

**ANCIENT CHRISTIAN TALES ABOUT JESUS:  
(HIS)STORY THROUGH THE EYES OF PEASANTS, BARDS, AND BIOGRAPHERS  
MST 312**

**MONTREAL SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY  
Winter 2018**

**I. COURSE DETAILS**

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<i>Office Hours</i>	Available for video conference by appointment
<i>Course Webpage</i>	<a href="http://www.fredericktappenden.com/mst312">www.fredericktappenden.com/mst312</a>
<i>Website Password</i>	Euangelion
<i>Course Weight</i>	3 Credit Hours
<i>Time</i>	Wednesdays, 6.30–9.15 pm EST
<i>Location</i>	Online

**II. COURSE DESCRIPTION AND GOALS**

“Ancient Christian Tales about Jesus” is designed according to the following description:

*This course offers a sustained examination of several ancient Christian Gospels. We will focus primarily on the four canonical gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John), though attention will also be given to a number of extra-canonical gospels (such as the Gospel of Thomas). We will approach these texts as ancient pieces of literature that are best viewed within the historical, social, and literary contexts of the first and second centuries CE. Careful attention will be given to reading the Gospels independently and synoptically. Specific themes developed in this course include the examination of ancient social values (collectivism, honour/shame, cleanliness and purity), issues of politics/empire, questions of historiography and memory, the compositional history and context of each Gospel, and especially the diversity and distinctiveness of Jesus’s image(s) within each narrative. In addition to reading these texts within their ancient context(s), class discussions will explore the many ways in which ancient Christian tales about Jesus continue to find sustained resonance within the contemporary world.*

At the completion of this course:

1. Students will have a firm grasp of the modern academic study of the canonical Gospels, including introduction to a variety of critical methods, interpretive strategies, and scholarly perspectives.
2. Students will have read closely the canonical Gospels and a selection of extra-canonical Gospels with special emphasis placed on their socio-cultural, historical, and religious dimensions.

3. Students will be able to read the Gospels both literarily as expressions of early Christian thought and memory, and synoptically as expressions of early Christian diversity and change.
4. Students will be able to situate the canonical Gospels within their historical and cultural milieu.
5. Students should be able to identify and trace the development of the various forms of early Christian thought and community evident in the canonical Gospels.
6. Students should be able to distinguish and demarcate theological variety within the early Christian movement, including varying understandings of Jesus and God, nuances within each Gospel tradition, and religious developments (theological and institutional).
7. Students should be able to read ancient texts from a variety of perspectives, considering questions of social location, personal and collective commitments, and the uses of New Testament texts in ancient and modern communities.
8. Students will have developed critical thinking skills through written assignments and class discussion materials.

### III. REQUIRED, RECOMMENDED, AND ONLINE TEXTS

The following books are **required** for this course. They can be purchased through online book distributors.

1. One of the following (but not both!)
  - a. Aymer, Margaret, Cynthia Briggs Kittredge, and David A. Sánchez, eds. *Fortress Commentary on the Bible: The New Testament*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014.
  - b. Stanton, Graham, *The Gospels and Jesus*. Second Edition. Oxford Bible Series. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.
2. Aland, Kurt. *Synopsis of the Four Gospels*. New York: American Bible Society, 2010.

#### *A Brief Note on Gospel Synopses:*

There are several Gospel synopses currently published, many of which are quite good. In addition to Aland, students may wish to consult Burton H. Throckmorton, Jr., ed., *Gospel Parallels: A Comparison of the Synoptic Gospels* (5th ed.; Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson, 1992) or Zeba A. Crook, *Parallel Gospels: A Synopsis of Early Christian Writings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). Students who have or intend to take Greek may wish instead to purchase K. Aland, *Synopsis of the Four Gospels: Greek–English Edition* (15th ed.; German Bible Society: Stuttgart, 2013), which has facing Greek and English pages.

Some synopsis tools can be accessed online, but these must always be used critically and with full awareness of the English translation and/or Greek text being compared. Of the web options available, John Marshall's *The Five Gospels Parallels* ([sites.utoronto.ca/religion/synopsis](http://sites.utoronto.ca/religion/synopsis)) and Mahlon Smith's *Synoptic Gospels Primer* ([virtualreligion.net/primer](http://virtualreligion.net/primer)) are the best (though even these can be awkward to use). *Though online access is convenient, it is not a substitute for the physical manuscript—students are expected to possess a print synopsis and bring it to each class period.*

3. A copy of the New Testament; here are some *recommended* editions (note: you need only one)
  - a. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible: New Revised Standard Version with the Apocrypha*. Edited by Michael D. Coogan. Fully Revised 4<sup>th</sup> Edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.
  - b. *The HarperCollins Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Including the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books with Concordance*. Edited by Harold W. Attridge et al. Fully Revised and Updated. New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2006.

*A Brief Note on Translations and Accessibility:*

Choosing a translation can be difficult due to the plethora of options. The recommended translation for MST 312 is the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV). Dynamic translations (e.g. New Living Translation), idiomatic or periphrastic translations (e.g. The Message), and classical translations (e.g. King James Version) are not acceptable for class use.

Many Bible translations can be accessed online. You can access the NRSV at the following web address: [biblia.com/books/nrsv](http://biblia.com/books/nrsv) (along with a few other translations that you can study in parallel). Other helpful sites are [www.ntgateway.com](http://www.ntgateway.com), [www.earlychristianwritings.com](http://www.earlychristianwritings.com), and [www.sbl-site.org/educational/sitesofinterest.aspx](http://www.sbl-site.org/educational/sitesofinterest.aspx); each of these can direct you to all kinds of online resources. Such online resources should always be used critically. *Though online access is convenient, it is not a substitute for the physical manuscript—students are expected to possess a print Bible and bring it to each class period.*

The following **supplemental readings** will be made available on the course website:

1. Fiensy, David A. “Ancient Economy and the New Testament.” Pages 194–206 in *Understanding the Social World of the New Testament*. Edited by Dietmar Neufeld and Richard E. DeMaris. London: Routledge, 2010.
2. Hanson, K. C. “How Honorable! How Shameful! A Cultural Analysis of Matthew’s Makarisms and Reproaches.” *Semeia* 68 (1994): 81–111.
3. Kirk, Alan and Tom Thatcher. “Jesus Tradition as Social Memory.” Pages 25–42 in *Memory, Tradition, and Text: Uses of the Past in Early Christianity*. Edited by Alan Kirk and Tom Thatcher. SemeiaSt 52. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005.
4. Lambdin, Thomas O., trans. “The Coptic Gospel of Thomas.” Pages 19–28 in *Lost Scriptures: Books that Did Not Make it Into the New Testament*. Edited by Bart D. Ehrman. Oxford: OUP, 2003.
5. “The Q Gospel,” pages 263–78 in *The Complete Gospels* (ed. Robert J. Miller; 4th ed. Salem, OR: Polebridge Press, 2010). (Optional)

#### IV. COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Students will be graded on the following requirements:

1. **Short Writing Assignments and Reading Reflections (15%)**: Students are required to complete two short writing assignments and a series of reading reports throughout the semester. The writing assignments are worth 5% each (5% x 2 = 10%) and the reading reports worth 5% of your final grade.

*Writing Assignments:* Students will complete two short (3 page) writing assignments, both of which are designed to help build specific skills in the reading and interpreting the Gospels. Assignment instructions are posted online at the course website; for more information, please see each assignment specifically.

*Reading Reflections:* We will develop skills in close, thoughtful, and critical readings of ancient texts, so you will find that you need to read and re-read the primary texts rather slowly and repeatedly. The reading reports are designed to aid you in this process. For each canonical Gospel, students will submit a reading journal that includes four consecutive entries for each Gospel (e.g. four for Mark, four for Matthew, etc). The first entry is simple: it must contain only one question that the student has about the Gospel's portrayal of Jesus. The second entry must include a second (different!) question about that Gospel's portrayal of Jesus *as well as* a critical reflection on the question posed in the first entry. The third and fourth entries follow the same pattern: a new question and a critical reflection to the previous question. In order to properly complete each entry, it is expected that students will re-read the gospel each time (thus, Mark will be read four times, Matthew four times, etc.), thus facilitating the *re-/questioning and critically answering* process. Through this process of continually reading and re-reading the gospels, distinct images of Jesus will emerge from each portrayal. (NOTE: questions submitted for one Gospel cannot be repeated for other Gospels.)

Both the Writing Assignments and the Reading Reflections are designed to help you build specific skills in reading and interpreting the Gospels. They also constitute part of your weekly class preparation. Given that the assignments and reading reflections serve as the foundation upon which weekly class discussions are built, *you are expected* to do these assignments as preparation for class periods. The **Writing Assignments are due 17 January 2018 and 24 January 2018**; the **Reading Reflections are due in class according to the schedule outlined below.**

2. **Exegetical Research Papers (50%):** Students are required to complete four (4) exegetical research papers, one on each of the four canonical Gospels. Papers are not to exceed 1200 words (approx. 4 pages) in length. These papers provide students the opportunity to examine specific Gospel texts in greater and more extended detail. More information will be handed out in class. The papers are **due on 21 February 2018 (Mark), 14 March 2018 (Matthew), 28 March 2018 (Luke), and 11 April 2018 (John).**
3. **Final Examination (35%):** Information pertaining to the final examination will be handed out in class. This will be a take-home final exam; **due date TBD.**

Grade Breakdown:

Writing Assignments and Reading Logs	15%
Exegetical Research Papers (x4)	50%
Final Examination	35%
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Total	100%

## V. RESEARCH QUALITY, ASSIGNMENT SUBMISSION, AND GRADING

*Paper Format and Style:* All papers are to be double-spaced, paginated, and typewritten in 12 pt. Times New Roman font; margins set at 1-inch (sides) and 1½ (top and bottom). All sources should be cited as in-line citations. An excellent guide to the preparation of essays, including citation styles, may be found at <http://bit.ly/2h6Vsa4>. This guide also reviews standards of academic integrity; if you have questions on how to avoid plagiarism please see the instructor.

*Assignment Submission and Due Dates:* All assignments are due in accordance with the Course Outline below. For convenience, I summarise the information here:

**Writing Assignment 1:** due no later than 11.59 PM on 17 January 2018

**Writing Assignment 2:** due no later than 11.59 PM on 24 January 2018

**Reading Reflections (Mark):** due *in class* on 14 February 2018

**Reading Reflections (Matthew):** due *in class* on 28 February 2018

**Reading Reflections (Luke):** due *in class* on 21 March 2018

**Reading Reflections (John):** due *in class* on 4 April 2018

**Exegetical Paper 1 (Mark):** due no later than 11.59 PM on 21 February 2018

**Exegetical Paper 2 (Matthew):** due no later than 11.59 PM on 14 March 2018

**Exegetical Paper 3 (Luke):** due no later than 11.59 PM on 28 March 2018

**Exegetical Paper 4 (John):** due no later than 11.59 PM on 11 April 2018

Any extensions of these deadlines must be arranged beforehand (barring unforeseen circumstances). All assignments are to be submitted via email to the instructor.

*Late Policy:* Assignments are considered late if they are submitted after the prescribed times outlined in the *Assignment Submission and Due Dates* section above. Late assignments will be penalised one grade point per day (e.g., from B to B- for one late day; from B to C+ for two late days, etc.) up to a maximum of 3 grade points in accordance with the following Grading Scale (e.g., from B to C; or B- to D). Exceptions will only be made for unusual circumstances such as illness or by prior arrangement (or at the discretion of the instructor).

*Grading Scale:* This course will be graded on the following scale.

Grade	GPA	%	Interpretation
A	4.0	85–100	Very Good
A-	3.7	80–84	
B+	3.3	75–79	Good
B	3.0	70–74	
B-	2.7	65–69	
C+	2.3	60–64	Satisfactory
C	2.0	55–59	
D	1.0	50–54	Conditional Pass
F	0	1–49	Fail

*Academic Integrity:*<sup>1</sup> “Plagiarism” means the representation of another’s work, published or unpublished, as one’s own or assisting another in representing another’s work, published or unpublished, as his or her own.

(a) No student shall represent another person’s work, published or unpublished, as his or her own in any academic writing, such as an essay, thesis, research report, project, sermon, or assignment submitted in a course or a program of study, or represent as his or her own the work of another, whether the material so represented constitutes a part of the entirety of the work submitted.

(b) No student shall contribute any work to another student with the knowledge that the latter may submit the work in part or whole as his or her own. Receipt of payment or other forms of compensation for work contributed shall be cause for presumption that the student had such knowledge.

(c) No student shall submit in any course or program of study, without both the knowledge and approval of the person to whom it is submitted, all or a substantial portion of any academic writing, essay, thesis, research report, project, sermon, or assignment for which credit has previously been obtained or which has been or is being submitted in another course or program of study in the University or elsewhere.

## **VI. RELATED COURSE INFORMATION**

*Disabilities:* If you have a disability and feel the instructor should be alerted, please contact the instructor to arrange a time to discuss your situation. I will make every effort to accommodate your needs and to help ensure successful learning. Such matters will be treated with appropriate confidentiality.

*General Policy:* My intent and desire is to assist and guide you in the learning of the material of this course, as well as to stimulate your own thinking. Should you have any questions and/or concerns with the course content, readings, assignments, etc., *please do not hesitate* to contact me by email or in person during office hours. I am also happy to listen to suggestions about how we use class time, the texts, and the assignments. If you need help at any point in the course, please ask. During office hours I hold an open-door policy and look forward to hearing any questions and/or concerns that you may have.

Your responsibility is to come to class prepared, especially in terms of familiarity with primary sources for discussion, and to be willing to explore ideas. I ask that you be willing to take risks, venture new ideas, ask questions, critique your preconceptions, and respect the perspectives, questions, and statements of your colleagues.

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<sup>1</sup> This policy is derived from the McGill University policy on plagiarism and cheating, and has been slightly modified for the context of the Montreal School of Theology.

## VII. COURSE OUTLINE

### Jan. 10 **Course Introduction**

*Topics:* General Introduction: The Critical Study of the Gospels; Overview of Syllabus

## **Part 1: Prolegomena**

### Jan. 10 **Interpreting**

(cont.)

*Topics:* Exegesis and Hermeneutics; Ricoeur's Hermeneutical Arc; The Gospels within Early Christian Literature; Ancient Memory and Modern Historiography; the Jesus of History and the Christ of Faith

*Read:* Stanton, ch. 1 or Aymer, Kittredge, Sánchez, pp. 1–30

### Jan. 17 **Contextualising**

*Topics:* Alexander's Greek World; the Rise of Rome; Graeco-Roman Religions, Philosophies, and Political Structures; First-Century Roman Palestine; The Jerusalem Temple; Priests, Sadducees, and Pharisees

*Read:* Aymer, Kittredge, Sánchez, pp. 31–82; Fiensy, "Ancient Economy and the New Testament"; Hanson, "How Honorable! How Shameful!"

*Due January 17:* Writing Assignment 1

### Jan. 24 **Reading**

*Topics:* What is a Gospel?—the Question of Genre; the Synoptics and John; the Synoptic Problem; Oral/Aural and Written Traditions; Q

*Read:* Stanton ch. 2 or Aymer, Kittredge, Sánchez, pp. 83–126; Kirk & Thatcher, "Jesus Tradition as Social Memory"; Optional: "The Q Gospel"

*Due January 24:* Writing Assignment 2

## **Part 2: According to . . .**

### Jan. 24 **... Mark**

(cont.),

Feb. 7, 14

*Topics:* Urgency, Secrets, and Suffering

*Read:* *The Gospel of Mark*;  
Stanton, ch. 3 or Aymer, Kittredge, Sánchez, pp. 127–172

*Due February 14:* Reading Reflections on Mark

*Due February 21:* Exegetical Essay 1: Mark

- Feb.  
21, 28      **... Matthew**  
*Topics:* Rabbi, Discipleship, and Law-(Re)Giving  
*Read: The Gospel of Matthew;*  
 Stanton, ch. 4 or Aymer, Kittredge, Sánchez, pp. 173–216  
*Due February 28:* Reading Reflections on Matthew  
*Due March 14:* Exegetical Essay 2: Matthew  
***NOTE: No Class on March 7; Study Break from March 5–9***
- Mar.  
14, 21      **... Luke**  
*Topics:* Traveling, Eating, and Including  
*Read: The Gospel of Luke;*  
 Stanton, ch. 5 or Aymer, Kittredge, Sánchez, pp. 217–264  
*Due March 21:* Reading Reflections on Luke  
*Due March 28:* Exegetical Essay 3: Luke
- Mar. 28      **... Thomas**  
*Topics:* Secrets, Knowledge, and Twinship  
*Read: The Coptic Gospel of Thomas, Stanton, ch. 7*
- Mar. 28  
(cont.),  
Apr. 4      **... John**  
*Topics:* Signs, Love, and Eternal Life  
*Read: The Gospel of John;*  
 Stanton, ch. 6 or Aymer, Kittredge, Sánchez, pp. 265–307  
*Due April 4:* Reading Reflections on John  
*Due April 11:* Exegetical Essay 4: John
- Apr. 11      **... the Fragmentary Gospels**  
*Topics:* In-class group assignment with a selection of early Christian Gospel fragments (Egerton Gospel, the *Gospel of Peter*, the *Gospel of the Hebrews*, etc.).

### **Part 3: Conclusion**

- Apr. 11  
(cont.)      **Course Conclusion: The Gospels and Jesus**  
*Topics:* Overview of Course Content and Major Themes; Final Exam Preparation