

Bexley Seabury

Gospels and Acts: An Introduction BIB 330 (3 Credits)

Term and Year Offered: Fall 2022

Learning Environment: This is an online course, both synchronous and asynchronous. Please find the meeting dates and times for the synchronous sessions below.

Meeting Dates/Times/Place: The semester begins on August 27 and ends on December 12.

- This course begins on September 9 and ends on December 9.
- The last assignment, a term paper, is due by 11:59 pm CT on December 19.
- We shall have synchronous online learning sessions via zoom lasting one and half hours (7:00 pm – 8:30 pm CT) on the following dates: 9/9, 10/7, 10/28, 11/18, and 12/9.

About Your Instructor(s): Peter Claver Ajer, Ph.D.; He/him/his

Contact Information: pajer@bexleyseabury.edu

Office Hours: Please consider making appointments via email to set up a zoom meeting. I am always excited to meet with students.

Course Description: This course introduces students to the Canonical Gospels and Acts of the Apostles and their interpretation from historical, literary, socio-cultural, and theological perspectives. In addition, students will learn interpretive approaches that consider the contemporary readers' various social locations. The course content will include the canon formation, the distinct nature of the Gospels and Acts, the context of their production, the issues addressed, the theological messages, and their significance for the ancient and present-day reader.

Course Goals and Outcomes:

Goal 1: Students who successfully complete this course will be able to describe the socio-cultural, religious, and historical context in which the New Testament was written and canonized.

- **Course Learning Outcome(s):** This goal will be met when students show a broad knowledge and a deep understanding of biblical history, content and an ability to bring scriptural wisdom to bear on contemporary religious and public life in pastoral and prophetic ways. [M.Div. 1. 1, 4.1]
- **Assessment:** This outcome will be assessed in the class discussions, reflection papers, and an exegesis term paper.

Goal 2: Students who successfully complete this course will recognize the interplay between faith and culture in addressing the New Testament writings.

- **Course Learning Outcome(s):** You will know you have done well when you understand the biblical text as a cultural production within its own time and geographical location and recognize how various cultures and social locations today impact the interpretations of the texts—the Bible as a text in cultures. Besides, this goal will have been met if you can identify the power distribution in the narratives, their implications for people from diverse experiences, and demonstrate how the intersection of historical experience, social

identities (such as race, class, gender, physical ability, sexual orientation), and related systems of privilege, power, discrimination, and oppression shape, sustain and transform the social contexts in which mission is articulated and in which ministry takes place. [M.Div 3.1, 3.3]

- **Assessment:** This outcome will be assessed in the class discussions, reflection papers, and the term exegesis paper. A specific reflection paper on the impact of various social locations on the interpretation of the New Testament will demonstrate student growth in the interpretations from multiple social spaces.

Goal 3: Students who successfully complete this course will show deep knowledge of skills in biblical interpretation, explain the theology of the four Gospels and Acts and explore their relevance for ministry today.

Course Learning Outcome(s): You will know you have done well when you can use various lenses in interpreting Scripture and engage in various techniques of theological reflection. [M.Div 1.1, 2.1, 4.1]

- **Assessment:** This outcome will be assessed in the class discussions, reflection papers, and the final exegesis project. A short paper focused on interpretation from social science perspective will measure the growth in one of the methods that presently dominates the conversation and how the social boundaries in various communities, ancient and contemporary, can include and exclude.

NB; The term paper, an exegesis, is an artifact assignment in which you will demonstrate deep knowledge of the three goals. In other words, you will show interpretive skills through careful analysis of the text in its ancient context and discuss the significance and relevance of the study for ministry, discipleship, and evangelism in our time.

A Word About Assessment: From Course Outcome Assessment to Program Assessment

Bexley Seabury Seminary regularly evaluates our programs' quality using various data, including documents deposited into student portfolios. These portfolios consist of designated student work (artifacts) from each course. Each artifact is graded and accompanied by a scored rubric that assesses the work in light of desired curricular outcomes. The designated assessment artifact for this course is the term paper, an interpretive essay (See details on the term paper on pages 5-6 of the syllabus).

We use your portfolio to assess student learning (in the aggregate) and the effectiveness of our curricula in reaching desired goals and objectives. This process does not involve any further evaluation of your work for grading purposes. No identifying information will be included in any evaluation or report provided to our accreditors or other outside parties. For further information, see the Student Handbook. You may also talk with your instructor, your advisor, the Assessment Coordinator (Lelia Fry, lfry@bexleyseabury.edu), or the Academic Dean (Jason Fout, jfout@bexleyseabury.edu).

Learning Methodology: We will learn various methods in biblical interpretation with a focus on the New Testament and apply them to specific texts. The different techniques or lenses allow us to interpret biblical texts from several angles. We classify these techniques of understanding the New Testament into three main groups: the author's world, which directs attention to the world behind the text), the text's world studying the world within the text (the text as it is), and the world in front of the text, which is the reader's world.

The author's world involves exploring the New Testament in its ancient context, including the history of the text and the historical, social, and cultural setting in which the various authors wrote to understand what the first-century listeners could have heard and understood as the meaning of the text.

The second is the world of the text, in which we cover the New Testament text as it stands. We learn how to read texts as literary works that can be classified and interpreted in light of their literary characteristics, for example, the genre. Methods like narrative criticism enable us to examine the final form of a text and estimate its significance for us. The assumption is that the internal dynamics and characteristics of the text allow us to find its meaning as far as possible.

The third is the world of the reader. Our experiences influence the way we interpret texts. We consider how people from various social locations and identities (race, gender, sexual orientation, class, etc.) interpret biblical texts and the implications of those understandings. In other words, we are concerned about the role that the reader plays in interpreting and the significance of these texts for present-day readers—for example, socially, ethically, and theologically. These methods include postcolonial approaches, feminist criticism, queer hermeneutics, and minority approaches such as African American, Native American, Latin American, Asian American biblical interpretations, etc.

The reader-centered approach is vital to enable the reader to actualize meanings and assess their relevance to the present-day Church's cultural, ecclesial, and ministerial contexts. By using the reader-centered method, we allow people from diverse social and geographical settings to read the text in a meaningful way by re-contextualizing the reading through the multicolored lenses of the reader. Learning and applying these methods will equip us with the necessary tools to interpret Scripture in ancient and present-day contexts.

The assigned readings present various perspectives from different readers, allowing us to engage ideas constructively. We will be responsible for reading the assigned texts and engaging them meaningfully. Please be prepared to share your views regarding the readings. It is alright to disagree on issues in constructive and respectful ways, which enables us to engage the topic even more. You have a voice, and your voice is important. In teaching, I think of the classroom as a small community of learners who trust themselves and unselfishly share their knowledge and contribute to each other's growth. So please be ready to participate actively in the class.

We shall also present the class in diverse ways; word, visual, group work, individual work, roleplays, etc., considering the multiple intelligence of the class members.

Course Required and Recommended Resources:

Please purchase copies of the following **required** textbooks:

1. Any modern English translation of the New Testament.
2. DeSilva, David A. *An Introduction to the New Testament: Contexts, Methods & Ministry Formation*. Second Edition. Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2018. ISBN:9780830852178.
3. Newsom, Carol A., Sharon H. Ringe, Jacqueline E. Lapsey. *Women's Bible Commentary: Twentieth Anniversary Edition* (Third Edition). Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2012. ISBN:9780664237073.
4. Carter, Warren. *The Roman Empire and the New Testament*. Abingdon: Nashville, 2006.

The following **required** readings will be **available in the Canvas**:

- Reginald Fuller, "Scripture," (*The Study of Anglicanism*, Fortress Press, 1988), 79-91.
- Eugene Boring, *An Introduction to the New Testament: History, Literature, Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2012), 1-22.
- Francis Bovon, "The Canonical Structure of the New Testament: The Gospel and the Apostle," *The International Bible Commentary*, 212-214.
- Michael Joseph Brown, "What They Don't Tell You." A Survivor's Guide to Biblical Studies. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2000), 1-11.
- Randolph W. Tate, *Biblical Interpretation: An Integrated Approach*, 2nd ed. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1997), 1-6.
- James Dunn, *The Evidence for Jesus* (Louisville, KY: Westminster, 1985), 1-8.
- Synoptic Parallels: The Baptism of Jesus, the Temptations, and the Lord's Prayers.
- Pheme Perkins, *Reading the New Testament: An Introduction*," (New York: Paulist Press), 78-90, and 98-113.
- Mitzi J. Smith, *Insights from African American Interpretation* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2017), 49-97.
- Marina Herrera, "Who Do You Say Jesus is?" A Hispanic Woman's Perspective.
- Johannes Beutler, SJ., "Faith and Confession: The Purpose of John," *Word, Theology, And Community in John* (St. Louis. Missouri: Chalice, 2002), 19-32.
- Marcus J. Borg, "The Kingdom of God: The Heart of God's Justice," *The Heart of Christianity: Rediscovering A Life of Faith* (Harper One, 2004), 126-148.
- Marcus J. Borg, "Born Again," *The Heart of Christianity: Rediscovering A Life of Faith* (Harper One, 2004), 104-125.
- Sandra Schneiders, "Inclusive Discipleship (John 4:1-42)," *Written That You May Believe: Encountering Jesus in the Fourth Gospel* (New York: Herder and Herder, 2003, 126-148).
- Watson, "Paul's Speech to the Ephesian Elders (Acts 20:17-38): Epideictic Rhetoric of Farewell" (*Persuasive Artistry*, JSNT 50): 184-207.
- Willie James Jennings, *Acts* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2017), 191-196.

Recommended Texts:

- Smith, Mitzi J. *Insights from African American Interpretation*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2017. This text comprehensively explores African American biblical interpretations.
- Burke, Sean D. *Queering the Ethiopian Eunuch: Strategies of Ambiguity in Acts*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2013. Burke introduces queer theory/hermeneutics (pp. 39-66) and applies it in queering Luke's story of the Ethiopian Eunuch in Acts of the Apostles (pp. 95-122).

Tech Help: Students are expected to access the "Tech Help" resources via the button at the bottom of the Canvas home page for a description of technology requirements.

Course Expectations and Assignments

The following assignments will constitute the assessment for the course:

1. **Attendance and participation (30%):** I expect each of you to study the assigned readings before participating in synchronous sessions and online forums. Intelligent and active involvement will earn you the participation grade. Your scores will depend on how contributions engage the assigned readings.

2. **Group Assignment (15%):** Reading from the perspective of social sciences
 - a) We shall form three groups during the second week of class.
 - b) Identify and describe the social, cultural, and political issues in one of the following passages: Luke 10:25-37; Luke 8:43-48; Matt 22:15-22; John 9:1-41; and Mark 6:14-29. I have selected these texts because their contexts are easily identifiable. Your group may choose any other canonical Gospel passage.
 - c) What message could the passage have communicated to the initial recipients?
 - d) What is the relevance of the passage for ministry in your/our context(s) today?
 - e) Length: 1000-1200 words. Consult at least six sources.
 - f) The assignment is due on Canvas by **11:59 pm on September 30, 2022.**
 - g) The format of this paper is open to what works best for you, but you should acknowledge the sources in the footnotes and bibliography.
3. **Short Reflection: Social Location and Interpretation (15%)**
 - a) This is an assignment on reading the New Testament from various social identities. The focus is on African American Hermeneutics, an opportunity to learn African American biblical interpretation and demonstrate how the intersection of historical experience, social identities, and related systems of privilege, power, discrimination, and oppression shape, sustain and transform the social contexts in which mission is articulated and in which ministry takes place [MDiv. 3.1, 3.3]
 - b) Details about the assignment will be available in the Canvas Assignments.
 - c) This paper is due on Canvas by **11:59 pm on October 21, 2022.**
4. **Reflection Paper (15%)**
 - a) What: Write a three-to-four-page paper on one insight you have come to so far about the Gospels and why that insight is significant for you.
 - b) How: *Review* the course up to this point and select an insight that is significant to you. *Please explain* what you have understood, how you came to it (reading, discussion, personal reflection, class, etc.), and why you find it essential.
 - c) Why: The assignment serves to help you review what we have so far studied. It is an exercise of **integrated assimilation** of the Gospels, which requires you to know what you are talking about (a requirement for responsible use of Scripture in ministry) but also to have interiorized it within the horizon of your own experience (a need for being effective in the use of Scripture in ministry).
 - d) Format: The paper should be three to four pages long, double spaced, carefully organized, clearly, and effectively written. No notes or bibliography are required because this reflection is based on what you have read, heard, and discussed in the class.
 - e) Please submit the reflection paper to Canvas by **11:59 pm on November 9, 2022.**
5. **Term Paper (25%)**
 - a) Write an exegetical essay on a specific passage of your choice from any book of the Gospels or Acts of the Apostles or on a theme of interest such as faith, baptism, etc. Apply any method you have learned in studying the text. Your paper will include an informed discussion of essential terms in that passage. More than a literature survey, it should be organized as an argumentative paper, i.e., it should argue for a position expressed in a clear and explicit thesis statement at the beginning of the article.

- b) The essay will engage relevant secondary literature such as biblical dictionaries, biblical commentaries (avoid one-volume commentaries of the whole Bible), monographs, scholarly essays, and journal articles. The article will not merely rehearse previous Biblical scholarship—your thought and synthesis are required.
- c) Length: 1500-2000 words. Please indicate the word count at the end of the paper.
- d) Assessment will depend on the following: Clarity and quality of the thesis statement, demonstration of the thesis; quality of the explanation (i.e., the study of the literary context, philology, explanation of possible meanings, significance of the passage and its potential implications), and engagement with secondary literature (quality of secondary sources and skill at engaging them) and the significance and relevance for ministry, evangelism, and discipleship today.
- e) This artifact assignment should demonstrate the achievement of the learning goals expressed in the syllabus and the fulfillment of the M.Div expectations indicated.
- f) Please submit the final assignment in Canvas by **11:59 pm on December 19, 2022.**

Late Assignments: It is essential to keep the deadline for the smooth running of the semester. I understand that our various circumstances may not allow prompt completion of assignments. Please get in touch with me if you foresee missing a deadline. Late papers without prior information will lose points.

Dismantling Racism

Questions of racism, white supremacy, anti-Judaism, and sexism are encouraged and will be integrated throughout the semester. One reflection paper will address race in biblical interpretation, and participants will engage questions of anti-black racism and white supremacy/normativity/privilege.

Course Evaluation: Course evaluations are a vital part of the educational process. They help instructors understand what works well for a course and what might benefit from some changes. Please take some time to evaluate the course giving constructive feedback that can help me shape the course better for the future.

Students taking the course for credit are expected to complete the evaluation as part of their participation in the learning experience. Auditors are encouraged to complete the evaluation as well. Evaluations will be available in Populi near the end of the course and will remain open until the grade deadline for each term. Evaluations should be completed based on your experience of the course and should not be based on your final grade. For this reason, during the grading period, you will not be able to see your grade in Populi until you have completed the evaluation. After the grade deadline, you will be able to see your grade in Populi, but you will no longer be able to share your voice through the course evaluation.

Better Practices for Zoom Sessions

Zoom works best when certain criteria are met:

- The latest version of Zoom is installed. Periodically check for updates and download the latest version.
- One computer: one user. Everyone should have their own device (including camera and mic) and zoom link. This helps everyone come to the space equally. (Or something along these lines)

- If you are in a shared or noisy space, use headphones/earbuds. In general, it is usually best to keep your mic muted unless you are speaking. This helps minimize background noise.
- Minimize distractions around you (try to be in the same location for the duration of the session). For example, if you must be in transit, mute your mic.
- Plan to ensure you have a stable internet connection for the session. If your connection becomes unstable, turning off your video when you speak may be helpful.
- Otherwise, cameras should generally be on unless you need to step away to take care of something. This contributes toward demonstrating your presence and participation in class during the session.

Course Grading & Feedback:

- **Feedback:** I expect to grade and give feedback on the assignments via Canvas SpeedGrader within 7-10 days after the paper deadline.
- MDiv students will receive letter grades at the end of the semester. The grade book will show points from the various assignments.
- Please be aware that the Canvas grade book reflects cumulative grades for assignments for your course. Still, the final official grade for the course will be recorded manually by the instructor in Populi.

Bexley Seabury requires a minimum grade of C to pass a course.		
Grade	Points	Description
A (4.00)	96-100	Superior/Mastery
A- (3.67)	90-95	Excellent
B+ (3.33)	87-89	Very Good
B (3.00)	84-86	Good (high)
B- (2.67)	80-83	Good (low)
C+ (2.33)	75-79	Acceptable (high)
C (2.00)	70-74	Acceptable/Adequate
F (0)	< 70	Unacceptable (Fail)
A grade of "P" in a Pass/Fail course is equivalent to a grade of C or above.		

Course Schedule or Calendar:

September 9: Synchronous via Zoom, 7:00 pm – 8:30 pm CT

Formation of the New Testament Canon

Readings:

Syllabus

Reginald Fuller, "Scripture" (12 pages)

DeSilva, *Introduction*, Chapter One (8 pages)

Boring, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 1-22 (22 pages)

September 16

The Environment of Early Christianity

DeSilva, *Introduction*, Chapter Two (67 pages)

Carter, *The Roman Empire and the New Testament*, 1-26 (26 pages)

Ajer, Video/Audio Lecture
Canvas discussion forum

September 23

Social and Cultural Context of Early Christianity

Readings:

DeSilva, *Introduction*, Chapter Three (26 pages)
Carter, *The Roman Empire and the New Testament*, 27-43 (16 pages)
Ajer, Video/Audio Lecture
Canvas Discussion Forum

September 30

Historical Criticism and Social Science Perspectives

Readings:

Brown, J. "What They Don't Tell You" (11 pages)
Tate, "Biblical Interpretation." (6 pages)
Barton, "Historical Criticism and Social Science Perspectives" (30 pages)
Eugene Boring, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 53-72 (19 pages)
Ajer, Video/Audio Lecture
Canvas Discussion Forum

Group Assignment Due at 11:59 pm

October 7: Synchronous, 7:00 pm – 8:30 pm CT

The Historical Jesus and Synoptic Problem

DeSilva, *Introduction*, Chapter Four (57 pages)
Dunn, "Gospels: Facts, Fiction or What?" (8 pages)
Synoptic Parallels: The Baptism of Jesus and the Temptations

October 14

Mark: Jesus the Suffering Messiah

Readings:

Gospel of Mark
DeSilva, *Introduction*, Chapter Five (34 pages)
Perkins, *Introduction*, 78-90, 98-113 (33 pages)
Newsom, et al., *Women's Bible Commentary*, 478-492 (14 pages)
Ajer, Video/Audio Lecture
Canvas discussion forum

October 21

Matthew: Jesus the Jewish Messiah and Minority Interpretations

Readings:

The Gospel of Matthew
DeSilva, *Introduction*, Chapter Six (50 pages)
Mitzi Smith, *Insights from African American Interpretation*, 49-97 (48 pages)
Ajer, Video/Audio Lecture.
Canvas discussion forum

Short Reflection Paper on Social Location and Interpretation Due at 11:59 pm.

October 28: Synchronous, 7:00 pm – 8:30 pm CT

Luke: Jesus and Social Justice

Readings:

The Gospel of Luke

DeSilva, *Introduction*, Chapter Seven (42 pages)

Newsom, et al., *Women's Bible Commentary*, 493-516 (23 pages)

November 4

The Kingdom of God and Postcolonial Approaches

Readings:

Borg, "The Heart of Christianity" (22 pages)

Perkins, *The Preaching of Jesus* (9 pages)

Carter, *The Roman Empire and the New Testament*, 100-118 (18 pages)

Ajer, Video/Audio Lecture

Role play on Empire and the Kingdom of God

November 11

The Gospel of John and The Beloved Community

Readings:

Gospel of John

DeSilva, *Introduction*, Chapter Nine (46 pages).

Newsom, et al., *Women's Bible Commentary*, 517-531 (14 pages)

Ajer, Video/Audio Lecture

Canvas discussion forum

Reflection Paper Due

November 18: Synchronous Session, 7:00 pm – 8:30 pm CT

Faith and Women in the Fourth Gospel and Feminist Approaches

Beutler, "Faith and Confession" (23 pages)

Borg, "Born Again" (21 pages)

Schneiders, "Inclusive Discipleship (John 4:1-42)" (18 pages)

Roleplay on Faith in various Johannine Characters

December 2

Acts of the Apostles

Readings

Acts of the Apostles

DeSilva, *Introduction*, Chapter Eight (36 pages)

Newsom, et al., *Women's Bible Commentary*, 536-546 (10 pages).

Ajer, Video/Audio Lecture

Canvas discussion forum

December 9: Synchronous Session, 7:00 pm – 8:30 pm CT

Commission, Witness and Empowerment in Acts: Rhetorical Criticism

Readings:

Acts chapters 1—2 and 20—22.

Watson, "Paul's Speech to the Ephesian Elders," 185-208 (23 pages)

Burke, Sean D. *Queering the Ethiopian Eunuch* (27 pages)

Final Papers Due by 11:59 pm on December 19, 2022.

Academic Policies

All students in Bexley Seabury courses are expected to be familiar with the following information that is provided on Canvas, in Student Resources:

- Academic policies and forms
- Requests for withdrawals, extensions, and incompletes
- Technological requirements and assistance
- Writing guidelines and assistance
- Course Netiquette
- Prohibition of plagiarism