



McMaster Divinity
College

“ISN’T THIS THE CARPENTER?”

THE SURPRISING LIFE OF JESUS OF NAZARETH

NT 3XL3

McMaster Divinity College
Dr. Christopher D. Land
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Winter 2017
Saturday 9:00am–4:00pm
Jan 14, Feb 4, Mar 4, Apr 1

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Jesus of Nazareth has influenced the course of human history more than any other human being. Some would say that this is because he is God incarnate; others would cite his inspiring teachings; still others would propose that he believed himself to be an end-times prophet or Messiah and that his followers refused to let history prove him wrong. Yet despite the many perspectives adopted and the bewildering number of portraits painted, one thing remains constant: Jesus of Nazareth matters. He is enigmatic, but not for this reason any less significant.

This course will produce a biographical sketch of Jesus that draws predominantly from the canonical Gospels, since these constitute the most important evidence that we possess. It will then fill in several aspects of this sketch with more detail and also situate the words and acts of Jesus against the backdrop of his socio-cultural context. In some cases, the course will explain seemingly-strange aspects of his character as perfectly normal (for a first-century Galilean Jew); in other cases, it will render still more awe-inspiring those qualities of Jesus that have persuaded millions of people to follow him and even to worship him.

SPECIALIZATIONS

Students taking this as a Biblical Studies (BS) course will be encouraged to explore what the New Testament says about the life of Christ and to consider debates regarding its value as historical evidence.

Students taking this as a Christian Worldview (CW) course will be encouraged to consider the tremendous impact that Jesus of Nazareth has made on human history and to explore the many different ways that people explain his influence.

Students taking this as a Pastoral Studies (PS) course will be encouraged to explore how the life of Christ is relevant for Christian faith and practice in the 21st century as both an exemplary human life and a revelation of God.

Doctor of Practical Theology students who wish to apply for this course as an Advanced Elective for their degree program must consult with the Program Director of the DPT and the course instructor in order to develop an Advanced Elective approach to the course that fulfills the specific elements required by the DPT program. Once the elements of the Advanced Elective have been agreed upon by the student, the Program Director, and the instructor, a formal application can be made for an Advanced Elective in connection with this course. Once the application is accepted, DPT students can proceed with the course as part of their degree program.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

Following this course, students ought to:

KNOWING

- Know the key elements of Jesus's teaching and how they relate to important aspects of his social, historical, and cultural contexts (e.g. socio-economic realities in Galilee, circumstances preceding the Jewish War, the Jewish scriptures, etc.)
- Know the key relationships into which Jesus entered and which constituted his social context (including both individuals and social groups)
- Know the key acts of Jesus and the consequences these actions had both for him and for others
- Know the general tenor of historical Jesus research and the major debates that characterize it
- Know the evidence that is available to modern historians and the methodological issues involved in drawing firm conclusions from it

BEING

- Appreciate Jesus as a real, historically-situated human being
- Appreciate that Jesus's beliefs and social interactions are meaningful first-and-foremost within the first-century matrix of Early Judaism
- Be amazed by the character and behaviour of Jesus
- Recognize the great honour and respect that is due to Jesus, both as a remarkable human being and as a revelation of God

DOING

- Have basic historical research skills, including the ability to locate useful resources, the ability to assess competing historiographical methodologies, and the ability to weigh historical evidence
- Have the ability to knowledgeably discuss the various perspectives on Jesus of Nazareth that have been articulated by historians and others
- Have the ability to situate Jesus within his first-century environment and to discuss intelligibly the ways in which this environment sheds light on his words and actions
- Have the ability to "bring Jesus to life" by some form of effective communication (e.g. written, spoken, artistic, etc.)

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Note: Students are required to complete all of the following assignments in order to pass the course. No un-attempted assignments are permitted. *Each written assignment should be uploaded in Microsoft Word format to Avenue to Learn. A penalty of 2% per day will be applied to all late assignments. Assignments cannot be submitted after April 12th without written permission from the Office of the Registrar (thomn@mcmaster.ca).*

CLASS ATTENDANCE & PARTICIPATION (0%)

Students are expected to attend class and participate in class discussions. During each class, students will gather in small groups in order to consider some aspect of Jesus's life and ministry.

OPENING STATEMENT (10%)

At the very outset of the semester, each student will describe the manner in which he or she knows Jesus. This will entail answering three questions in a brief essay: (1) *Who is Jesus, and how do you know him?* (2) *Is it appropriate to examine Jesus in the same manner that we examine other historical figures?* (3) *Do the results of historical inquiry have any bearing on Christian theology and devotion?* Key things to consider include the role that the canonical witnesses play in Christian theology relative to other sources of information about Jesus (i.e. Should Christians attempt to go "behind" the Gospels by doing historical research, and if so why?), the extent to which Jesus's humanity is decisive for explanations of his thoughts and actions (i.e. Do we interpret Jesus's words and deeds with reference to his enculturation as a first-century Jew, or do theological beliefs about him require that we treat him differently than other people in history?), the role and significance of contemporary experiences regarded as "a personal relationship with Jesus," and the degree to which life-determining commitments ought to rest on "objective" evidence (i.e. Is it important for individual Christians to confirm that their understanding of Jesus is historically reliable, or is knowing Jesus a matter of faith and experience?).

The purpose of this assignment is to clarify what the student knows and believes upon starting the course, so it should ideally be completed prior to the first Saturday meeting. It is not officially due, however, until **Saturday, January 21st at 11:59pm**. The opening statement should be approximately 800 words, and it should follow the MDC *Guidelines for Essays and Theses*.

ONLINE BOOK DISCUSSIONS (30%)

During the semester, students will read two books about Jesus and will discuss them with one another in an online forum. *All students are required to read both books*, but what is expected in the online forums will vary depending on the student's chosen specialization. Specifically, students must post at least two lengthy and well-written posts (see details below) in the forum topic tied to their specialization, although they are free to make as many other posts as they wish without worrying about grammar or length. They are also required to participate actively in the forum topic that is not tied to their specialization, asking incisive questions and advancing the conversation by means of interesting observations. For posts in this other forum, grammar and length will not be assessed.

Before **February 3rd at 10:00pm** (i.e. prior to the second Saturday meeting), students taking this as a Biblical Studies (BS) course must read *The Historical Jesus: Five Views* in its entirety; students taking this as a Christian Worldview (CW) or Pastoral Studies (PS) course will instead read *Simply Jesus: A New Vision of Who He Was, What He Did, and Why He Matters*.

Before **February 11th, 2016 at 11:59pm**, each student will make a well-written post of 1,000 words in the A2L forum topic dedicated to their specialization's assigned book. This post must be made in a new thread started by the student, and the title of the thread should transparently identify a specific issue that is being raised or addressed by the student in reaction to the assigned reading. The post itself then needs to explain how the issue was raised for the student while he or she was reading, what information or argumentation in the book pertains to the issue (with cited pages and/or quotations), why the issue is of significance, and what the student currently thinks about the issue. The goal here is critical thinking, so it is expected that the post will display not only an understanding of the assigned reading and its implications, but also a thoughtful and rational engagement with the relevant evidence and its various interpretations. Students should seek to clearly outline alternative positions that are possible on the issue, and they should situate themselves in relation to these positions. It is fine for the student to be undecided, but something must still be said about his or her current convictions and questions. Ideally, the issue in question should be one that truly *matters* to the student.

Following their initial post, students will do two additional things in the online forums. They will engage actively in the forum that is not tied to their specialization, asking insightful questions and moving the discussion forward in productive directions. They will also answer participate in follow-up discussions within their specialization's forum. For all of these posts *except one* (see below), the usual requirements of academic writing do not apply (i.e. the posts will not be expected to follow the conventions of academic writing). However, each student must at some point contribute one additional post of approximately 800 words that carefully and in a sustained manner reflects upon something raised in the discussion forum associated with the student's chosen specialization. This post can be either a follow-up reply or the commencement of a new thread, but it must be clearly flagged by the student as the follow-up post that he or she wishes to have graded (i.e. please insert the line "FOR GRADING" in all caps at the top of the post).

The overall grade for the online discussions will thus consist of three components, equally weighted: (1) an initial 1,000-word book response within the relevant specialization forum; (2) a student-selected follow-up post of 800 words within that same forum; (3) general engagement in the other forum that is not tied to the student's specialization. The forum will close on **March 25th at 11:59pm**.

FILM REVIEWS (30%)

After viewing one of the films listed below, students will write two film reviews of approximately 1,000 words each. One of the reviews is to be written for a Christian audience and the focus of the review will be the film's use (or misuse) of *specific historical evidence* and the historical reliability of *specific details in the film*. In particular, where the film's portrayal differs from commonly-held Christian opinions about the life of Christ, do these *specific differences* manifest a responsible or irresponsible handling of the historical evidence on the part of the filmmaker? Does the portrayal serve to balance or even correct

inaccurate Christian ideas, or is it misleading and unhelpful? A second review is to be written for a general audience and the focus of the review will be the *overall portrait of Jesus* with which the viewer is left. No creative work (including the canonical Gospels) produces a complete representation of Jesus. So what does the viewer need to know about the portrait created by the film? How has the filmmaker exercised his or her craft in order to produce the film, and how does the resulting portrait compare with others (including the portraits produced by the Evangelists)? The reviews should be written in journalistic style (e.g. as one might find on a news site or a well-written blog), but in all mechanical respects they must adhere to the MDC *Guidelines for Essays and Theses* (e.g. any sources cited must be footnoted and included in a bibliography). *It is expected that reliable academic sources will support any claims made in these reviews, just as would be expected in a research paper.* The reviews are both due on **March 25th at 11:59pm.**

“WHAT WOULD JESUS DO?” (30%)

Many interesting questions arise once it is realized that Jesus of Nazareth was, among other things, a first-century Galilean Jew who looked like, thought like, talked like, and acted like a first-century Galilean Jew. We cannot, and must not, attempt to eliminate his historical particularity—yet we inhabit a very different world today and we seek to imitate Jesus in a very different world, in which we look like, think like, talk like, and act like twenty-first-century Canadians (or citizens of whatever country we call home). Since we believe that the person of Jesus endures, and that his relevance and even authority endure as well, we ask the question, “What would Jesus do, if he were here today?” But the question assumes a contemporary Jesus who understands and inhabits the modern world (as opposed to a first-century Jesus simply dropped into a bewildering and foreign contemporary situation), and so the issues involved in deciding what Jesus would do are the very same questions involved in deciding how we can best imitate the historical Jesus. Either way, it is *we* who must give an answer to the question, and so the task remains *ours* to decide what is most essential to the person of Jesus and what it might look like for those qualities to be embodied in the twenty-first century. (Another important issue is whether all of us should do exactly what Jesus would do, but that’s an issue for another course. If we are genuinely concerned with what *Jesus* would do.)

In this final assignment, students will draw upon their new knowledge about the historical Jesus and his cultural environment in order to produce an imaginative portrait of Jesus as a twenty-first-century person speaking and acting in some well-defined twenty-first-century environment. Each student must, in consultation with the professor, decide in advance how the portrait will be presented (e.g. essay, drama, film, graphic novel, etc.). Whatever format is chosen, the assignment must include a written explanation that ties key aspects of the contemporary portrait to historical facts regarding the historical Jesus. In other words, the assignment must list and document (using citations both from the NT and from secondary sources) specific things that the student has chosen to regard as essential to the person of Jesus (e.g. certain beliefs about the nature of God and the universe, certain moral principles or passions, a certain sense of vocation and calling, certain personality traits, etc.), and it must discuss how those have been translated into a twenty-first-century person (i.e. how are they expressed similarly or differently, given cultural changes?). Please note, the goal is not to place Jesus in a narrow situation (e.g. how would Jesus react if...) but to place him in a broad environment (i.e. what would his lifestyle choices be, what

would he do with his time, how would he talk, what institutions would he confront, who would like/oppose him, what would his reputation be, what legal/political dangers would he face, etc.?). It is up to the individual student to decide if/how to deal with the various plot issues created by the imagined scenario (e.g. will it be treated imaginatively as Jesus's initial coming, or as an unexpected not-yet-the-second coming? how will Jesus interact with the now well-established Christian church?).

The explanatory written component, which discusses specific facets of the historical Jesus and explains their translation, must be approximately 1,000 words. It must follow the MDC *Guidelines for Essays and Theses* and must include explicit support for its historical claims about Jesus. The additional material, which depicts Jesus living in the twenty-first century, can be fused with this discussion so as to produce a single essay or else presented alongside the discussion as a separate creative work. If the accompanying creation cannot be uploaded to Avenue to Learn along with the written component, alternative arrangements must be made by the student in order to ensure that the professor and his GA are able to view the work. The assignment is due on **April 8th at 11:59pm**.

GRADING SUMMARY

Class Attendance & Participation	0%
Opening Statement	10%
Online Book Discussions	30%
Film Reviews	30%
What Would Jesus Do?	30%
Total	100%

TEXTBOOKS

All students are required to possess an English translation of the New Testament, as well as

Beilby, James K., and Paul Rhodes Eddy, eds. *The Historical Jesus: Five Views*. Downers Grove: IVP, 2009.

Wright, N. T. *Simply Jesus: A New Vision of Who He Was, What He Did, and Why He Matters*. New York: HarperOne, 2011.

All required textbooks for this class are available from the College's book service, READ On Bookstore, Room 145, McMaster Divinity College. Texts may be purchased on the first day of class. For advance purchase, you may contact READ On Bookstore, 5 International Blvd, Etobicoke, ON, M9W 6H3: phone 416.620.2934; fax 416.622.2308; email books@readon.ca. Other book services may also carry the texts.

In addition to the course textbooks, students are required to view one of the following films. *NB: Some of these films contain violence, nudity, and/or profanity. Students who wish to avoid potentially disturbing content should research the films before watching them (e.g. using the parental advisories at www.imdb.com).*

- The Greatest Story Ever Told (George Stevens, 1965)
- Jesus Christ Superstar (Norman Jewison, 1973)
- Godspell (David Greene, 1973)
- Jesus of Nazareth (Franco Zeffirelli, 1977)
- The Last Temptation of Christ (Martin Scorsese, 1988)
- Jesus of Montreal (Denys Arcand, 1990)
- The Passion of the Christ (Mel Gibson, 2004)
- Color of the Cross (Jean-Claude La Marre, 2006)

SEMINAR SCHEDULE

Dates	Seminar Sessions
Jan 14	Welcome & Introduction Judea and Galilee in the First Century John, the Forerunner of Jesus The Public Ministry and Message of Jesus
Feb 4	The Public Ministry and Message of Jesus, con't
Mar 4	Jesus among Friends, Followers, and Family
Apr 1	The Passion Week

ASSIGNMENT SCHEDULE

Due Dates	Assignments
Jan 21 @ 11:59pm	Opening Statement Due
Feb 11 @ 11:59pm	Initial Online Book Response Due
Mar 25 @ 11:59pm	Online Discussion Concludes Film Reviews Due
Apr 8 @ 11:59pm	"What Would Jesus Do?" Due

STATEMENT ON ACADEMIC HONESTY

Academic dishonesty is a serious offence that may take any number of forms, including plagiarism, the submission of work that is not one's own or for which previous credit has been obtained, and/or unauthorized collaboration with other students. Academic dishonesty can result in severe consequences, e.g., failure of the assignment, failure of the course, a notation on one's academic transcript, and/or suspension or expulsion from the College.

Students are responsible for understanding what constitutes academic dishonesty. Please refer to the Divinity College Statement on Academic Honesty at:

<http://www.mcmasterdivinity.ca/programs/rules-regulations>

In this course we will be using a web-based service (Turnitin.com) for plagiarism detection and the student's continuation in the course represents his or her consent to the use of this service. If a student has objections to the use of this service, alternate arrangements for assignment submission must be made with the professor in advance of the assignment deadlines.

A useful guide to avoiding plagiarism is the Harvard Guide to Using Sources:

<http://usingsources.fas.harvard.edu/icb/icb.do>

STYLE

All stylistic considerations (including but not limited to questions of formatting, footnotes, and bibliographic references) must conform to the latest edition of the McMaster Divinity College Style *Guidelines for Essays and Theses*:

<http://www.mcmasterdivinity.ca/sites/default/files/documents/mdcstyleguide.pdf>

Failure to observe appropriate form will result in grade reductions.

GENDER INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

McMaster Divinity College uses inclusive language for human beings in worship services, student written materials, and all of its publications. In reference to biblical texts, the integrity of the original expressions and the names of God should be respected. The NRSV and NIV (2011) are examples of the use of inclusive language for human beings. It is expected that inclusive language will be used in chapel services and all MDC assignments.

This syllabus is for information only and remains the property of the respective professor. This syllabus is prepared with the best information available, but the professor reserves the right to change the content and format of the course.