207 Jesus and Power

Adam Clark

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Theology 207: Jesus and Power
Xavier University, Spring 2014

Professor: Adam Clark
Office Hours: TR 4-5:00pm or by appt.
Time: TR 2:30-3:45pm Logan 101
Office: Hinkle Hall 307
Phone: 745-3233
Mailbox: Hinkle Hall #60
Email: clarkadam@xavier.edu

Course Description:

This course introduces students to new ways of thinking about Jesus in light of his social and historical context. The first part of the course examines Jesus within the context of the Roman Empire and Jewish social world and discusses why he was perceived as threat to both. The second part of the course explores prophetic voices and visions in the context of American Empire.

Course Objectives:

1) To introduce students to the difference between the popular Jesus, the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith.
2) To understand Jesus within the Roman Imperial world and Jewish social world.
3) To explore the oppositional character of Jesus’s teachings
4) To examine prophetic Christian responses to American Empire

Class Attendance and Participation: The success of this course will depend on the quality of dialogue between its participants. It is imperative to critically read and reflect on the assigned readings, complete assignments on time as well as attend each class. In order to facilitate productive discussion and engagement of course materials, students will be asked to relate their questions and comments to the assigned readings.

You are allowed 2 unexcused absences without penalty for the entire semester (one week). Each absence after 2 will result a reduction of your final grade. For example, a final letter grade of B would be reduced to a B-. Four or more absences may result in failure. Absences are excused only with provision of doctor’s or a Xavier administrator’s note. I occasionally accept emailed excuses but no more than 2. If you miss class for an extended period of time (3 or more sessions in a row) due to a health crisis or family emergency, please contact the Associate Dean, Jim Snodgrass with your medical excuse before coming back to class.

Attendance will be taken at the beginning of class. Late arrivals should see the professor after class. Three late arrivals will count as an absence.

If you are forced to miss class, let your professor know ahead of time, if possible. You are responsible for what occurred during class (including syllabus changes, handouts, films, etc.) and making up missed material. Absence from a test, quiz, or presentation will only be permitted for grave circumstances and at the discretion of the instructor.

Questions I will ask myself in evaluating your class preparation and participation:

1. Does your participation in discussion consistently reflect a careful and critical reading of all the assigned readings for the session?
2. Do you show an ability to actively listen, compare differing perspectives accurately, fairly, respectfully? A willingness to integrate multiple perspectives into a (more or less) coherent whole?
3. Are you having any fun?
Class Environment: A “hermeneutic of generosity”

At its best, theological conversation opens up questions of a personal, political, and sometimes sensitive or controversial nature. The dialogue model itself is designed to facilitate open-ended discussion and critical questioning of assumed positions or complacent beliefs. This kind of personal engagement necessitates that we do our best to create ample space for diverse and conflicting points of view, even struggle and growth within ourselves. In short, at its best the seminar should cultivate an atmosphere of intellectual openness, trust, and mutual respect, especially where we may disagree with another’s point of view.

A good Ignatian rule of thumb, when feeling challenged or uncomfortable with another’s position, is to listen carefully, ask follow-up questions for clarity and understanding, and try to consider the idea (above all the person advancing it) through the best possible lens, or what we might call a “hermeneutic of generosity.” At the end of the day, surely we will all depend on the same wellspring of mercy and understanding for our painfully limited, obscure, and imperfect view of things.

Finally, a climate of openness and trust implies a rule of confidentiality to the degree experiences of a personal or sensitive nature may be shared during seminar discussions.

This is an unplugged classroom! No lap tops, cell phones or electronic devices are to be used during class as they can distract from engagement with class discussion. Electronic devices are only to be used during student presentations.

Students must check their XAVIER email regularly

Important notifications in cases of emergency and updates about course material, assignments, etc. will be sent via Xavier, not private, email. Make sure you direct all Canvas notifications to your Xavier email address.

Directions for Jesus Paper (6-7 pages):

1) Identity and locate an “authority figure” within your faith tradition. For example, a pastor, priest, minister, professor, social activists, etc.

2) Set up an interview.

3) Here are some sample questions for your interview:

a) Who is Jesus and what does Jesus mean to you personally?
b) Does faith in Jesus Christ have social meaning or phrased differently, what is the social purpose of Jesus Christ?
c) Did the historical Jesus (first century Jesus) have political significance or was he just a spiritual figure? Please explain?
d) From your perspective, what are the major social/moral issues of our time and does Jesus Christ address these issues? If so, how?
e) After the interview, compare and contrast the perspective of your “authority figure” with one or more of the following thinkers: Borg, McLaren, Hendricks, Rauschenbush, Niebuhr, Rieger, and West. (You do not have to include the entire interview in your final paper. But if you do, please do not use more than 3 pages.)
f) Conclude your paper with a short statement about your Jesus perspective. How has it been informed by your authority figure and/or course authors?
Writing Assistance
Xavier has resources to assist you with writing if you feel that you need help to improve. Please visit James A. Glen Writing Center in CLC ph. 513-745-2875, or go online to http://www.xavier.edu/writing_center/ to arrange for a consultation.

Helpful sources on writing

Course Requirements: Group Project, Reflection Assignments, Class Participation: 10%
- Paper 1 = 10%
- Paper 2 = 15%
- Paper 3 = 20%
- Midterm Exam: 20%
- Final Exam: 25%

See Xavier's Theology Department Website for Grading Scale

Late Policy on Papers: Please submit papers on time. Late papers are penalized ½ grade per day.

Jesus Teachings in Contemporary Times (Group Project): In groupings of 3-5, you will be required to do an in-class presentation that translates the Jesus teachings to contemporary culture. This entails incorporating the assigned readings as well as doing research on a contemporary issue or project outside of class. Your group is tasked with 1) Giving an overview of the assigned readings 2) Analyzing and discussing the relevant issues/points in the assigned readings 3) Using a contemporary event or issue to illustrate the major points of the readings. This part of your presentation should highlight your own voice or perspective. (see me for help). You will be evaluated by 1) Content: How well did your group understand analyze and discuss the assigned readings 2) Communication and Engagement: How well did your group communicate significant issues and engage the class? Is your presentation interactive? Did you provoke class members to ask questions and become interested in the material? 3) Visual Aids: What was the quality of your visual aids and how well did they illustrate the assigned readings.

Each person in the group is required to turn in a one paragraph self-assessment indicating: 1) What was your role in the group presentation? 2) Were you accessible to your fellow group members and did you follow through on what you promised? 3) Which group members did you work with? 4) How many hours did you devote to your presentation? 5) On a 1-10 scale (1 = poorly and 10 = Outstanding) how well did your group work together 6) On a 1-10 scale (1 = poorly and 10 = Outstanding) how much did you like the assigned readings.

Required Texts:
E-Reserve Readings

Recommended Texts: (Not in bookstore)

Obery Hendricks, The Politics of Jesus: Rediscovering the True Revolutionary nature of Jesus’ Teachings and How They Have Been Corrupted (2006) (less than $15 online)
SYLLABUS (Tentative)

Tuesday, January 14  INTRO. & OVERVIEW

The Emerging Paradigm

Thursday, January 16  Marcus Borg, Jesus Today, Chapter 1, pp. 3-26

Tuesday, January 21  Borg, The Gospels: Memory and Testimony, Chapter 2, pp. 27-50

Thursday, January 23  “People and Places in the life of Jesus”, Hill, pp. 25-41 (e-reserve)

Tuesday, January 28  Borg, The Jewish Tradition in an Imperial World, Chapter 4, pp. 77-94

Thursday, January 30  **Paper 1 Due**: “What is the emerging Christian paradigm? Discuss the difference between the early and emerging Christian paradigm? How are the gospels understood differently within the emerging paradigm? Give examples.”  4-5 pages

 Jesus and Roman Empire

Tuesday, February 4  Borg, The Jewish Tradition in an Imperial World, Chapter 4, pp. 95-108

Thursday, February 6  Hendricks, Jesus The Political Revolutionary pp. 5-10; Hendricks, How Jesus the Revolutionary Became Meek and Mild (e-reserve) pp. 74-95

The Revolutionary Teachings of Jesus: God’s Kingdom

Tuesday, February 11  McLaren, Uncovering the Message of Jesus (e-reserve) pp. 3-25

Thursday, February 13  McLaren, Uncovering the Message of Jesus (e-reserve) pp. 25-40

**Paper 2 Due: Paper topic: How did Jesus become Non-Political Figure?** Directions: Discuss the socio-political setting of Jesus’ earthly life and why it’s important? How did Paul and Constantine transform the image of Jesus?  4-5 pages

We will be reading sections of Obery Hendricks, The Politics of Jesus, Chapter 4: Messiah and Tactician: The Political Strategies of Jesus (e-reserves)

 Jesus The Political Revolutionary

Tuesday, February 18  Strategy One: Treat the People’s Needs as Holy, pp. 99-112
Strategy Two: Give a Voice to the Voiceless, pp. 113-131

Thursday, February 20  Strategy Three: Expose the Workings of Oppression, pp. 132-144
Strategy Four: Call Demon By Name, pp. 145-158

**Group Presentation 1** Dramatize and discuss the traditional readings of these parables and the radical reading of these parables.
Tuesday, February 25 Strategy Five: Save Your Anger for the Mistreatment of Others, pp. 159-167
   Strategy Six: Take Blows Without Returning Them 168-177

Thursday, February 27 Wisdom: The Broad Way and The Narrow Way, Chapter 8, pp.191-223
   Group Presentation 2

Tuesday, February 28  Midterm Exam: Jesus The Political Revolutionary

Thursday, March 4-6 : SPRING BREAK: NO CLASS
   Christ and Modern Culture

Tuesday, March 11 Sallie McFague, Metaphorical Theology Ch. 1 pp. 1-29

Thursday, March 13 Richard Niebuhr, Christ and Culture Ch. 1 “The Enduring Problem” pp.1-22 *
   readings are dense, may require more time

Tuesday, March 18 Richard Niebuhr, Christ and Culture Ch. 1 “The Enduring Problem” pp.22-44
   Group Presentation 3: Present on chapter 1 of Christ and Culture.

Thursday, March 20 Richard Niebuhr, Christ and Culture Ch. 6 “Christ the Transformer of Culture” pp.190-129
   1-2 page Reflection Paper outlining how Christ functions as a transformer of culture.
   (Remind about interview paper)

   Social Gospel

Tuesday, March 25 Walter Raushenbusch and The Social Gospel, Ramsay, pp. 9-28 ( e-reserve)

   Christian Realism

Thursday, March 27  Karen Lebacqz “ A Protestant Alternative: Reinhold Niebuhr” ( e-reserve)

   Group Presentation 4: Discuss the social gospel and the meaning of love and justice in Niebuhr

   CHRIST AND EMPIRE

Tuesday, April 1 Joerg Rieger, Christ and Empire: From Paul to Postcolonial Times Introduction pp. 1-16

Thursday, April 3  Joerg Rieger, Christ and Empire: From Paul to Postcolonial Times, Chapter 1 pp.23-54
   Group Presentation 5

Tuesday, April 8 Joerg Rieger, Christ and Empire: From Paul to Postcolonial Times, Chapter 7

Thursday, April 10 Cornel West, “The Crisis of Christian Identity in America” Democracy Matters ( e-reserve)

   Group Presentation 6
Dangerous Memories: Suffering and The Cross

Tuesday, April 15 Downey, Loves Strategy: The Political Theology of Johann Baptist Metz, Intro pp 135-139; Johann Metz, Faith In History and Society, Chapters 5

Paper Due: Jesus Paper Interview (see page 1-2 of syllabus)

Thursday, April 17 EASTER- NO CLASS

Tuesday, April 22 Johann Metz, Faith In History and Society, Chapters 6, 11

Thursday, April 24 James Cone, The Cross and the Lynching, Tree chapter 1

Group Presentation 7

Tuesday April 29 Borg, Executed By Rome, Vindicated By God, Chapter 10

Thursday, May 1: Borg, Jesus and American Christianity, Epilogue

Tuesday, May 6: Final Exam 1:00-2:50pm