealth of extra-canonical writings (e.g. Gospel of Judas and Gospel of Thomas) that are important for examining the rise of Christianity in the early common era

**Bibliography**

The New Oxford Annotated Bible with Apocrypha


Bart D. Ehrman, Lost Scriptures: Books that Did Not Make It into the New Testament


Jim Crace, Quarantine

Barbara Rossing, The Rapture Exposed: The Message of Hope in the Book of Revelation
Film

The Last Temptation of Christ, Martin Scorsese (dir.)

Requirements

Regular, punctual attendance is assumed. Do not miss class under any circumstances (medical or other emergencies are exceptions). No digital media in class (phones, computers, etc) without instructor’s prior approval. Writing assignments consist of one exegetical paper, midterm, quiz, and final exam. Equal weight is assigned to first three assignments for final grade evaluation. When possible, the instructor will deemphasize one outlier lower grade for final grade evaluation

Community Based Learning. Once every week for 3-4 hours, class members volunteer at after-school tutoring programs, among other activities. Swarthmore College understands its mission as developing ethical intelligence among its student body. To that end, the goal of community based learning (CBL) in this course is to integrate classroom ideals about the good life and community practice so that that class members can become more reflective and competent participants in public life

Blackboard

Blackboard provides the digital portal for the course: announcements, syllabus, reading materials beyond required books, assignments, discussion board, research tools, and so forth. Please visit the class site regularly to keep abreast of new developments and regularly post comments to facilitate ongoing discussion board exchanges

Schedule

Items noted below: New Testament books are listed by book and are to be read in their entirety, digital course documents are asterisked, and all other readings are from the Bibliography; Ehrman’s New Testament textbook readings are identified by chapter numbers; all other readings use page numbers where relevant

Week One: The Background of the New Testament

1/18 Introduction
1/20 Crace, Quarantine, 1-102

**Week Two: Introduction to the Gospels and Mark**

1/25 Mark
Ehrman, The New Testament, chap. 6

1/27 Crace, Quarantine, 103-164

**Week Three: Matthew**

2/1 Matthew
Ehrman, The New Testament, chap. 8

2/3 Crace, Quarantine, 165-242

**Week Four: Luke/Acts**

2/8 Luke
Ehrman, The New Testament, chap. 9

2/10 Acts
Ehrman, The New Testament, chap. 10

**Week Five: John and Gnosticism I**

2/15 John

2/17 1, 2, 3 John
Ehrman, Lost Scriptures, 1-28 (Gospels of Nazareans, Ebionites, Hebrews, Egyptians, Thomas)
--- 1st Exegetical Paper Due
Week Six: The Quest for the Historical Jesus and Gnosticism II

Ehrman, Lost Scriptures, 31-44, 57-62, 78-81 (Gospels of Peter, Mary, Philip, Infancy Gospel of Thomas, Coptic Apocalypse of Peter)
The Gospel of Judas, ed. Kasser, 6-53
* Gospel of the Egyptians


Week Seven: The Historian and the Believer

3/1 Ehrman, The New Testament, chaps. 16-17
* Burton Mack, A Myth of Innocence: Mark and Christian Origins, 353-76

* John Dear, Peace Behind Bars: A Peacemaking Priest’s Journey from Jail, 1-7, 29-73

Spring Break

Week Eight: Paul and the End Times

1 Thessalonians
* J. Christiaan Beker, Paul the Apostle: The Triumph of God in Life and Thought, ix-19, 351-67

3/17 --- In-class Midterm

Week Nine: Paul and Slavery

3/22 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, Philemon
Ehrman, The New Testament, chap. 21

3/24 Romans

Week Ten: Paul and Homosexuality

3/29 Romans (again), James
Week Eleven: Paul and Women

4/5 Galatians, 1 Corinthians, 1 Timothy (again)

4/7 * Elizabeth Castelli, “Paul on Women and Gender,” in Women and
Christian Origins, ed. Kraemer and D’Angelo, 221-35
Pagels, The Gnostic Gospels, 48-151

Week Twelve: Christians, Pagans, and Jews

4/12 Hebrews
* “Martyrdom of Polycarp,” in The New Testament and Other Early
Christian Writings, 2d ed., ed. Ehrman, 183-88
Ehrman, Lost Scriptures, 219-35 (Letter of Barnabas)

4/14 1 Peter
--- In-class quiz

Week Thirteen: The End of the World I

4/19 James (again), Jude
Ehrman, Lost Scriptures, 211-18 (Didache)
Ehrman, The New Testament, chap. 28

4/21 Revelation
Ehrman, Lost Scriptures, 251-87 (Shepherd of Hermas, Apocalypse of
Peter)
Rossing, Rapture Exposed, 1-102

Week Fourteen: The End of the World II

4/26 Rossing, Rapture Exposed, 103-207

Final Exam TBA