

Jesus and the Synoptic Gospels  
NT 601  
Canadian Theological Seminary  
Fall 2003

Course Syllabus

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Tuesdays, 7 – 10 PM

Office hours: anytime Mondays – Thursday

Description

This course considers the life of Jesus of Nazareth according to the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke (the so-called 'Synoptic Gospels'). Key subjects include the historical context of Jesus and the Gospels; various methods employed in the reading of the Gospels; the common and distinctive features of Matthew, Mark, and Luke; the life and ministry of Jesus; and the role of the Gospel story of Jesus in the ongoing life and ministry of the Church today.

Course Prerequisites

Prerequisite: *New Testament Foundations* (NT 501)

Prior to the second class, students should re-fresh themselves on matters of introduction to the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke (authorship, dating, etc.). Little or no time will be devoted to these issues in class. Students might read the following:

David Wenham and Steve Walton. "Mark." Pages 191-207 in *Exploring the New Testament: A Guide to the Gospel & Acts* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2001).

David Wenham and Steve Walton. "Matthew" Pages 209-226 in *Exploring the New Testament: A Guide to the Gospel & Acts* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2001).

David Wenham and Steve Walton. "Luke." Pages 227-241 in *Exploring the New Testament: A Guide to the Gospel & Acts* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2001).

## Learning Outcomes

At the completion of this course, students are expected to demonstrate:

- 1 Insight into ways in which they can know and appreciate their vocation and identity in Christ
- 2 Comprehension of historical and literary methods used to interpret the Gospels
- 3 Understanding of the current debate about Jesus in the academic world and popular media
- 4 Knowledge of (1) the reasons why each of the Synoptic Gospels was written, (2) the major theological ideas found in each Gospel, and (3) the literary and argumentative structure of each Gospel
- 5 Ability to exegete and interpret the Synoptic Gospels according to a clearly articulated hermeneutic
  - Structural analysis of a Gospel (for this course, the Gospel of Matthew)
  - Word study using Greek-language tools
  - Use of a synopsis
  - Redaction-critical & literary study
- 6 Facility to apply the teaching of the Gospels in solving problems faced in Christian life and the world today

## Textbooks (required)

Borg, Marcus J. and N. T. Wright. *The Meaning of Jesus: Two Visions*. New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1999.

McKnight, Scot. *Interpreting the Synoptic Gospels*. Guides to New Testament Exegesis. Baker: Grand Rapids, 1988.

Moore, Stephen D. *Literary Criticism and the Gospels: The Theoretical Challenge*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989.

Throckmorton, B. H. *Gospel Parallels: A Comparison of the Synoptic Gospels/New Revised Standard Version*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1992.

NOTE: Moore's *Literary Criticism and the Gospels* is out-of-print. A copy is on reserve in the library.

### Textbooks (recommended but not required)

- Klein, William W., Craig L. Blomberg, Robert L. Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*. Dallas: Word, 1993.
- Green, J. B., S. McKnight, and I. H. Marshall, eds. *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1992.
- Stein, Robert H. *Studying the Synoptic Gospels: Origin and Interpretation*. Second edition. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001. (first edition: *The Synoptic Problem: An Introduction*)

### Course Requirements

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Vocation & Identity in Christ Reflection Paper | 10% |
| Structural analysis of the Gospel of Matthew   | 15% |
| Book report                                    | 15% |
| Exegetical or Thematic paper                   | 30% |
| Meaning of Jesus multi-media Presentations     | 30% |

#### ***Vocation & Identity in Christ Reflection Paper (10%)***

The CTS mission statement says, “Canadian Theological Seminary prepares Christians to serve and lead the church in its mission in the world.” To serve students in their ministry preparation and formation, CTS seeks to help students come to a better understanding of their identity in Christ, and as an extension of this, how they might best serve Christ in his global mission (vocation).

Toward this end, and as a means of fulfilling our first learning outcome (‘Insight into ways in which they can know and appreciate their vocation and identity in Christ’), in this assignment we step back to look at the self-identity and vocation of Christ and his disciples.

In the first two weeks of the course, read through the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke in their entirety with the following things in mind:

- 1 Unrelated to this assignment, make a short list (one page max.) of questions that come to your mind as you read the Gospels and which you would like to see answered or discussed in class. In a course like this, it is impossible to discuss every passage and topic in the Gospels thoroughly and adequately. It is hoped however, that some of your interests will be addressed in class.
- 2 As you read through the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, record (chapter & verse; no need to write out the entire passages or verses) all the verses that speak meaningfully to you about how Jesus saw himself and his vocation (calling). Record brief comments of reflection on these passages. Do the same for the

disciples: how did they see their identity and vocation? Or, how does Jesus see their vocation and calling. You may consult secondary sources if you wish, but it is not required.

- 3 Write a conclusion that ties together your reflections (five pages max.).

Due date for questions and assignment: **September 11**

### *Structural analysis of the Gospel of Matthew (15%)*

Understanding the structure of the Gospel of Matthew is one of the most perplexing issues surrounding the Gospel of Matthew. In this assignment, you will inductively outline and analyze the structure of Matthew's Gospels following closely the instructions given on pages 23-26 of Scot McKnight's *Interpreting the Synoptic Gospels*.

This assignment has two parts. Part one (steps 1-5) is inductive. Do not consult the synopsis or commentaries for them. Part two (step 6) is analytical and self-critical. Layout your conclusions from steps 1-5 in a chart.

#### Step

- 1 *Column one.* Using a Bible that does not have chapter and paragraph divisions, read through the Gospel of Matthew isolating each pericope or story-unit, and in the first column of your chart, list these units by chapter and verse.
- 2 *Column two.* Provide a brief summary (a few words or a phrase) of the content of each pericope or story-unit.
- 3 *Column three.* Provide a brief statement of how you see each pericope or story-unit functioning. Ask yourself: 'as a result of reading/hearing this pericope, what does Matthew want his readers/hearers to do or think (this step is not included in McKnight).
- 4 *Column four.* In this column link together the pericopes or story-units that you see belonging together. For example, it is common to see the pericopae in Matthew 5-7 belonging together and forming the so-called 'Sermon on the Mount'.
- 5 *Column five.* Apply step three to these larger units. Provide a brief statement of how you see these larger units functioning. Ask yourself: 'as a result of reading/hearing these sections, what does Matthew want his readers/hearers to do or think (again, this step is not included in McKnight). This step may also prove helpful in establishing the larger story-units in the Gospels.
- 6 Critique your structural analysis of the Gospel of Matthew in light of several commentaries on Matthew. Evaluate their outlines of the Gospel in view of your research. How would you modify your findings? Why? In what ways do you

prefer your analysis to theirs? Why? Write up your findings and conclusions in 1-3 pages. Consider looking at some of the following sources (all on reserve):

Davies, W. D., and D. C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew* (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 1.58-72.

France, R. T. *Matthew* (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 56-62.

France, R. T. *Matthew: Evangelist and Teacher* (Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 1989), 141-149.

Green, M. *The Message of Matthew* (The Bible Speaks Today; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2000), 30-36.

Gundry, R. H. *Matthew: A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church under Persecution* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 10-11.

Hagner, D. A. *Matthew 1-13* (WB33A; Dallas: Word, 1993), 1-1iii.

Luz, U. *Matthew 1-7: A Commentary* (trans. W. C. Linss; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989), 33-43.

- 7 In one or two paragraphs (or however long you want), write up some insights from your research into the structure of Matthew's Gospel that may be of use to you in preaching expository and/or topical sermons on the Gospel of Matthew.

Due date: **September 18**

### ***Book report (15%)***

Students are required to read and write a review of Stephen D. Moore's *Literary Criticism and the Gospels: The Theoretical Challenge* (maximum seven pages, double-spaced). The review should consist of two more-or-less equal parts.

In part one, *summarize* aspects of the book's content objectively. Begin with the over-arching theme(s) that hold the book together. Are there one or more main ideas that hold the entire book together? Secondly, summarize distinctive theme(s) that hold together several of the chapters. It will be impossible to summarize the entire book.

In part two, provide a critical evaluation of aspects of the book's contents. You may write about the following things.

- 1 What questions did your reading of Moore's *Literary Criticism and the Gospels: The Theoretical Challenge* generate in your thinking? How did the book deal with your questions?
- 2 Evaluate various themes that hold the entire book and chapters together. Why does the author come to the conclusions that he does?
- 3 How do aspects of the book's content compare with what you have thought in the past? Where there is a difference between your thinking and what the author affirms, how has the author gone against what you've thought? Where were you wrong? How wrong? Where is he wrong? Why?
- 4 In the second part of the assignment, you may wish to focus narrowly on one particular theme that comes to expression in the book and focus on it in some detail.

Because there is only one copy of the book available in the library (the book is out-of-print), there will be several due dates for the assignment. During the week in which the assignment is due, the group will meet with the professor to discuss the book and the individual critiques of the book.

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|------------|----------|--------|
| Due dates: | Group #1 | Oct 9  |
|            | Group #2 | Oct 30 |
|            | Group #3 | Nov 27 |

### ***Exegetical or Thematic paper (30%)***

Students are required to write an exegetical or thematic paper of about eight pages based on a passage or topic in the Synoptic Gospels. In addition to working closely with methodologies expressed in Scot McKnight's *Interpreting the Synoptic Gospels*, students will apply guidelines for the researching and writing of the exegetical/thematic paper that will be distributed in class.

Due date: **November 11**

### ***Meaning of Jesus Multi-media Presentations (30%)***

Pretend you are the producers, directors, writers, and actors of a twenty-minute (max. thirty minute) documentary on the Meaning of Jesus Today. You may give your presentation live, on video, powerpoint, or a combination of these media.

Begin by reading Borg & Wright's *The Meaning of Jesus: Two Visions*, and identify the differences of perspective and how they come to differences of perspective. Then examine popular media (newspaper articles, magazine articles, television documentaries, and if you wish, movies on the life of Christ). Your group is given the greatest freedom in what to cover and in how to present your findings creatively.

As a result of watching your twenty-minute multi-media presentation, the audience should come away with a good sense of different perspectives on the life and meaning of Jesus as reflected in scholarly writings *and* in the media today.

In addition to class-time devoted to the exercise (Nov 25 & 27), you should each plan to devote about forty hours to researching, writing, and producing your multi-media presentation.

Here are just a couple ideas. You could have two people role-play Borg and Wright and bring them face-to-face in a debate; you could have two people role-play Roger Ebert and Richard Roeper and have them review a couple movies about Jesus; you could do interviews or a combination of things, just like on *Biography*, etc.

Due date: **December 2**

### Tentative Class Schedule

|        |                    |   |
|--------|--------------------|---|
| week 1 | Sept 4             | Introduction to course  |
| week 2 | Sept 9<br>Sept 11  | Matthew 1-4<br>Matthew 5-7<br><b>Vocation &amp; Identity in Christ Reflection Paper due</b> |
| week 3 | Sept 16<br>Sept 18 | Matthew 8-13<br>Matthew 14-19<br><b>Structural analysis of the Gospel of Matthew due</b>    |
| week 4 | Sept 23<br>Sept 25 | Matthew 20-25<br>Matthew 26-28  |
| week 5 | Sept 30<br>Oct 2   | Mark 1-4<br>No class  |
| week 6 | Oct 7<br>Oct 9     | Mark 5-8<br><b>Book report due (group 1)</b>  |
| week 7 | Oct 14<br>Oct 16   | Mark 9-13<br>Mark 14-16   |
| week 8 | Oct 21<br>Oct 23   | Luke 1-2<br>Luke 3-6  |

|         |                  |   |
|---------|------------------|---|
| week 9  | Oct 28<br>Oct 30 | No class: Community Days/Mission Emphasis<br>Luke 7-9<br><b>Book report due (group 2)</b>                 |
| week 10 | Nov 4<br>Nov 6   | Luke 10-12<br>No class: mid-term break  |
| week 11 | Nov 11<br>Nov 13 | Luke 13-15 <b>Exegetical paper due</b><br>Luke 16-18  |
| week 12 | Nov 18<br>Nov 20 | Luke 19-21<br>Luke 22-24  |
| week 13 | Nov 25<br>Nov 27 | Group work<br>Group work <b>Book report due (group 3)</b>   |
| week 14 | Dec 2<br>Dec 4   | <b>Meaning of Jesus presentation due (group 1)</b><br><b>Meaning of Jesus presentations due (group 2)</b> |
| week 15 | Dec 9            | <b>Meaning of Jesus presentations due (group 3)</b>   |