Major Figures in Christian Thought: The Alternative Jesus
Re St 381 01, Fall 2019

Although Jesus of Nazareth is regarded by millions as savior and sage, he left us no writings of his own, so that the task of telling his story fell to followers and critics of later generations. This course examines how Jesus and his message, “the good news,” are depicted in strikingly different ways in Christian literature and beyond. After closely examining the various portraits of Jesus set forth in the four biblical Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John), and understanding the unique perspectives of each story teller, we will then compare different modern interpretations of Jesus and his teachings. We will also look at how Jesus is represented in ancient Gospels not included in the Bible, such as the Gospels of Thomas, Judas, and Mary, and in the literature of other religions, including the Qur’an and medieval Jewish legends. Emphasis will be on understanding the diversity of perspectives on Jesus and how he serves as a powerful vehicle for conveying the values of those who tell his story.

Instructor: Lance Jenott (jenott@wustl.edu), Umrath 250 | Office hours: T, Th 2:00–3:30pm

Meetings: T, Th 4:00–5:20pm, Eads 103

Books and Readings

All other readings will be available on the course website, marked (*) on the schedule below.

Recommended Documentary and Book

Assignments and Grading
1. Map quiz 5%
2. Participation in group discussion 15%
3. Gospels analysis 25%
4. Book review 25%
5. Research paper and in-class presentation 30%
Assignment 1: Gospels analysis. Taking either the opening chapter(s) of each Gospel in the New Testament, or a synoptic episode (e.g., the Last Supper, the Trial and Crucifixion, the Baptism of Jesus), analyze how the different ways each author tells the story reflects his or her unique themes, agenda, and emphases.

Assignment 2: Book review. Write a critical review of John Crossan’s book, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography*. A critical review includes (a) an accurate description of the book’s thesis and argument (imagine you’re writing for someone who does not have time to read the whole thing), and (b) a critical assessment of it: i.e., what do you find problematic about the book and why?

Assignment 3: a research paper on a topic of your choice, related to some aspect of the material studied in class, and designed in consultation with the instructor. You will present a draft of your paper (15 minutes) for peer review in the final week of class. The expertise of Michael Schaefer (michaelschaefer@wustl.edu), Washu’s research librarian in Religious Studies, is another helpful resource for this project.

Grade Scale

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Late Assignment and Extension Policy

Papers submitted after the due date are subject to a 5% grade deduction per day unless a prior extension is arranged with the instructor.

Pass/Fail/Credit/No-Credit Policy

Anyone taking the class for pass/fail/credit/no-credit must submit all work and receive a final course grade of C (74) or higher in order to pass.

Computer Policy

Please do not use computers, phones, or other electronics in class. Instead, bring books and printed copies of readings for class discussion (instructor will give you a heads-up when you can forego printing). Students with special needs may use computers to take notes if documentation is provided from the Disability Resources office (https://students.wustl.edu/disability-resources/).
Schedule

Part I: Introduction

T 8/27 Course introduction and “Jesus 101”: historical setting and sources

Th 8/29 How do we have the Bible today? Manuscripts and Making the Biblical Canon
- Bart Ehrman, “Do We Have the Original New Testament?” (*)

Part II: The Oldest Written Gospels

T 9/3
- The Gospel of Mark (Bible)
- Ehrman, “Jesus, the Suffering Son of God: The Gospel According to Mark” (*)

Th 9/5 How are Mark, Luke, and Matthew related to each other?
- Ehrman, “The Synoptic Problem and Its Significance for Interpretation” (*)
- Bishop Papias on oral and written Gospels (*)

T 9/10
- Mark-Luke synopsis (*)

Th 9/12
- The Gospel of Matthew (Bible). Read as much as you can, but focus on chs. 1-2 (genealogy and infancy narrative), chs. 5-7 (the Sermon on the Mount), ch. 12 (wrangling with Pharisees), 13 (parables of the Kingdom), 15:1-20 (Pharisees and Sadducees), 16:13-28 (Peter “the Rock”), chs. 21-23 (entry into Jerusalem, criticism of temple priests, scribes, Pharisees), chs. 26-28 (from the Last Supper to the Great Commission)
- Ehrman, “Jesus, the Jewish Messiah: The Gospel According to Matthew” (*)

T 9/17
- The Gospel of John (Bible): focus on chs. 1-3, 11-12, 18-21
- Ehrman, “Jesus, the Man Sent from Heaven: The Gospel According to John” (*)
Part III: Historical Jesuses in Modern Imagination

Th9/19
• In-class screening of Monty Python’s The Life of Brian (runtime 1 hr 34 min)

** Sunday 9/22 (11:59pm): First paper due

T 9/24 Discussion of film and essay
• William R. Telford, “Monty Python’s The Life of Brian and the Jesus Film,” 3-18 in Jesus and Brian: Exploring the Historical Jesus and his Times via Monty Python’s Life of Brian, ed. Joan E. Taylor (Bloomsbury, 2016) (*)

Th9/26
• start reading Crossan for next week

T 10/1 Crossan, pp. xiii-xix, 1-59 (Prologue and chs. 1-2)

Th10/3 Crossan, ch. 3 (pp. 61-83)

T 10/8 Crossan, chs. 4-5 (pp. 85-137)

Th10/10 Crossan, ch. 6 (pp. 139-178)

T 10/15 No class: Fall break

Th10/17 Crossan, ch. 7 and Epilogue (pp. 179-226)

** Sunday 10/20 (11:59pm): Book review due

T 10/22
• The Gospel of Thomas, introduced and translated by Marvin Meyer (*)
• Parables in Thomas and the Synoptic Gospels (*)

Th10/24 Levine, Introduction and ch. 5: The Mustard Seed (pp. 1-23, 151-168)

** Sunday 10/27: Due by email (11:59pm): A one-paragraph description of your research question, including which historical source(s) you will focus on and a preliminary bibliography of at least two modern scholars.

T 10/29 Levine, ch. 1: Lost Sheep, Lost Coin, Lost Son (pp. 25-70)

Th10/31 Levine, ch 2: The Good Samaritan (pp. 71-106)

T 10/29 Levine, ch. 3: The Kingdom of Heaven is like Yeast (pp. 107-125)
Th 10/31 Levine, ch. 4: The Pearl of Great Price (pp. 127-150)

T 11/5 Levine, ch. 7: The Laborers in the Vineyard (pp. 197-219)

Th 11/7 Levine, ch. 8: The Widow and the Judge (pp. 221-245); Conclusion (pp. 275-285)

Part IV: Beyond the Bible:
Jesuses in Other Christian, Jewish, and Muslim Traditions

T 11/12
- The Gospel of Mary (*)
- Acts 1 and 1 Timothy 2:8-15 (Bible)

Th 11/14 The Gospel of Judas (*)

T 11/19 Toledot Yeshu: The Life Story of Jesus (*)

Th 11/21 Jesus in the Qur’an (*)

Part V: Presentation of Research

T 11/26 No class: instructor away. Work on research paper drafts.

Th 11/28 No class: Thanksgiving

T 12/3 Presentations and peer discussion (5 @ 15 min each). Pre-circulate drafts to the rest of the class by Sunday 12/1 (11:59pm).

Th 12/5 Presentations and peer discussion (5 @ 15 min each). Pre-circulate drafts to the rest of the class by Tuesday 12/3 (11:59pm).

Reading and exam period: Monday, Dec. 9th – Wednesday, Dec 18th

** Sunday 12/15 (11:59pm): final research paper due
Academic Accommodations at Washington University

Disability Resources. At Washington University we strive to make the academic experience accessible and inclusive. If you anticipate or experience barriers based on disability, please contact Disability Resources at 314.935.5970, disabilityresources@wustl.edu, or visit our website for information about requesting academic accommodations: https://students.wustl.edu/disability-resources/

Sexual Assault Resources. The University is committed to offering reasonable academic accommodations (e.g., no contact order, course changes) to students who are victims of relationship or sexual violence, regardless of whether they seek criminal or disciplinary action. If you need to request such accommodations, please contact the Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Center (RSVP) at rsvpcenter@wustl.edu or 314-935-3445 to schedule an appointment with an RSVP confidential, licensed counselor. Information shared with counselors is confidential. However, requests for accommodations will be coordinated with the appropriate University administrators and faculty. Visit the RSVP Center website at https://students.wustl.edu/relationship-sexual-violence-prevention-center/

Reporting Sexual Assault. If a student discusses or discloses an instance of sexual assault, sex discrimination, sexual harassment, dating violence, domestic violence or stalking, or if a faculty member otherwise observes or becomes aware of such an allegation, they will keep the information as private as possible, but as a faculty member of Washington University, they are required to immediately report it to the Department Chair or Dean or directly to Ms. Jessica Kennedy, the University’s Title IX Director, at (314) 935-3118, jwkennedy@wustl.edu. Additionally, you can report incidents or complaints to the Office of Student Conduct and Community Standards or by contacting WUPD at (314) 935-5555 or your local law enforcement agency. See the Title IX at Washu: https://titleix.wustl.edu

Bias Reporting
The University has a process through which students, faculty, staff and community members who have experienced or witnessed incidents of bias, prejudice or discrimination against a student can report their experiences to the University’s Bias Report and Support System (BRSS) team. See brss.wustl.edu

Mental Health
Mental Health Services’ professional staff members work with students to resolve personal and interpersonal difficulties, many of which can affect the academic experience. These include conflicts with or worry about friends or family, concerns about eating or drinking patterns, and feelings of anxiety and depression. See https://students.wustl.edu/mental-health-services/

Center for Diversity and Inclusion (CDI)
The Center for Diversity and Inclusion (CDI) supports and advocates for undergraduate, graduate, and professional school students from underrepresented and/or marginalized populations, collaborates with campus and community partners, and promotes dialogue and social change to cultivate and foster a supportive campus climate for students of all backgrounds, cultures and identities. See https://diversityinclusion.wustl.edu/