

## **Religious Studies 356 (3 Credits)**

### **Jesus and the Gospels**

Fall 2019, TTH 9:00 a.m.-10:15 a.m.

Krug Hall 19

Professor Kevin R. Augustyn, Ph.D. Cand.

Buchanan Hall D170      703.993.8706      [kaugusty@gmu.edu](mailto:kaugusty@gmu.edu)

Office Hours: By Appointment

**Please note that the instructor reserves the right to change the syllabus during the term if and/or when need arises (e.g., to meet the learning outcomes of the course). I will notify students with a hardcopy update and will post it to Blackboard.**

**COURSE DESCRIPTION:** This course will serve as an academic introduction to the historical figure of Jesus and his teachings as presented by the four canonical gospels and, in an auxiliary manner, extra-canonical writings and the normative Christian tradition. Using both ancient and modern methods of interpretation within the broad Christian tradition, this course will study the canonical gospels in depth from historical, literary, and theological perspectives. Roughly the first third of the course will be an introduction to the principles of Christian biblical interpretation while the second two-thirds will be taken up with applying these to a close reading of the canonical gospels.

#### **COURSE OBJECTIVES**

1. To provide an introduction to the various methods of reading the New Testament in general and the Gospels in particular,
2. To closely read, understand, and interpret the canonical gospels in their original context and from a variety of perspectives, and
3. To study the arguments for and against the historical reliability of the New Testament itself and specifically the Gospels' portraits of Jesus and his teachings.

**METHODS OF INSTRUCTIONS AND CLASS PROCEDURES:** This course will use the following methods of teaching and learning:

1. A close reading of primary and secondary sources for sympathetic understanding and critical questioning,
2. Lectures based on but extending beyond the reading materials,
3. Discussion based on the readings and lectures, and
4. Exercises that provide opportunities to show mastery of the subject matter.

#### **REQUIRED READING:**

1. *The Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: New Testament*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Catholic Edition RSV. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2010.

2. In addition to the *Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: New Testament*, any complete Bible or stand-alone Old Testament.

In English, I recommend the *Revised Standard Version Catholic Edition* from Ignatius Press ([www.ignatius.com](http://www.ignatius.com)). *The New Jerusalem Bible* is, however, also a very good translation. *The New American Bible Revised Edition* is currently used in the United States Catholic churches even though it is a very poor translation. You are also welcome, and indeed encouraged, to read it in another language if you prefer (especially Greek, Latin, or Hebrew), provided you share significant variations with the class.

3. Brown, Raymond E. *An Introduction to the New Testament*. The Anchor Bible Reference Library. New York: Doubleday, 1997. **N.B.: Not the Abridged Version**
4. Blomberg, Craig L. *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels*. Second Edition. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press Academic, 2007.
5. Various handouts provided by the Professor.

**This is a text-based course. You are expected to have the texts in class (either book or printed handout) that you have read and annotated. In other words, not electronically: I do not allow students without a documented need for accommodation to use laptops or smartphones in the classroom. For my reasons, please see Jennifer Senior, <https://www.thecut.com/2015/07/case-against-laptops-in-the-classroom.html>.**

#### Recommended Resources

Cavins, Jeff and Tim Gray. *Walking with God: A Journey Through the Bible*. Ascension Press, Revised Edition, 2018.

Pitre, Brant. *The Case for Jesus: The Biblical and Historical Evidence for Christ*. New York: Image Books, 2016

Blomberg, Craig. *Can We Still Believe the Bible?: An Evangelical Engagement with Contemporary Questions*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2014.

Ehrman, Bart. *Misquoting Jesus: The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2007

\_\_\_\_\_. *How Jesus Became God: The Exaltation of a Jewish Preacher from Galilee*. New York: HarperCollins, 2015.

#### **GRADE EVALUATION:**

**Participation (20%):** A large portion of this course will be seminar-style discussions where you will be expected to have closely read a text and come to class with observations, questions, praise, critiques, and arguments. Constructive

participation means attending class on time, engaging with the materials by taking notes, asking questions, and making thoughtful observations and arguments.

**Consultative Meeting and Annotated Bibliography (10%):** You must meet with me to discuss your research project before October 1, prior to submitting an annotated bibliography for your research paper that includes a preliminary title, research question, and annotated bibliography. An example document will be provided for you.

**Research Paper (30%):** A thesis-driven research paper on some aspect of the historicity of the canonical gospels using Blomberg as a starting point or a historical-exegetical-theological paper on a particular biblical passage(s) will be due on the last day of class. The paper is to be 10-12 pages in length, double-spaced with standard margins and font size. Style must follow Kate Turabian's Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Ninth Edition, the so-called Chicago Style:

[https://www.amazon.com/Manual-Writers-Research-Papers-Dissertations/dp/022643057X/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1544043123&sr=8-1&keywords=turabian](https://www.amazon.com/Manual-Writers-Research-Papers-Dissertations/dp/022643057X/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1544043123&sr=8-1&keywords=turabian).

By thesis driven paper, I mean that you make a claim or claims and argue for it in the body of the paper using relevant primary and secondary sources to back up your own arguments. Your work will be graded on clarity of thesis, force of argumentation, synthesis of the material, (i.e. coherence, completeness, flow, logic), and correct orthography and grammar. Late work will not be accepted.

We will discuss this more in class and I look forward to helping you every step of the way: helping you to formulate a precise question, find resources, conduct research, and formulate your argument. Start early and ask for my help! Please make an appointment!

**Examinations (40%):** There will be a midterm and final essay exams worth 20% of your grade each. The midterm will cover the first half of the course, the final will be cumulative. Your answers will be graded on their lucidity, depth of your mastery of the material, and independent insights.

A Note on Grading Standards for Essays—From a Dr. Teresa Michals syllabus:

“An "F" paper does not satisfy the purposes of the assignment. A "D" paper makes a visible effort to satisfy the purposes of the assignment, but still reads like a draft because of difficulty with writing clear sentences, developing thesis, organizing an argument, and/or using textual support. A "C" paper shows fairly consistent mastery of the mechanics of organization and grammar, and uses some textual evidence to support a thesis. A "B" paper shows consistent mastery of mechanics, and a more thoughtful use of textual evidence to support its thesis. An "A" paper makes me smile as I read it: in many subtle ways, it announces that someone has come into their own. The writer has developed a compelling voice, and has

something to say.”

[Percentage Breakdown of Grade Determination]	A+ Outstanding+	4.00	100%
	A Outstanding	4.00	97-99%
	A- Excellent	3.67	93-96%
	B+ Superior	3.33	89-92%
	B Very Good	3.00	85-88%
	B- Good	2.67	81-84%
	C+ Good	2.33	77-80%
	C Satisfactory	2.00	74-77%
	C- Acceptable	1.67	70-73%
	D Passing	1.00	66-69%
	F Failing	0.00	<65%
	I Incomplete		N/A
	W Withdrawal (no penalty)		N/A

## **COURSE AND UNIVERSITY POLICIES**

### **TECHNOLOGY POLICY**

**I do not allow students without a documented need for accommodation to use laptops or smartphones in the classroom. Please keep them stowed away and out of sight. For my reasons, please see Jennifer Senior, *The Case Against Laptops*, 2015: <https://www.thecut.com/2015/07/case-against-laptops-in-the-classroom.html>.**

### **ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION**

Attendance is mandatory for this class. You will also be on time and ready at 9 a.m. Although students are not graded on attendance directly, failure to attend and be an active presence in the classroom will adversely affect your participation grade (20%). **By active presence and participation, I mean engaging with the materials by taking notes, asking questions, and making observations and arguments.**

An absence from class, even for an approved and acceptable reason, such as illness, does not excuse the student from knowing about any assignments, schedule changes, or other instructions announced in class. Students who miss class must listen to the lecture, which will be posted to Blackboard, and contact the instructor to learn about any announcements made in class.

### **CLASS CANCELLATION**

In the event that the instructor cannot make it to class (e.g., due to illness), he will email class members to notify you of the cancellation. In the event that the university cancels classes (e.g., for weather), the instructor assumes that you will receive this notification by email, text, or checking either the university website or the information line (703-993-1000). Missed classes will be made up through online

lectures and/or exercises. They will be made available on Blackboard and students will receive notification when they are uploaded by email.

### CLASS DISCUSSION

Students are expected to and should feel free to express their views on the ideas presented in the readings and in the lecture and class discussion, but disagreements with the views of others must be expressed with respect and courtesy.

The instructor seeks to create a learning environment that fosters respect for people across identities. We welcome and value individuals and their differences, including gender expression and identity, race, economic status, sex, sexuality, ethnicity, national origin, first language, religion, age and ability. We encourage all members of the learning environment to engage with the material personally, but to also be open to exploring and learning from experiences different than their own. **If I do not personally succeed in this or hold students accountable, please simply and kindly let me know and I will strive to correct any wrongs to the best of my ability.**

### ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

George Mason University is an Honor Code university; please see the University Catalogue for a full description of the code and the honor committee process. The principle of academic integrity is taken very seriously and violations are treated gravely. What does academic integrity mean in this course? Essentially this: when you are responsible for a task, you will perform that task. When you rely on someone else's work in an aspect of the performance of that task, you will give full credit in the proper, accepted form.

Any student caught cheating on an examination, or plagiarizing material in their essays from other authors (in print or on the Web) or other students will be referred to the Honor Committee without exception.

### GEORGE MASON EMAIL ACCOUNTS

Mason uses electronic mail to provide official information to students. Examples include communications from course instructors, notices from the library, notices about academic standing, financial aid information, class materials, assignments, questions and instructor feedback. **Students are responsible for the content of university communication sent to their Mason email account and are required to activate that account and check it regularly.**

### OFFICE OF DISABILITY SERVICES

If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please see me and contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS) at 993-2474. All academic accommodations must be arranged through the ODS.  
<http://ods.gmu.edu>



Cont. preliminary reading of Gospels

Week 4

September 17

The Gospels in General, Synoptic Gospels in Particular

Readings: Brown, 99-125,  
Cont. preliminary reading of Gospels

September 19

Political, Social, Religious and Philosophical Context

Readings: Brown, 55-96  
Cont. preliminary reading of Gospels

Week 5

September 24

The Gospel of Matthew

Readings: Brown, 171-224  
ICSB:NT, 3-6, Mt. 1:1-2:23

September 26

The Gospel of Matthew

Readings: Mt. 3:1-7:29

Week 6

October 1

The Gospel of Matthew

Readings: Mt. 8:1-10:42

**DEADLINE TO MEET WITH ME TO DISCUSS PAPER**

October 3

The Gospel of Matthew

Readings: Mt. 11:1-13:58

Week 7

October 8

Gospel of Matthew

Readings: Mt. 14:1-18:35

October 10:

**MIDTERM EXAMINATION**

Week 8:

October 15

**NO CLASS**

October 17

The Gospel of Matthew

Readings: Mt. 19:1-25:46

Week 9

October 22

The Gospel of Matthew

Readings: Mt. 26:1-28:20

October 24

The Gospel of Mark

Readings: Brown, 126-170  
ICSB:NT 61-63, Mk. 1:1-8:30

Week 10

October 29

The Gospel of Mark

Readings: Mk 8:31-16:20

**ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPY DUE**

October 31

The Gospel of Mark or Catch Up Class

Readings: TBD

Week 11

November 5

The Gospel of Luke

Readings: Brown, 225-278

ICSB:NT, 99-101, Lk 1:1-4:13

November 7

The Gospel of Luke

Readings: Lk. 4:14-19:27

Week 12

November 12

The Gospel of Luke

Readings: Lk. 19:28-24:53

November 14

The Gospel of John

Readings: Brown, 333-382

Blomberg, 196-240

ICSB:NT 157-159, Jn. 1:1-4:54

Week 13

November 19

The Gospel of John

Readings: Jn. 5:1-8:59

November 21

The Gospel of John

Readings: Jn. 9:1-12:50

Week 14

November 26

The Gospel of John

Readings: Jn. 13:1-17:26

November 28

**NO CLASS—Thanksgiving**

Week 15

December 3

The Gospel of John

Readings: Jn. 18:1-21:25

December 5

The Gospel of John

Readings: TBD

**TERM PAPER DUE**

Week 16

December 12

**FINAL EXAMINATION at 7:30 a.m.-10:15 a.m.**