

**Religion/Classical Studies 218a**  
**Early Christian Literature I: the Gospels**  
**Fall 2005**

**I. Instructor:**

Dr. Michele Murray  
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Office hours: 4:30-5:45 PM Mondays, or by appointment

**II. Class Times and Location:**

Monday and Wednesdays 3:00-4:20 in the Preston room

**III. Description:**

This course introduces students to early Christian Gospels (both canonical and non-canonical) examined within the historical context of Greco-Roman world during the first and second centuries CE. The distinctive features and characteristics of each text will be investigated with the goal of gaining insight into their historical, social and political environments. The course will concentrate on a careful and critical reading of the documents, with particular attention placed on uncovering the theological tendencies of the authors! editors responsible for this literature. No familiarity with Christianity or the New Testament is required or assumed; what *is* required is a willingness to participate in an analysis of the content, history and formulation of the canonical and non- canonical Gospels from an academic perspective.

**Caveat:**

All students should expect that our work in this course will challenge your beliefs and assumptions about Christianity, especially its origins. This will be the case regardless of the concerns and background you bring to the course. All students should be prepared for this challenge (to the degree, of course, that any of us can be prepared for the unknown in advance!).

**IV. COURSE OBJECTIVES:**

1. To enjoy the academic study of religion;
2. To understand the social, cultural and political context in which the New Testament Gospels were written;
3. To understand the history and development of the early Christian communities associated with this literature;
4. To understand early Christianity in its rich diversity and to be familiar with some of the non-canonical Gospels;
5. To develop skills in textual interpretation and critical reading;

6. To develop skills and discipline in researching a topic and writing up the results in understandable form.

## **V. Textbooks:**

Bart D. Ehrman, *The New Testament A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings* (2nd ed). Available in Bishop's bookstore.

Kurt Aland (ed.), *Synopsis of the Four Gospels*. English Edition. Available in Bishop's bookstore.

The Bible, New Revised Standard Version (the preferred translation) or another modern translation (NOT the King James nor the Living Bible). I have not ordered this through the bookstore on the assumption that most of you will have access to a Bible. Let me know if you do not.

All other necessary reading material will be distributed in class

## **VI. Course Requirements and Student Evaluation:**

1. Seminar presentation: a topic will be assigned to each student to research and present in class **(10%)**. **A schedule and further details on presentations will be distributed in the second week (or so) of class.**

2. Mid-term on lectures and readings **(25%) Monday, Oct. 24**

3. Research Essay **(30%) Due: Wednesday, Nov. 30** –See below for more details

4. Take-home Final exam **(25%) Due: Monday, Dec. 12**

5. Attendance, prepared class presence, participation in class discussions **(10%)**

## **VII. General Course Outline and Readings (subject to change):**

**Sept. 7** Intro, to course content

*Reading. Ehrman, pp. 1-15*

**Sept. 12, 14** The New Testament, its Development and how we will approach it; the Context of Early Christianity: the Hellenistic World and Greco Roman religiosity

*Reading: Ehrman, pp. 16-32*

**Sept. 19,21** The Roman Empire: its regions and rulers; Jews and Judaism in the Greco-Roman world

**Sept. 26** Jews and Judaism in the Greco-Roman world cont...

*Reading. Ehrman, pp. 33-42; slides*

**Sept. 28** Writing in the ancient world; Oral and written traditions behind the Gospels; Redaction criticism

*Reading: Ehrman, pp. 43-59*

**Oct. 3** Formation of the New Testament; Gospel of Mark part A

*Reading: Gospel of Mark*

**Oct. 5** Gospel of Mark part B **(Student-led discussions begin)**

*Reading: Ehrman, pp. 60-83*

- Prepare: Aland #150; P. Oxy. 840 and P. Eger. 2*
- Oct. 10 Class is cancelled: Happy Thanksgiving!**
- Oct. 12** Gospel of Matthew part A  
*Reading: Gospel of Matthew*  
*Prepare: Aland #7, 8, 10, 11*
- Oct. 17** Gospel of Matthew part B  
*Reading: Ehrman, pp. 84-102*  
*Prepare: Aland #279; Gospel of Thomas 64*
- Oct. 19** Gospel of Luke part A  
*Reading: Gospel of Luke*  
*Prepare: Aland #142, 177; Gospel of Thomas 14, 73*
- Oct. 24** Mid-term
- Oct. 26** Gospel of Luke part B  
*Reading: Ehrman, 103-121*  
*Prepare: Aland #332-38; b. Sanhedrin 43a*
- Oct. 31** The Lost Gospel of Q  
*Reading: Ehrman, 76-83*  
*Prepare: The Q Source*
- Nov. 2** Gospel of John part A  
*Reading: Gospel of John*  
*Prepare: Aland #1*
- Nov. 7** Gospel of John part B  
*Reading: Ehrman, pp. 141-161*  
*Prepare: Aland #146*
- Nov. 9** Gospel of Thomas  
*Prepare: Aland #51-54; Gospel of Thomas 11,33,54,68-69*
- Nov. 14** Gospel of Peter  
*Reading: Ehrman, pp. 179-184*  
*Prepare: Aland #347; Gospel of Peter 15-27*
- Nov. 16** Gospel of Philip  
*Reading: The Gospel of Philip*  
*Prepare: The Gospel of Philip*
- Nov. 21** Infancy Gospel of Thomas  
*Reading: Ehrman, pp. 185-193*  
*Prepare: Infancy Gospel of Thomas*
- Nov. 23** Gospel of Mary  
*Reading: Gospel of Mary*  
*Prepare: Gospel of Mary*
- Nov. 28** Historical Jesus; Mirades and the Historian  
*Reading: Ehrman, pp. 194-207; 208-212*  
*Prepare: Descriptions of Jesus in the Mishnah, the Talmud and the writings of Josephus*
- Nov. 30** From Jesus to the Gospels  
*Reading: Ehrman, pp. 252-259*

## VIII. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ON COURSE REQUIREMENTS

### *Research Paper*

- a. DUE: Wednesday, Nov. 30th
- b. LATE PENALTY: 3% per day (Hangovers and “the dog/horse/pet pig ate my notes” will NOT be accepted as excuses...)
- c. LENGTH: 8-10 pages (2000-2500 words)
- d. PURPOSE: This is a research paper and you are required to consult secondary sources as well as primary sources.
- e. SOURCES: Footnotes (or endnotes) need to reflect the use of **at least 5 books or articles. Important: avoid plagiarism** by acknowledging your use of other sources, other persons’ ideas or the words of others in full and accurate footnotes. Plagiarism is a serious academic offence with grave consequences. Avoid it like the plague.
- f. TOPIC: You may choose to expand on one of your seminar topics, or you may choose an entirely new topic. I will send around a list of possible topics to help with your topic selection. In either case, it is necessary to consult with me (in person!) prior to beginning your research.
- g. APPROACH: I suggest your paper incorporate the following principles:

1. Introductory paragraph(s) describing your topic, posing the problem to be discussed and the outline of your answer.

2. A thematic point by point discussion following your outline of the subject. (Do not include the outline with your paper). You should show that you have understood the various scholarly opinions on the topic, that you have carefully considered the issue, weighed the evidence and arrived at a decision yourself. The coherence and effectiveness of *how* you argue is more important than *what* you argue.

3. Conclusion in which you summarize your findings. In some ways what you say here will repeat what you say in part one, but in different words.

**Here are two tips:** Consult a good writing guide, such as Margot Northey’s *Making Sense: A Student’s Guide to Research and Writing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003) or Kate L. Turabian’s *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

Also, don’t forget that you may make an appointment at the Writing Centre (located on the first floor of Divinity) for someone to go over your writing with you. This is a good way to improve your writing, and it’s a free service!