

CH262 Synoptic Gospels

Fall 2007

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Regular office hours posted on my office door.

Course Description: Matthew, Mark, and Luke are core New Testament literature for Christians, for the understanding of Jesus, for the construction of Christian origins and early history, for Christian self-definition, and for the preaching and teaching of the Christian Gospel. In this course we will study the literary relationships among the Synoptic Gospels, the gospel stories within their historical, religious, and social contexts, and the place of these writings in contemporary contexts, particularly in our own faith communities.

Objectives:

- To develop further critical reading and listening skills in our encounter with the Synoptic Gospels
- To become informed readers of other interpreters and knowledgeable participants in the conversation
- To develop creativity and imagination in our engagement with the Gospels
- To deepen awareness and sensitivity to different contexts relevant to interpreting the Gospels

Course Requirements:

- Read Assigned texts, primary (biblical) and secondary (commentary, articles, etc.) and be prepared to discuss them.
- Attend class meetings and participate in class discussions. Because much learning takes place in the interaction among us, missing more than two classes will affect your ability to pass the course.
- Complete all written assignments and hand in when due. Late assignments will not be accepted unless arrangements are made prior to the due date for an alternate due date or alternate assignment. You will notice that written assignments are completed in preparation for class meetings rather than after we have discussed the related material. All written assignments must be completed in order to pass the course.

Required Texts:

NRSV study bible, HarperCollins or current edition of Oxford Annotated Gospel Parallels, NRSV translation
Blount and Charles, *Preaching Mark in Two Voices*
Porter, Stanley, ed., *Hearing the Old Testament in the New Testament*
Hayes and Holladay, *Biblical Exegesis*
Salmon, *Preaching without Contempt*
Sloyan, Gerard, *Why Jesus Died*

Recommended Texts:

Brawley, Robert, *Luke-Acts and the Jews*
Fredricksen and Reinhartz, editors, *Jesus, Judaism, and Christian Anti-Judaism*
Reid, Barbara, *Parables for Preachers Year A*
Rhoads, David, Reading Mark, Engagling the Gospel
Schottroff, Luise, *The Parables of Jesus*

Evaluations: Final evaluations for the course will be based primarily on the written assignments, with extra weight given to the final paper. Written work will be evaluated on the basis of following: attention to directions and the questions asked; skill in using critical methods to interpret biblical texts; knowledge and awareness of relevant contexts; evidence of critical thinking skills; engagement with secondary literature where appropriate; effective written communication skills.

Policy on Extensions:

The faculty voted to approve the following policy on extensions in April, 1999:

The work for a course is terminated at the end of the final class session. The performance in the course is evaluated on the basis of the work submitted by that time, unless an exception is made by the instructor, in which case a formal petition for extension must be approved by the instructor by the end of the final class session. Extensions (of course work) beyond the end of the semester will be approved only under extraordinary circumstances. Each instructor will include this policy on each course syllabus as well as the criteria by which she or he will grant such an extraordinary exception.

For this course, extraordinary circumstances include: death in the family, hospitalization for illness or injury, or serious illness of self or family member. If you think you have an extraordinary circumstance that affects your ability to complete the course, please talk with me about it.

Policy on Plagiarism: See Student Handbook. If I see evidence of plagiarism in written work, one of the following will occur: I will note it and suggest you be more careful in the future; I will request that you resubmit the paper with proper acknowledgement of sources; I will give a failing grade for the paper; I will give a failing grade for the course.

Policy on Cell Phones: Please turn cell phones off during class.

Class Schedule of Topics and Assignments:

9/11 Overview and Review
Introductions and Syllabus
Review of Synoptic Basics

9/18 Considering Contexts
What contexts inform our reading?
What do we bring to the text?
The world of the text
Interaction between and among contexts

Read: *Preaching Mark*, Forward and Introduction
Preaching without Contempt, Introduction and Chapter 1
Biblical Exegesis, chapter 1
Jesus, Judaism, and Christian Anti-Judaism, Introduction and Chapter 1
Reading Mark, chapter 8

Write: What do you, as a reader, bring to the study of the Gospels and the interpretation of Gospel texts? What are some of your convictions about the Gospels and the stories they tell? In what contexts do you read or hear them? (daily devotions? Bible study group? Church on Sunday? In class?) How do you think you might read them differently than other Christians? (Do you know, or guess?) Or different than readers who are not Christians? Or the same? What difference does your formation as a Christian, or lack of it, make in how you read? What have you learned in seminary so far that contributes to how you read? Use these questions to guide your reflections. About 500 – 600 words.

9/26 Between Jesus and the Gospels
Oral Tradition behind the Text
Jesus remembered and Jesus interpreted
Form and Redaction Criticisms

Read: *Biblical Exegesis*, Chapters 3, 6, 7, 8
Jesus, Judaism, Chapter 2
Preaching Mark, Chapter 7

Prepare to Discuss: (1) Notice the ways that Blount and Charles make distinctions between the Jesus presented by the Gospel writer and the historical person Jesus. Put another way, where do you see them distinguish between the context of Jesus' ministry and the context of the communities of the gospel writers? Be prepared to cite a few examples from their sermons and exegetical work. (2) What are some benefits, or implications of making the distinction between these two contexts for reading the gospels?

10/2 Reading a Gospel... from beginning to end
What is a Gospel?
Clues for reading in beginnings and endings
Author and Audience Implied
Narrative Criticism

Read: Mark, paying particular attention to 1 and 16

Biblical Exegesis, chapter 5
Preaching Mark, chapters 1 and 12
Reading Mark, Engaging the Gospel, chapters 1-2 (pp 1-43)
M.A. Powell, "Toward a Narrative-Critical Understanding of Mark,"
Interpretation, October, 1993.

Write: Analyze either chapter 1 or 12 from *Preaching Mark*, in terms of how the interpreters/preachers understand the meaning of Mark. What critical decisions about the text (about beginnings or endings, for example) inform their reading? Do you see places where you disagree with how they read? Where they disagree with others you have read? Where Blount and Charles disagree with each other? In this assignment, you become a participant in the community of interpreters, using your own critical skills, knowledge, and experience to the conversation. About 500-700 words.

10/9 The Gospel of Matthew, Beginnings and Endings
Particular features of Matthew's story

Read: Matthew 1, 5-7, 28
Gospel Parallels for 1, 5-7, 28; color chapter 6
M.A. Powell, "Toward a Narrative-Critical Understanding of Matthew,"
Interpretation, October, 1992

Write: Matthew begins with a genealogy. Read slowly, carefully, several times! What clues does the gospel writer give in this beginning concerning convictions, purpose, context, the meaning of Jesus. What historical event(s) are important and what might they suggest about how the writer understands Jesus? How does the writer use the scriptures? What does the use of scripture here imply about author and audience? Imagine yourself as a listener in the late first century. How do you think you might respond to the beginning of Matthew's story? About 500-700 words.

10/16 Reading Luke-Acts
the relationship between Luke and Acts
a paradigm shift regarding context and author's identity and purpose
the author as historian
Luke's Jesus

Read: Luke 1-2, Luke 4, Luke 24
Gospel Parallels
Robert Brawley, *Luke-Acts and the Jews*, Chapter 1 and 2
A commentary written in the last 20 years (there are several on reserve)

Be prepared to discuss: According to long-standing tradition, the writer of Luke was a companion of Paul, a physician, a gentile writing for gentiles. Many doubt the identity of the author as a companion of Paul or a physician, but the

supposition that he was a non-Jew writing for non-Jewish Christians is still quite prevalent and unexamined. What evidence do you see in Preface and Prologue (chapters 1-2), that supports an emerging view among scholars in the last 25 years that the writer of Luke-Acts wrote from within Judaism, as an apologist for Israel. Be prepared to cite specific examples of the author's attention to the traditions and institutions of Judaism: scriptures, Torah observance, and Temple. How will you read the Gospel differently in light of what you see in the opening chapters?

10/23 Reading Week; classes do not meet

10/30 The Pharisees and Controversies
Polemic and its literary function
The function of the Pharisees in the Gospels
The relationship between the historical Pharisees and the Gospels' portrayals

Read: Matthew 23; Mark 7; Luke 6:1-11, 7:36-50, 13:31-35, 14:1-6, 15:1-32, 18:9-14, 19:28-40
Parallels; color, noting the differences in the portrayals of the Pharisees
Luke T. Johnson, "The New Testament's Anti-Jewish Slander and the Conventions of Ancient Polemic," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Fall, 89
Preaching without Contempt, Chapter 3
Preaching Mark, Chapter 6
Recommended: Brawley, *Luke-Acts and the Jews*, chapter 6 (reserve)

Write: Write a brief description of the historical Pharisees on the basis of what you learned from the assigned readings. Use your own words. Your description might include some insights about the difference between the historical Pharisees and the common portrayal of the Pharisees in the Gospels. What is the relationship between the two? Why might the Gospels portray the Pharisees this way? (Any ideas from Johnson's article?) On the basis of your reading from *Preaching Mark*, how do you think Blount and Charles understand the historical Pharisees? How does an understanding of both the narrative function and a historical definition of the Pharisees affect your reading of the Gospels? How might this inform your preaching or teaching on some of these controversy texts? About 750 words

11/6 Characters in the Story
What is the role of persons and groups in the story?
How are different groups presented?
How do you feel about or respond to people in the story?
What is the relationship between the characters as historical figures and their function in the story?

Read: Mark 6:1-9:1
Parallels to the above; color, noting the portrayal of the disciples in each

Preaching Mark, chapter 5
Reading Mark, Engaging the Gospel, chapter 7

Write: Critical readers of the Gospels have observed that Mark presents the disciples as lacking in understanding and faithfulness. This theme in Mark has often been called “failed discipleship.” But literary criticism asks different questions, related to the function of the disciples in the story. In this paper, examine how the disciples are presented in Mark, by noting a few examples. Do they evoke your sympathy? Antipathy? Do you identify with them? Or not? What insights or observations might you draw upon to preach or teach from this gospel? How do the disciples in Mark’s story illumine the life of faith, or the human experience? You might choose one pericope to interpret. 750 words

11/13 The Gospel Writers As Interpreters of Scripture
Reading the Gospels before there was an OT and NT
Supercessionism
Biblical metaphors and themes

Read: *Preaching without Contempt*, Chapter 2
Hearing the Old Testament in the New Testament, 1-126
Luke 4:1-13 and parallels, color
Luke 10:25-37
Matthew 1:18-25
Mark 1:1-8 and parallels, color

Prepare to Discuss: In each of the biblical passages above, compare the citation of the OT with its source. Is the citation identical with the OT source? How is the writer using the OT source? What observations do you make about the differences between the principles of first century exegesis and modern exegesis?

11/20 Parables and the Kingdom
challenges and opportunities for preaching and teaching
relationship between parables and the Kingdom of God

Read: *Parables for Preachers*, A, Chapters 1 and 2
(or the same chapters in Reid’s *Parables for Preachers*, Year B or Year C)
The Parables of Jesus, Appendix, p. 225, Chapters 8, 12, 13, 15
The interpretations of two parables (you choose) from Reid and Schottroff

Write: Compare the two interpretations of one of the parables, considering attention to relevant contexts, historical and literary, understanding of the genre of parables, purpose of parables, particular emphases of each. 300-500 words

Prepare to Discuss: What are Schotroff's commitments that are reflected in her guidelines for interpreting parables? Do you find them helpful? Do you agree with her? How might the preaching of the same parable be different in different contexts? Bring a copy of p. 225 to class for discussion.

11/27 The Passion Narrative
history remembered and history interpreted
the meaning of Jesus' death
connecting the Passion Narrative to the rest of the Gospel story

Read: Mark 14 and 15; Luke 22 and 23
Why Jesus Died, Introduction, Chapters 1 and 2
Preaching without Contempt, Chapter 5 and Conclusion
Preaching Mark, Chapter 11

Prepare to Discuss: In light of the context of Roman occupation in Galilee and Judea, and what we read in the Gospels, how do you reconstruct the historical reasons for Jesus' execution? Write at least a paragraph, or make some notes of key points for this discussion. How might attention to historical realities provide insights for preaching and teaching during Holy Week? What ideas do you have for addressing the problem of anti-Judaism by the Christian tendency to historicize what was history interpreted in the first century?

12/5 Characters without Names
Entering into the story through minor characters

Read: Mark 5; Luke 24; Matthew 8
Preaching Mark, Chapter 4

Be prepared to discuss: How do un-named characters function in the Gospel narratives? What do they contribute to our reading of the story? In preparation for class, enter into the stories above in the role of different un-named characters. How does the situation look and feel from this point of view in the story?

12/12 Final Paper Due
This assignment asks you to integrate what you have learned by interpreting a text from one of the Synoptic Gospels. I will give you several from which to choose. Your paper will include a discussion of the critical issues related to the text, how relevant contexts inform your reading, and an interpretation of the text in the form of a sermon or newsletter essay or education forum or another public presentation. 1250-1500 words. You will receive a more detailed assignment toward the end of the term.

Guide for Coloring Gospel Parallels

Color the parallel texts using the following color code:

Underline in Red	words found in Mt, Mk, Lk
Underline in Blue	words found in Mt and Mk but not in Lk
Underline in Green	words found in Lk and Mk but not in Mt
Underline in Black	words found in Mt and Lk but not in Mk
Underline in Brown	words in Mk only
Underline in Yellow	words in Mt only
Underline in Orange	words in Lk only

Recommended Commentaries

The Gospel of Mark_Donald Juel,

Mark, Donahue and Harrington

Mark, Hare

Mark, A new translation with introduction and commentary, Joel Marcus

Mark as Story, Rhoads and Michie

Matthew, Jack Dean Kingsbury, 1998

Matthew, Margaret Davies

Matthew, Russell Pregeant

Message of Matthew, the Kingdom of Heaven, Michael Green

Matthew and the Margins, Warren Carter

Matthew: God With Us, Ronald Witherup

Matthew, Daniel J. Harrington

Luke, Augsburg New Testament Commentary, David Tiede

Luke, Darrell Bock

Luke, Robert Tannehill

Preaching Luke-Acts, Ronald Allen

Luke, a New Paradigm, Michael Goulder

Luke and Scripture, Craig Evans

Luke, Artist and Theologian, Robert Karris

Jesus and the heritage of Israel, David Moessner