**CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE**

**DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES**

**RS 327: *THE TEACHING OF JESUS***

**FALL 2015; MW:9:30-10:45 A.M.**

**ὰνήρ ἂτεχνος τοīς πᾰπιν ἐστι δούλος**

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**COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

Most everyone has certain assumptions about Jesus of Nazareth and his teachings. Many of these assumptions are based on traditional Christian theology and personal faith. In other words, many Christians begin with the conviction that Jesus of Nazareth was the Christ (Messiah) and *Second Person* of the *Holy Trinity* sent by God for the salvation of the world. Many believe that Jesus Christ died for their sins so that they can go to Heaven. Such beliefs were codified by early Christian councils in creedal statements that became doctrinal standards about Jesus as the *Son of God* and deal almost exclusively with ‘the Virgin Birth,’ Jesus’ atoning death, his resurrection, and ascension. Creeds essentially left out the life and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth and presented a spiritualized, apolitical savior.

Clearly such doctrinal assumptions about Jesus of Nazareth continue to determine how people interpret his deeds and sayings in the New Testament Gospels and Gospel of Thomas. Put another way, one’s particular theology and Christology greatly influence the way that one understands the ancient Christian texts. Usually, this approach to Jesus’ teachings in the Gospels involves little or no historical and contextual investigation and lacks any critical analysis of the sayings later attributed to Jesus. For example, some Christians accept all of the sayings of Jesus found in the canonical gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) as coming from Jesus—literally ‘word for word’—without investigating each saying’s historical authenticity. Additionally, many Christians believe that Jesus is the “**Son of God**” but have never looked into the historical and religious use of this metaphor in the Ancient Mediterranean World. Few realize that Jesus was not the first person to receive this title or other titles like “Savior of the world.” An uncritical and **anachronistic** approach has also led many to assume that Jesus of Nazareth rejected “Judaism” and started a new religion called “Christianity.”

***These observations are not meant as an attack on Christian beliefs.*** Rather, the point is to distinguish between uncritical faith-assumptions and the Historical Critical method used to study Jesus and his teachings in this university course. This is not to imply that modern Jesus researchers do not have their own set of assumptions and problems. It simply acknowledges the important differences between faith-assumptions and those based on modern Historical Critical Jesus research. This course follows the latter as a matter of scientific method not anti-Christian or anti-Jewish biases.

Therefore, this course equips students with the critical thinking skills necessary to address introductory issues involving Jesus of Nazareth and his teachings according to current university scholarship. Professor Talbott will introduce heuristic models used in Historical Critical scholarship. This contextual approach, based on social scientific research, utilizes cultural and economic anthropology to examine Ancient Mediterranean cultures. Rhetorical, feminist, and postcolonial biblical criticisms are also used to interpret Jesus’ sayings as well as Social Memory theory. Students will utilize these models to interpret the available documentation contextually.

This **working methodology** will also enable students to critique various scholarly theories (assumptions) about Jesus and his sayings while discussing the political, economic, and religious factors that helped shape what he taught. The course also explores how **power** functioned in the patriarchal/**kyriarchal** Ancient Mediterranean World and its role in the teachings of Jesus—especially with regard to gender. All this will require reading and discussing additional documents not found in the New Testament but that also have sayings attributed to Jesus of Nazareth. The **Gospel of Thomas** and the recently discovered **Gospel of Judas** are of particular interest these days when reconstructing the historical Jesus and the early Christian movements.

Remember, one’s assumptions—whether based on faith or academic theories—very much influence how one reconstructs the historical Jesus and interprets his sayings.

**We will explore the following questions**: How did Jesus use power? What type of rhetoric did Jesus use? Was Jesus an ascetic? How much did Hellenism influence Jesus? Was Jesus a Jewish wisdom teacher or apocalyptic prophet? Was Jesus a social reformer? In what way was Jesus political? What type of communities did Jesus create? Did Jesus include women as equals? Do the teachings of Jesus in the New Testament or the so-called ‘Gnostic Gospels’ best represent the historical Jesus? What are “parables” and how did Jesus use these extended metaphors? How did miracle stories function in Jesus’ culture? What social role did religious rituals play? (Note: the field of NT scholarship accepts the historicity of Jesus of Nazareth. Only a few non-specialists question the historical existence of Jesus. See Bart Ehrman’s *Did Jesus Exist: The Historical Argument for Jesus of Nazareth*, 2013).

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS:**

No formal prerequisites are required but RS 100, 101 and 325 are recommended.

**Attendance:** Students must attend class to perform well. Attendance will be taken.

**Exams:** One midterm (30%) and a final (30%). The exams have two parts. Part one involves short identifications that require both the historical context of the term and its significance for understanding Jesus of Nazareth and/or the Gospels. In part two, students will write two short essays from three or more options. The exams are based on the integration of assigned readings and lectures. Note: Exams focus mostly on lecture and assigned reading materials. **The New Testament will be required during exams.**

**Research Paper (35%):** The paper is due on the day of the final. The paper topic must be approved by Dr. Talbott (a list of paper topics will be circulated after the fifth week). All papers must use **five** outside scholarly books and/or articles. Internet sources **may not** be acceptable. If you are uncertain about an internet source as a scholarly one, please ask in advance. Non-scholarly sources will earn no credit (F). Plagiarism of any kind will result in no credit for the paper—the loss of 35% of the course grade. This includes using a paper or any part of a paper from another course.

All papers must evidence the scholarly methodological issues covered in lectures and assigned readings. Papers written from a faith or theological perspective will not receive credit (F). Students must focus on a theoretical, methodological or historical problem central to understanding Jesus in his **religio-social** context. Specific texts from the Gospels are to be used in this critical fashion. More will be said about the papers during the semester. Again, the paper represents **35%** of the total grade in the course.

Papers are to be double spaced and between **8 and 10** pages in length. Footnotes and a bibliography should be according to the *Chicago Manual of Style*, 15th ed., or other MLA with bibliographical sources.

**Oral Presentation of Paper Topic:** Beginning the 12th week students will give a 5 minute introduction of their paper topic including a thesis and projected bibliography. Students will also answer questions from others (including Dr. Talbott) concerning their paper proposal. The purpose of these presentations is to help students with the project by identifying weaknesses or major problems before submitting it. The thesis statement, an outline with bibliography will be turned in to Dr. Talbott after the presentation. The presentation is **5% of the overall grade**. All presenters will receive an A for their efforts and public exposure provided the one-two page thesis statement, paper outline, and bibliography is turned.

**Religious Studies Student Learning Outcomes:**

1. Students will become familiar with criteria used to determine authentic Jesus sayings.
2. Students should be able to discuss and critique the major theoretical problems surrounding current Historical Jesus Research.
3. Students will learn basic models from cultural and economic anthropology.
4. Students will learn to use the above mentioned heuristic models to analyze the social-political background of early Christian Gospels, including the Gospel of Thomas.
5. Students will write four essays and one research paper utilizing that the above critical thinking tools to address a variety of scholarly topics surrounding Jesus of Nazareth and his teachings.

**Reading assignments:** All reading assignments, including the gospel sections, must be completed the week before. Dr. Talbott encourages students to research on their papers no later than the 4th week of the semester. He makes himself available to help students find scholarly material for such research.

**COURSE TEXTS:**

Hanson, K.C. and Douglas E. Oakman. 2008. Palistine at the Time of Jesus: Social Structures and Social Conflicts. 2nd ed. Minneapolis: Fortress.

Borg, Marcus. 2006. *Jesus: The Life, Teachings, and Relevance of a Religious Revolutionary*, HarperCollins Publisher.

Any English translation of the *New Testament.*

If you have a disability and need accommodations, please register with the Disability Resources and Educational Services (DRES) office or the National Center on Deafness (NCOD). The DRES office is located in Bayramian Hall, room 110 and can be reached at 818.677.2684. NCOD is located on Bertrand Street in Jeanne Chisholm Hall and can be reached at 818.677.2611. If you would like to discuss your need for accommodations with me, please contact me to set up an appointment.

**In Class CODE OF CONDUCT:** The Five Commandments

1. **Thou shall Respect thy neighbor.**
2. **Thou shall Not browse the internet during class.**
3. **Thou shall Turn off cell phones.**
4. **Thou shall Not arrive late.**
5. **Thou shall Not leave early (without prior notification).**

**Reading Schedule:**

**Week 1: Hanson & Borg (H&O) Intro.** Catching the drift : introduction to the social system of Roman Palestine**. Borg,(*Jesus*), preface.**

**Week 2: Mark (Mk) chaps 1-5. Borg chap 1.**

**Week 3: Matthew (Mt) chaps 1-4. H&O, chap. 2, *All in the family : kinship in agrarian Roman Palestine*. Borg, chap 2.**

**Week 4: Luke (Lk) chaps 1-7; Mt chaps 5-11. H&O, chap. 3, “Pyramids of power : politics and patronage in agrarian Roman Palestine.” Borg, chap 3.**

**Week 5: Mk 6-9; Mt 12-14; Lk 8-9. Borg, chap. 4.**

**Week 6: *Midterm*. *Gospel of Thomas* (GT), Sayings 1-35 (Posted On Moodle.) H&O, chap 4, “The denarius stops here : political economy in Roman Palestine.”**

**Week 7: *Paper presentations* begin. Mk 10-12; Mt 15-16; Lk 10-12; GT 36-55. Borg, chap 5.**

**Week 8: Mk 13; Mt 13; Lk 13; GT 55-65. H&O, chap. 5, “Was bigger better? : political religion in Roman Palestine.” Borg. Chap 6.**

**Week 9: Mk 14; Mt 14-16, Lk 14; GT 56-76. Borg, chap 7.**

**Week 10: Mk 15-16; Mt 16-19; Lk 15; GT 77-82. Borg, chap 8.**

**Week 11: Mt 20-25; Lk 16-19; GT 83-95. H&O, “In the rearview mirror : conclusion.” Borg, chap 9.**

**Week 12: Mt 26-28; Lk 20-21; GT 96-105. Borg, chap 10.**

**Week 13: GT 106-114.**

**Week 14: *Gospel of Judas*; John 1-11.**

**Week 15: John 12-21.**