

BIB 642G: THEOLOGY AND ETHICS OF THE GOSPELS

ASSOCIATED MENNONITE BIBLICAL SEMINARY *Spring Semester 2010*

INSTRUCTOR: *Jerry Truex, PH.D.* **E-mail:** jtruex1@cox.net **Phone:** 316-263-0204

COURSE DESCRIPTION (*3 credit hours*)

This course introduces the theology and ethics of the Four Gospels. We will look at the origin, nature, and contexts of the Gospels. Then we will study the content, structure, and motifs that emerge from each individual Gospel. In particular, we focus on (i) a narrative analysis of Mark, (ii) the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew, (iii) the parables in Luke, and (iv) the Maverick quality of John. Finally, we will search for the one who stands at the epicenter of the Gospels traditions by considering recent scholarship on the historical Jesus.

Time: Monday evenings from 6:45-9:30 p.m.

Place: Lorraine Avenue Mennonite Church, 655 South Lorraine Ave., Wichita, KS 67211.

OUTCOMES

1. Knowledge & Comprehension

- List the probable date, audience, historical setting, and key theological themes for each Gospel
- Paraphrase the “story line” for each Gospel
- Explain the main “source theories” for the Gospels

2. Application & Analysis

- Show how the Gospels draw on OT themes and assume a first century Jewish milieu
- Demonstrate how theological motifs and ethical concerns emerge within each Gospel and are simpler to, but distinct from, the other Gospels
- Indicate how theological motifs might address contemporary personal and corporate issues

3. Synthesis & Evaluation

- Compose essays on selected Gospel themes and theologies
- Articulate the value of the Gospels for personal and corporate use
- Support compositions and evaluations with examples, expert opinion, rationale, and biblical texts
- Develop skills in evaluating scholarly works on the Gospels and the historical Jesus

TEXTBOOKS AND OTHER RESOURCES

1. Required Texts

Allison, Dale C. *The Sermon on the Mount: Inspiring the Moral Imagination*. New York: Herder & Herder, 1999. 176 pages. [List price \$19.95; Amazon.com \$13.57]

Dunn, James D. G. “The Tradition” pages 173-254 in *Jesus Remembered. Christianity in the Making*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003. 80 pages. [A copy will be provided]

Kysar, Robert, *John, the Maverick Gospel*. Third Edition. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox, 2007. 200 pages. [List price \$24.95; Amazon.com \$16.47]

Rhoads, David, Joanna Dewey, and Donald Michie, *Mark as Story. An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel*. Second Edition, Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999. 176 pages. [List price \$21.00; Amazon.com \$17.10]

Strauss, Mark L. *Four Portraits, One Jesus: An Introduction to Jesus and the Gospels*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007. 560 pages. [List price \$44.99; Amazon.com \$29.69]

Young, Brad H. *The Parables: Jewish Tradition and Christian Interpretation*. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1998. 332 pages. [List price \$24.95; Amazon.com \$16.47]

3. Recommended

Throckmorton, Burton H. *Gospel Parallels: A Comparison of the Synoptic Gospels*. Revised and Updated Textual Notes. Fifth Edition. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1992.

3. Digital Resources

Bible Resources — <http://www.bible-researcher.com/index.html> — Offers "Internet resources for students of scripture," including the Greek Text of the NT, the Hebrew text of the OT, Ancient versions of the bible, Canon of Scripture, English versions of Scripture, web directory of biblical studies, and more; maintained by [Michael Marlowe](#).

Biblos — <http://biblos.com> —Offers very impressive and easy to us gateways to everything biblical: atlas, Bible, concordance, dictionary, encyclopedia, measures, mobile, thesaurus, devotions, visuals, multilingual, lexicon, GNT concord, Strong's, aocrypha, story liste, chronological, people, places and topics. Biblos is an extension of the Online Paralle Bible Project at at <http://bible.cc>.

Case Against Q — <http://www.ntgateway.com/Q/> — provides analysis and supporting material on the "the Farrer theory," which questions the need to postulate the existence of Q. It features introductory material, bibliography, articles by Farrer, Goulder, Hobbs, and Goodacre. The Website is maintained by Dr. Mark Goodacre, a Senior Lecturer at the University of Birmingham, England.

Early Judaism and Christianity—<http://www.ejc-nexus.net>—offers links for students and scholars of Early Judaism and Christianity. Categories include academic religion, ancient manuscripts, Bible, Greek, Greek audio, Hebrew, Jewish Christian, Judaica, Latin, Septuagint, and Software. Maintained by Jerry Truex, AMBS Great Plains Extension.

From Jesus to Christ — <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/> — provided by Frontline to accompany their special documentary series for PBS on the historical evidence for the life of Jesus; each of the following sections have extensive materials and links.

Jesus Seminar Homepage — <http://www.westarinstitute.org/> — is the official Website for the famous "Jesus Seminar." It provides copious on-line articles and resources as well as information about the Seminar.

Jewish Roman World of Jesus — <http://www.religiousstudies.uncc.edu/JDTABOR/indexb.html> — offers over 40 short articles in four categories: Hellenistic/Roman Religion & Philosophy, Archaeology and the DSS, Christian Origins and the NT, Ancient Judaism; maintained by Dr. James Tabor, University of North Carolina.

New Testament Gateway — <http://www.ntgateway.com> — is an excellent Website for students of the New Testament. It provides links to a variety of other websites specializing in the Gospels, the Synoptic Problem, Historical Jesus, Judaism, Non-canonical Texts, Archaeology, Jesus on Film, and much more. Created and maintained by Dr. Mark Goodacre, Duke University.

Synoptic Gospel Primer — <http://virtualreligion.net/primer/> — offers an introduction to the study of the Synoptic Problem, sample synopses, and an extensive bibliography. The site is maintained by Dr. Mahlon H. Smith, Rutgers University.

Synoptic Problem Homepage — <http://www.mindspring.com/~scarlson/synopt/harmony/> — provides copious material on the synoptic problem, including colored synopses in Greek, diagrams, explanations of various hypotheses, and reproductions of classic material on the synoptic problem by Abbott and Wood. Maintained by Stephen Carson.

Gospel of Thomas Homepage — <http://home.epix.net/~miser17/Thomas.html> — provides numerous translations of the Gospel of Thomas, an annotated bibliography pertaining to the Gospel, texts, articles, images, and links. The Website is maintained by Dr. Stevan Davies, College Misericordia, Dallas, Pennsylvania.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. Read assigned chapters in Strauss' Four Portraits, One Jesus—Due Weekly

Students will have the opportunity to grade themselves on how well they read the assigned material from Strauss. Each week students will indicate whether they have read the material *closely* (10 pts), *skim read* (5 pts), or *not at all* (0 pts).

Points: 10 pts per week; 140 pts total

Due: Each week

2. Complete an analysis of selected Synoptic Parallels — Due Feb. 15

This assignment pertains to the “Synoptic Problem”. Using material provided from Throckmorton’s *Gospel Parallels*, students are to select two of the following parallel texts for analysis.

- T§6: The Baptism of Jesus (Matt 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21-22)
- T§8: The Temptation (Matt 4:1-11; Mark 1:12-13; Luke 4:1-13)
- T§45: The Healing of a Leper (Matt 8:1-4; Mark 1:40-45; Luke 5:12-16)
- T§249: The Crucifixion (Matt 27:33-44; Mark 15:22-32; Luke 23:33-43)

Students are to provide a three-part analysis of their selected parallels by (i) *describing* the similarities and differences, (ii) *explaining* the similarities and differences in Matthew and Luke, assuming Markan priority, and (iii) *speculating* on the unique perspectives, situations, and theology Matthew and Luke might have in mind.

Students should do their own analysis, then check with one or two commentaries to see if anything was missed, summarize their finding in two to three pages (700 to 950 words), and be able to present their findings for classroom discussion on the due date.

Points: 60 pts

Due: Feb. 15

3. Complete a narrative analysis of Mark's Gospel — Due March 8

Students are to write an analysis demonstrating familiarity with the techniques of analysis presented by the book, *Mark as Story*. The analysis should have two parts.

First, in about 1-2 pages, students are to briefly describe the role of the narrator, the function of the settings, the plot, and the character of Jesus and the disciples in Mark.

Second, in about 3-4 pages, students are to apply narrative analysis to a single episode (Mark 5:21-43), noting the way the narrator guides the reading experience, describing the point of view of various characters, identifying stylistic features, speculating about how the setting influences the reading, explaining why the author might have sequenced the story one way rather than another, examining the conflicts (between characters, within characters, between characters and culture), analyzing the characters, etc.

The analysis should be concisely written, carefully edited, and about five pages in length (350 words/page or 1,750 words total). Students should be prepared to share their findings in class.

Points: 100 pts.

Due: March 8

4. Complete one of the following essays — Due Apr. 12

a. The moral vision of the Sermon on the Mount

Based on reading Allison's *The Sermon on the Mount*, students are to write an essay describing the type of character, choices, and community advocated by the Sermon on the Mount. Connors and McCormick provide a helpful three-part conceptual structure for the essay:

Morality is concerned with answering three questions: "Who ought we be?" "What ought we do?" and "What sort of community ought we construct?" As a result, much of the conversation in morality is about: (1) Our CHARACTER—the kinds of persons (good or bad) we are now or are becoming, (2) Our CHOICES FOR ACTION—the (right and wrong) decisions, judgments and behavior that make up our lives, and (3) Our COMMUNITIES—the moral fabric and nature of the (just and unjust) systems, structures and groups which we form and live in. ¹

Students should (a) use the categories of character, choice, and community to structure their papers, but not let their creativity be limited by it, (b) demonstrate familiarity with Allison's book by judiciously quoting him and periodically referring to his interpretations of Matthew, and (c) carefully write and edit the essay, which should be about five pages in length (350 words/page or 1,750 words total). Students should be prepared to share their findings in class.

Points: 100 pts.

Due: April 12

b. Jesus' Parables in Jewish context — April 12

Based on reading *The Parables* by Brad Young, students are to write an essay describing and evaluating Young's *approach to parables*. Questions to address might include the following: What are Young's sources, methods, and rationale for interpreting Jesus' parables? In what way does he add to your understanding and appreciation of the parables? Do you see any weaknesses in his approach? Does he draw sound or implausible conclusions? In reviewing

¹ Russell B. Connors and Patrick T. McCormick, *Character, Choices and Community. The Three Faces of Christian Ethics* (Mahwah: Paulist, 1998) 9-10.

and evaluating Young's book, include judicious quotations, examples, evidence, and reasoned analysis.

The essay should be concisely written, carefully edited, and about five pages in length (350 words/page or 1,750 words total). Students should be prepared to share their findings in class.

Points: 100 pts.

Due: April 12

5. Complete an essay on *John, the Maverick Gospel* — Due April 26

Based on Kysar's *John, The Maverick Gospel* and other selected resources, students are to write an essay on "Why is John's Gospel considered the Maverick Gospel?"

The essay should compare and contrast the Synoptic Gospels (SG) and the Fourth Gospel (FG). Broadly speaking, students should compare and contrast the content, structure, theological motifs, and ethical concerns of SG and FG. More specifically, students could compare the portraits of Jesus, including his mission and message, his role in relation to God and Israel, and his style of teaching and healing. Students could compare chronological differences, including an analysis of the overall sequence of events, the length of Jesus' ministry, and the differences in the final week (esp. the trial, Passover, crucifixion, etc). Students could compare SG and FG's portrayal of the Jesus' disciples and opponents.

Whatever points students choose to compare and contrast, they should speculate on why there are differences and similarities.

The critical review should be concisely written, carefully edited, and about five pages in length (350 words/page or 1,750 words total). Students should be prepared to share their finding in class.

Points: 100 pts.

Due: April 26

6. Complete an essay on "*Jesus and Me*" — Due May 10

As a capstone to the course, drawing on course material, textbooks, and personal experience, students are to write an essay entitled, "Jesus and Me." The essay should address the following questions: (a) How do I know about Jesus and is it authentic, dependable, and sound? (b) How would you describe Jesus historically and theologically; who was he? (c) What was Jesus' mission and message, and how does that relate to me and my community? (d) Why did Jesus die, and how does that pertain to my contemporary situation? (e) How do I understand the resurrection and its significance?

Although not required, the book by Marcus Borg and N.T. Wright, *The Meaning of Jesus. Two Visions*, might be helpful.

The essay should be concisely written, carefully edited, and about five pages in length (350 words/page or 1,750 words total). Students should be prepared to share their findings.

Points: 100 pts.

Due: May 10

GRADING

Requirements	Points	Percent
1. Reading Strauss' Four Portraits, One Jesus (10 pts/wk for 14 weeks)	140	14
2. Analysis of Gospel Parallels	60	6
3. Narrative Analysis of Mark	200	20
4. Essay on the Sermon on the Mount <u>or</u> Jesus' Parables	200	20
5. Essay on John the Maverick Gospel	200	20
6. Essay on Jesus and me	200	20
Total	1000	100

Letter Grades

- A = 90-100%
- B = 80-89%
- C = 70-79%
- D = 60-69%
- F = Below 60%

Pass/Fail Grade

If a student would prefer a pass/fail grade, instead of a letter grade, please make that request to the instructor. If the instructor grants the request, then the student must contact Lois Barrett, Executive Director of AMBS Great Plains, and fill out the proper forms.

EXTENSION POLICY

The dean and faculty have agreed to implement the course extension policy and to work hard as a faculty to meet institutional grading deadlines after the end of the term. Deadlines for assignments are listed above. If there is a reason why you need an extension beyond the end of the semester, you must secure a Request for Extension form, available through the AMBS website. This form must be submitted with signatures from the professor and dean before the end of the business day on the last day of class for the term (Dec. 18, 2009). An extension is not normally longer than six weeks. See the AMBS online catalog for further information.

COURSE EVALUATION

As part of AMBS's commitment to improve the quality of teaching and learning, we take seriously the feedback we receive from students in course evaluations. By seminary policy, students are required to complete an online course evaluation outside of class time in order to get credit for a class. Evaluations are optional for auditors. The online course evaluation will become available to students the last week of class at <http://evals.ambs.edu> where further instructions are available. Username and password are required. Students must complete the evaluation within one week of the last day of class to be in compliance. Students who wish to convert an NC (due to noncompliance) to a passing grade must pay a \$25 fee to complete the evaluation and to have the grade converted. Students who have technical difficulties with completing the evaluations should contact Brent Graber at 296-6221 or bgraber@ambs.edu.

SCHEDULE

UNIT ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE GOSPELS

1. FEB. 1 — Introduction and the Nature and Origin of the Gospels

Lecture Topics

What are the Gospels?

1. The Gospels as Biographies
2. Synoptic Problem and Source Criticism
3. Q-Source
4. Form Criticism and Oral tradition
5. Redaction Criticism and the evangelists as authors

Reading Assignment: Due Feb. 8

Strauss, Chapter 1: *What Are the Gospels?*

Strauss, Chapter 2: *Exploring the Origin and Nature of the Gospels*

Strauss, Chapter 4: *Historical Setting of the Gospels*

Assignment: Due Feb. 15

Analysis of Selected Synoptic Parallels — Due: Feb 15

2. FEB. 8 — The Nature and Origin of the Gospels

Lecture Topics

What are the Gospels? (Continued)

Contexts

1. Historical and Religious
2. Social and cultural

Reading Assignment: Due Feb. 15

Strauss, Chapter 5: *Religious Setting: First-Century Judaism*

Strauss, Chapter 3: *Reading and Hearing the Gospels Stories*

Strauss, Chapter 7: *Mark: The Gospel of the Suffering Son of God*

Assignment: Due Feb. 15

Analysis of Selected Synoptic Parallels — Due: Feb 15

UNIT TWO: THE GOSPEL OF MARK

3. FEB. 15 — The Gospel of Mark and Narrative Analysis

Lecture Topics

The Gospel of Mark

1. Mark's Characteristics
2. Mark's Portrait of Jesus
3. Mark as Story/Narrative

4. Workshop: Using Narrative Analysis on Markan texts

Reading Assignment: Due Feb. 22

The Gospel of Mark (any modern version)

Assignment: Due Mar. 8

Read Rhoads, Dewey, and Michie, *Mark as Story*.
Essay on a Narrative Analysis of Mark — Due: Mar. 8

4. FEB. 22 — *The Gospel of Mark and Narrative Analysis*

Lecture Topics

Gospel of Mark (Continued)

Reading Assignment: Due Mar. 1

Strauss: Chapter 11: *Searching for the Real Jesus*

Assignment: Due Mar. 8

Read Rhoads, Dewey, and Michie, *Mark as Story*.
Essay on a Narrative Analysis of Mark — Due: Mar. 8

UNIT THREE: THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

5. MARCH 1 — *The Gospel of Matthew and the Sermon on the Mount*

Lecture Topics

The Gospel of Matthew

1. Matthew's Characteristics
2. Matthew's Portrait of Jesus
3. Matthew's Sermon on the Mount

Reading Assignment: Due Mar. 8

The Gospel of Matthew (any modern version)
Strauss, Chapter 8: *Matthew: The Gospel of the Messiah*

Assignment: Due Apr. 12

Dale Allison, *The Sermon on the Mount*.
Essay on the Moral Vision of the Sermon on the Mount — Due: April 12

6. MARCH 8 — *The Gospel of Matthew and the Sermon on the Mount*

Lecture Topics (Continued)

The Gospel of Matthew (Continued)

Reading Assignment: Due Mar. 15

Strauss: Chapter 12: *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels*

Assignment: Due Apr. 12

Dale Allison, *The Sermon on the Mount*.

Essay on the Moral Vision of the Sermon on the Mount — Due: April 12

UNIT FOUR: THE GOSPEL OF LUKE

7. MARCH 15 — *The Gospel of Luke and the Jewish Parables of Jesus*

Lecture Topics

The Gospel of Luke

1. Luke's Characteristics
2. Luke's Portrait of Jesus
3. The Jewish Parables of Jesus

Required Reading: Due Mar. 22

The Gospel of Luke (any modern version)

Strauss, Chapter 9: *Luke: The Gospel of the Savior for All People*

Assignment: Due Apr. 12

Young, *The Parables: Jewish Tradition and Christian Interpretation*

Essay on Jesus' Parables in Jewish context — Due: April 12

8. MARCH 22 — *The Gospel of Luke and the Jewish Parables of Jesus*

Lecture Topics

The Gospel of Luke (Continued)

Reading Assignment: Due Apr. 5

Strauss: Chapter 13: *The Contours and Chronology of Jesus' Ministry*

Assignment: Due Apr. 12

Young, *The Parables: Jewish Tradition and Christian Interpretation*

Essay on Jesus' Parables in Jewish context — Due: April 12

9. MARCH 29 — *No Class. Easter Break.*

UNIT FIVE: THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

10. APRIL 5 — *The Gospel of John, the Maverick Gospel*

Lecture Topics

The Gospel of John

1. John's Characteristics
2. John's Portrait of Jesus
3. John and "the Jews"

Reading Assignment: Due Apr. 12

The Gospel of John (any modern version)
Strauss, Chapter 10: *John: The Gospel of the Son Who Reveals the Father*

Assignment: Due Apr. 26

Read Kysar's *John, The Maverick Gospel*
Essay on "John, the Maverick Gospel" — Due: April 26

11. APRIL 12 — *The Gospel of John, the Maverick Gospel*

Lecture Topics

The Gospel of John (Continued)

Reading Assignment: Due Apr. 19

Strauss: Chapter 14: *Jesus' Birth and Childhood*
Strauss, Chapter 15: *The Beginning of Jesus Ministry*

Assignment: Due Apr. 26

Read Kysar's *John, The Maverick Gospel*
Essay on "John, the Maverick Gospel" — Due: April 26

12. APRIL 19 — *The Gospel of John, the Maverick Gospel*

Lecture Topics

The Gospel of John (Continued)

Reading Assignment: Due Apr. 26

Strauss, Chapter 16: *The Message of Jesus*
Strauss, Chapter 17: *The Miracles of Jesus*

Assignment: Due Apr. 26

Read Kysar's *John, The Maverick Gospel*
Essay on "John, the Maverick Gospel" — Due: April 26

UNIT SIX: THE HISTORICAL JESUS

13. APRIL 26 — *Recent Scholarship on the Historical Jesus*

Lecture Topics

- (1) Contemporary Scholarship
 - (a) Non-canonical & non-Christian sources
 - (b) Criteria of Authenticity
 - (c) Contemporary Portraits
 - (i) Jesus Seminar
 - (ii) E.P. Sanders

- (iii) Marcus Borg
- (v) N.T. Wright

- (2) The Early Life of Jesus
 - (a) Birth and infancy stories
 - (b) John the Baptist
- (3) The Mission and Character of Jesus
 - (a) Jesus the Jewish Galilean Mystic
 - (b) Jesus the Healer & Exorcist
 - (c) Jesus the Nonviolent Social Prophet
 - (d) Jesus the Rabbi and Wisdom Teacher
 - (e) Jesus and Archaeology
- (4) The Last Days of Jesus
 - (a) The final week of Jesus
 - (b) The crucifixion of Jesus
 - (c) The empty tomb & resurrection
- (5) Jesus after Easter

Reading Assignment: Due May 3

Strauss, Chapter 18: *The Messianic Words and Actions of Jesus*
Strauss, Chapter 19: *The Death of Jesus*
Strauss, Chapter 20: *The Resurrection of Jesus*

Assignment

Essay on “Jesus and Me” — Due: May 10

14. MAY 3 — Recent Scholarship on the Historical Jesus

Lecture

The Historical Jesus (Continued)

Reading Assignments

None

Assignments

Essay on “Jesus and Me” — Due: May 10

SELECTIVE BIBLIOGRAPHY

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