

University of South Carolina
Department of Religious Studies

RELG302: New Testament
(generic syllabus)

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Course Description

Historical and critical study of the New Testament writings, with emphasis on origins, production, and transmission.

Course Overview

What is the New Testament? What does it say about Jesus and his first followers? Who wrote it? Why does it contain four gospels? What can it tell us about the history of Christianity?

This course deals with the texts produced, transmitted, and utilized during the early years of the formation of Christianity. Students will read widely from English translations of primary source materials including the letters and gospels contained in the anthology now known as the New Testament as well as other texts that circulated among early Christians. By the end of the semester, students will have read the entire New Testament as well as a few other texts that, while popular in Antiquity, are not contained within the major canonical traditions of today.

The course has no prerequisites except for a willingness to learn and an open mind.

Learning Outcomes

Students who successfully complete the course should be able to:

- Demonstrate an understanding of the textual sources used by historians to reconstruct the early formation of Christianity;
- Identify different literary genres represented in the New Testament, describe the different uses of the genres within the spread of Christianity, and explain the process of canonization;
- Conduct close-reading, analysis, and comparison of primary source texts and evaluate a range of interpretive methods;
- Critically engage in discussions about current debates about early Christian texts and explain why these issues are significant within the academic study of religion.

Textbooks

Kurt Aland, ed. *Synopsis of the Four Gospels (English) Revised Standard Version*, 2nd Edition (American Bible Society, 2010)

Bart Ehrman, ed. *The New Testament and Other Early Christian Writings, A Reader*. 2nd Edition (Oxford University Press, 2003)

Assignments, Requirements, and Grading

Students will be evaluated in a variety of ways. The following four components contribute equally toward the final grade:

- **In-class quizzes** (25% of the final grade): Each reading assignment will be paired with a set of discussion questions that are distributed ahead of time. Students are responsible for thinking about these questions before class and being ready to discuss their answers. The quizzes will ask students to explain their answers to one or more of the pre-assigned questions, and students will often be given the option to work either alone or in small groups while completing the quizzes. When students work in groups, each student must sign his or her name on the quiz. Students who miss class or who do not participate constructively will not receive credit for that day's quiz. Students who record the names of absent students on the quiz in an attempt to help them get credit for that day will receive a zero for that quiz.
- **Midterm Exam** (25% of the final grade): An in-class written exam covering the assigned readings *as well as* material delivered in class (lectures, films, discussions, and so forth). The midterm exam aims to evaluate students' ability to think critically and comparatively about the letters of Paul, the synoptic gospels, Acts of the Apostles, and the Revelation to John.
- **Final Project/Report** (25% of the final grade) Students will work alone *OR* in groups to identify, research, and discuss a particular topic, issue, or text related to the general topic of the course. This work will culminate in the preparation of an individual or group report. Reports will be evaluated in terms of clarity, attention to detail, critical analysis, and ability to assess the project in terms of the academic study of religion. Further details will be distributed and explained in class.
- **Final Exam** (25% of the final grade): A comprehensive in-class written exam covering the assigned readings *as well as* material delivered in class (lectures, films, plenary/team discussions, and so forth). The final exam aims to evaluate students' understanding of the textual sources for Christianity in the first 2 centuries CE and their subsequent canonization as well as their ability to compare, analyze, and explain particular texts.

Grading Scale

Grading will be on a 100-point scale as follows:

A, 90-100 / B+, 87-89 / B, 80-86 / C+, 77-79 / C, 70-76 / D+, 67-69 / D, 60-66 / F, 59 or less

Attendance Policy

As per University policy, students who accumulate three or more absences risk having their final grade lowered by ten points. Students who anticipate needing to miss a class for any reason should contact the professor ahead of time via email in order to receive permission to make up any exam or quiz for the missed day. Unless the absence is discussed ahead of time, or unless there is a compelling reason for not doing so, the student will not receive credit for missed exams or quizzes.

Schedule

Week 1A Course Introduction
Week 1B What is the New Testament? (Canon Lists, **On Blackboard**)

Part One: First Generation

Week 2A The Apostle Paul (1 Thessalonians)
Week 2B The Apostle Paul (1 Corinthians)

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Week 3B Labor Day
 The Apostle Paul (2 Corinthians)

Week 4A The Apostle Paul (Philippians; Philemon)
Week 4B The Apostle Paul (Galatians)

Week 5A The Apostle Paul (Romans)

Part Two: Second Generation

Week 5B Synoptic Gospels (Mark)

Week 6A Synoptic Gospels (Matthew)
Week 6B Synoptic Gospels (Luke)

Week 7A *Gospel Synopsis*, 1-20
Week 7B *Gospel Synopsis*, 49-71

Week 8A *Gospel Synopsis*, 276-289, 297-338
Week 8B Origins Narrative (Acts)

Week 9A Legacies (Colossians; Ephesians; 2 Thessalonians; 1 Peter; James)
Week 9B Response to Rome (Revelation to John)

Week 10A Review
Week 10B **Midterm Exam**

Part Three: Third & Fourth Generations

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| Week 11A | Christology (Gospel of Thomas; Gospel of Peter) |
| Week 11B | Christology (John) |
| Week 12A | Christology (1 John; Hebrews) |
| Week 12B | Apostolic Traditions (Letter of Barnabas; Letters of Ignatius; Martyrdom of Polycarp) |
| Week 13A | Apostolic Traditions (1 Clement; Shepherd of Hermas) |
| Week 13B | Apostolic Traditions (Infancy Gospel of Thomas; Acts of Paul and Thecla) |

Part Four: Fourth Generation

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| Week 14A | Competition for Authority (2&3 John; Jude; 2 Peter) Thanksgiving Recess |
| Week 15A | Competition for Authority (1&2 Timothy; Titus) |
| Week 15B | Retrospective: What is the New Testament? Course Wrap-Up |

FINAL EXAM