RLST 205: Introduction to New Testament Studies

Spring Semester 2014
Tu Th 9:40 – 11:00 am; LA 338

Course description
This course offers an introduction to the New Testament and to the ancient world of its authors. In the first weeks we survey the New Testament’s cultural contexts: the Hebrew Bible, ancient Judaism, and Greco-Roman history and religion. We then focus on New Testament writings including the four canonical gospels, the letters of Paul, and other ancient documents within and outside of the Bible. Our goal is to understand earliest Christian literature, history, religion, and social groups through a focus on New Testament texts and contexts. Students will be introduced to the diverse cultures of the ancient Mediterranean world and to the modern study of the Bible and religion.

Required Textbooks
The Harper Collins Study Bible (or any printed NRSV translation of the Bible)
E. P. Sanders, The Historical Figure of Jesus (Penguin, 1993)

e-reserve: e-reserve readings noted in the syllabus may be downloaded and printed out through the Mansfield Library Course Reserves website (http://eres.lib.umt.edu/eres/) using the course password “RLST205”

Course Requirements
Regular attendance is essential and required. Reading assignments are to be completed before the lecture for which they are assigned. It is recommended that you bring your Bibles to class with you.

Three quizzes: on the dates listed in the course schedule below.
Midterm exam: to be taken in class on the date listed in the course schedule below.
One paper: on a topic to be provided by the instructor. Approximately 5 pages in length, double-spaced, stapled, with one-inch margins, in 12 point font.
Final exam: the final will be comprehensive for the semester.
Grading:

Attendance and participation 10%
Quizzes 15%
Midterm examination 25%
Paper 25%
Final examination 25%

Course policies and classroom expectations:

1) There will be no make-up quizzes or extensions unless the student has made arrangements at least a week ahead of time. Students who leave the classroom before the end of the class meeting will be counted as absent. If you miss a class meeting, it is then your responsibility to obtain from a classmate any class notes and other assignment and scheduling information discussed during your absence.

2) Students are allowed one cut without penalty. Each additional cut (including early departures from class) will reduce the attendance and participation grade by 10% (that is, 1% of the final grade).

3) This is a course about religion as an academic subject and the development of the Bible in historical context. This is not a class that teaches religion or religious doctrine from a religious and/or devotional perspective. In this class, we will be examining biblical literature in an academic and secular setting, and treating biblical texts as an ancient document open to questioning, examination, criticism, and interpretation. An interest in exploring new ideas and new methods of examining the Bible are essential. This class is not a forum for expressions of personal theology.

4) Students may not use any electronic communication devices in the classroom. Tablets and laptops may be used only for note taking, only if necessary, and must remain offline. Students using cell phones, smartphones, or computers to text or go online during class will be asked to leave the classroom.

5) Plagiarism – the presentation of others’ work as your own – is an offense punishable by course failure and/or expulsion. All work submitted in this class must be your own, and all references to ideas from books, articles, or other sources must be cited correctly. If you do not know how to properly reference your work, or you are in doubt whether or not you should cite material, refer to the University guidelines, or make an appointment to see the instructor to discuss the problem. Anyone found guilty of plagiarism, cheating, forgery, falsification or any other form of academic dishonesty will fail this course and the incident will be reported to the Dean.

6) Disability accommodations: Students with disabilities may develop a course accommodation plan with the assistance of Disability Services. The instructor will assist in facilitating all disability accommodations.
Learning outcomes of RLST 205:
• Students will acquire a general command of multidisciplinary methods in and approaches to the modern study of ancient biblical literature, focusing on the development and structure of ancient literary traditions and forms of expression in their ancient literary and historical contexts.
• Student will locate biblical texts within the literary, social-historical and aesthetic contexts and frameworks of ancient Jewish, Christian and Greco-Roman literature, art and architecture.
• Students will learn to ask key questions about ancient authorship and audiences.
• Students will learn to make coherent, strong arguments (in writing and public speaking) based on ancient literary and archaeological evidence and using modern literary-critical and social-theoretical methods.
Course Schedule

*Note: this schedule may change slightly as our course progresses. Regular attendance will ensure that students are informed of any changes.

I. Introduction to the course: methods and topics

Week 1
Tu 1/28
   Introduction: The New Testament in the modern university

Th 1/30
   Approaching the New Testament as an ancient literary and historical document
   Reading: Ehrman, chs. 1 and 2

II. New Testament Contexts

Week 2
Tu 2/4 *Map Quiz*
   The Hellenistic Mediterranean world
   Reading: Ehrman, ch. 3
   Sanders, pp. vii-xii, 1-14
   e-reserve: “Savior Gods in the Mediterranean World”

Th 2/6
   The Hebrew Bible and ancient Israel
   Reading: Ehrman, ch. 4 (and review ch. 1 p. 4 (Box 1.2)
   Sanders, pp. 15-32

Week 3
Tu 2/11
   Ancient Judaisms
   Reading: Ehrman, ch. 17
   Sanders, pp. 33-48

Th 2/13
   Greco-Roman religion
   Reading: Sanders, pp. 49-56
   e-reserve: Roman Cult (Cult Scenes, Cult Groups, Imperial Cult)
   e-reserve: Apuleius, Metamorphoses 11
Week 4
Tu 2/18 *Quiz: New Testament contexts*

From Jesus to Christ (I)
Reading: Sanders, pp. 57-76

III. The Gospels and the Jesus Movement

Th 2/20
Encountering the Gospels
Reading: Ehrman, chs. 5 and 6
Gospel of Mark 1-7
Review Sanders, pp. 57-76

Week 5
Tu 2/25
The Synoptic Problem
Reading: Ehrman, ch. 8
Gospel of Matthew 1-7

Th 2/27
Mark
Reading: Ehrman, ch. 7
Gospel of Mark 1-7 (read it again), 8-16

Week 6
Tu 3/4
Matthew
Reading: Ehrman, ch. 9
Gospel of Matthew 1-14 (read it again), 15-28

Th 3/6
Luke
Reading: Ehrman, ch. 10
Gospel of Luke
Philemon 24; Colossians 4:14; 2 Timothy 4:11
Acts 1:1-2:21
Ehrman Ch. 11 (skim)
Week 7
  Tu 3/11
  John
  Reading: Ehrman, ch. 12
  Gospel of John
  1 John
  2 John

Th 3/13  Review and catch-up
  *From Jesus to Christ (2)*
  Reading: Sanders, 78-131

Week 8
  Tu 3/18  *Midterm exam*

IV. The Historical Jesus

  Th 3/20
  *The Historical Jesus (1)*
  Reading: Ehrman, chs. 15 and 16
  Sanders, 132-68

Week 9
  Tu 3/25
  *The Historical Jesus (2)*
  Reading: Ehrman, chs. 18 and 19
  Sanders, 169-204

  Th 3/27
  *From Jesus to Christ (3)*
  Reading: Sanders, 205-81

Week 10
  Tu 4/1 - Th 4/3  Spring Break
V. The earliest evidence: The Life, Letters, Communities, and Thought of Paul

Week 11
Tu 4/8
Paul of Tarsus: life, mission, and writings
Reading: Ehrman, ch. 20
Galatians, 1:11 - 2:14
Romans 11:1; Philippians 3:5; 2 Corinthians 11:22
Ehrman Ch. 11 (skim)

Th 4/10
Paul and the life of his communities
Reading: Ehrman, ch. 21
Gager, pp. 3-19
1 Thessalonians
1 Corinthians

Week 12
Tu 4/15
Paul and the Apocalypse
Reading: Gager, pp. 21-42
Ehrman, ch. 22
1 Corinthians 15
1 Thessalonians 1:10; 4:1-5:11
Romans 9-11, 13:11-14

Th 4/17
Identifying Paul: Pharisee and apostle to the Gentiles
Reading: Gager, pp. 43-99
Galatians

Week 13
Tu 4/22
Pauline thought: Jews, Gentiles, and the Law
Reading: Gager, 101-152
Ehrman, pp. 435-38, 449-52
Romans

Th 4/24  *Quiz: Paul*
Reading: Ehrman, Ch. 23
Galatians, Romans (review)
VI. Apocalyptic Literature

Week 14
Tu 4/29
The Book of Revelation
Reading: Ehrman, Ch. 30
Revelation

VII. Community and Controversy: Heresy and Canonization

Th 5/1
Sex, gender, and the early Christian household
Reading: Ehrman Ch. 26
1 Corinthians 5-7, 11, 14
1 Timothy 2
Romans 1:18-32, 2:12-16
Ephesians 5:21 – 6:9
Colossians 3:18 – 4:1
Titus 2:2-10, 3:1
1 Peter 2:16 – 3:7

Week 15
Tu 5/6  *Paper Due in Class*
Non-Canonical Gospels, Esoteric Teachings of Jesus
Reading: Ehrman Chs. 13 and 14
1 John (review)
e-reserve: Gospel of Thomas, Gospel of Truth

Th 5/8
The Second Century: The Emergence of the Christian Bible
Reading: e-reserve: Iranaeus, *Against Heresies*
            Early New Testament Canon Lists
            Tertullian, *Prescription of the Heretics* (optional)

Final examination: In class on Thursday May 15, 8:00 – 10:00 am