

**STMM 501: CHRISTOLOGY**

Winter 2009

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Hunthausen 213

Office Hours: by appointment

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

A survey of theological reflection on Jesus of Nazareth, his life, his teaching, his death and resurrection. The course examines the New Testament, early Christian theologians, the important conciliar definitions, the scholastic synthesis, and contemporary discussion. It covers three main questions: Who is Jesus? How does Jesus save us? What did Jesus teach and do during the time of his ministry?

**GOALS OF THE COURSE**

By the end of the course students should:

1. have a basic sense of the scriptural and dogmatic teachings of the Church which deal with Christology.
2. have a basic sense of the development of theological reflection upon the presentation of Jesus in the New Testament and the Christian tradition.
3. be conversant with the basic issues and approaches modern theology has taken in Christology.
4. be able to reflect on the pastoral implications of these issues and approaches.

**INSTRUCTIONAL METHODS**

Lectures, class discussion, and short papers.

**TEXTBOOKS**

O'Collins, G., Interpreting Jesus, Reprint through Wipf and Stock, Publishers.

Weaver, J. Denny, The Nonviolent Atonement, Eerdmans.

Borg, Marcus, Jesus, A New Vision, Harper.

One of many possible views of the historical Jesus. This text should be read in connection with the issue of the historical Jesus.

McMahon, Christopher, Jesus Our Salvation, St. Mary's Press.

## **COURSE OUTLINE**

**The readings listed for each class session are those that are to be done for that class session.**

### Session 1: January 5

Introduction

Pluralism in Christology

Images of Jesus

From our own experience

From the world of art

From the scriptures, especially the Hebrew Scriptures

No reading assigned before the first class session

### Session 2: January 12

Finish the overview of images from the Hebrew Scriptures used by early Christian thought

A quick survey of the New Testament Christologies of the gospels

Readings: Mark 1, Matthew 1 and 2, Luke 1 and 2, John 1.

Each of the gospels sets up its key images of Jesus quickly in its opening chapters. Read these selection and try to get some sense of how the various gospels differ in the fundamental images they use to present Jesus.

McMahon, chapter 4

Read this after you have tried getting the images from the gospels on your own. McMahon gives a quick overview of what each of the gospels is doing in its presentation of Jesus. What are the practical implications for ministry each of these presentations open up?

### Session 3: February 2

We will finish up our treatment of the Christologies of the New Testament.

And we will begin to look at the Historical Jesus

Readings: O'Collins, chapter 2; McMahon, chapters 1 and 2.

Read at least O'Collins for this week. We will be covering this topic for a couple of weeks so the reading can be spread out a bit.

Some key questions as you read:

Why is there a problem getting back to the historical Jesus?

How do the authors propose to deal with the problem so that they might say something about the historical Jesus? What criteria do they propose for handling passages in the gospels to see if they bear historical content or not?

What are the key elements in each of their presentations of the historical Jesus?

### Session 4: February 9

Continuation of the discussion of the historical Jesus.

Readings: All of Borg's book.

We read Borg as one example of a Christology rooted in the approach to Jesus through his ministry and teaching. Key questions:

Why does Borg take this approach (through the historical Jesus)? How much ink does he give to the cross and resurrection or the doctrines regarding Jesus' natures? Why so little?

What is the central metaphor or image Borg uses in his approach to Jesus?

What is Jesus ministry about? What are its central features according to Borg?

### Session 5: February 16

Finish the discussion of Borg.

Move on to the 2<sup>nd</sup> major approach to Christology: the path through Jesus death and resurrection, i.e. Jesus as Saviour.

Readings: O'Collins, chapters 3, 4 and 5, McMahon, chapters 3, 6 and 7.

### Christology Syllabus 3

I would begin with O'Collins and then move on to McMahon. We will continue this discussion in the 7<sup>th</sup> session, so you need not get it all done for this week.

Key questions in reading both of them:

What historical issues surround the death and the resurrection of Jesus?

What do we need to be saved from?

How are we saved?

Is the cross the only saving act of Jesus?

Does the resurrection play a role?

Is anything else Jesus did salvific?

3 major approaches to soteriology (how we are saved by Jesus).

#### Session 7: February 23

Continuation of the discussion of the topics of the 5<sup>th</sup> session, so see the materials above.

If we have time, we will begin to look at Weaver's book. So you might want to begin reading the first 3 chapters.

Key questions for Weaver:

Why does he object to the usual Christian view of the Atonement (that of St. Anselm)?

How does he handle scripture passages that we tend to read through the lens of Anselm's view of the atonement?

How does he think we are saved by Jesus?

#### Session 8: March 2

Continuation of the discussion of Weaver's position in the first 3 chapters of his book.

Finish reading his book and be ready to discuss

Black soteriologies

Feminist soteriologies

And Womanist soteriologies

What problems do each of these have with the usual theories of atonement?

How do they describe the saving work of Jesus?

#### Session 9: March 9

We move on to the third major theological approach to Christology, that taken through the question of the natures of Jesus as divine and human.

Readings: McMahon, chapter 5.

O'Collins, chapter 6.

We will begin by looking at the development of Christology in the early centuries of the Church. McMahon gives a good short account of these early developments. We will look at them to see how Christian reflection on Jesus developed to the point of the dogmatic teachings of the Councils of Nicea and Chalcedon. Key questions:

What were the issues the Church struggled with in the development of thought leading up to each of these councils?

What were the key steps taken forward in the development of the Church's reflection?

What exactly did each council teach about Jesus?

#### Session 10: March 16

Complete our discussion of the historical developments in the early church.

How does theology deal with these issues today—how do we interpret the councils?

O'Collins, chapter 6. is especially helpful here.

Key questions in reading O'Collins and in our own thought:

What does it mean to be human: what does it mean to say that Jesus is human?

What does it mean to be God: what is the divine nature and what are we saying about Jesus when we apply divinity to him?

How do humanity and divinity come together in Jesus?

Why is the notion of person a problem here?

Jesus and the world religions: McMahon, chapter 8.

## ASSIGNMENTS

1. the assigned readings;
2. class discussion;
3. written assignments:

Write 2 papers from the three assignments described below:

### 1. The Ministry of Jesus

Due at Session 5, February 16.

Since the Eighteenth century there has been a great deal of theological discussion about what we can know of the actual life and work of Jesus. Read a significant theologian who has written on this topic and write a paper in which in conversation with this theologian you develop what you think are the key elements in the teaching and ministry of Jesus. Explain how your view of Jesus' ministry shapes your own ministry and the mission of the Church.

Some suggestive questions which you **may or may not** want to address:

How would you defend the inclusion of these elements in the light of the criteria of the search for the historical Jesus?

How do these elements cohere in what you would argue is the central vision of Jesus?

How did Jesus' approach to his ministry led to his death?

### 2. The Salvific Work of Jesus

Due at Session 8, March 2.

From the earliest days of the Christian faith there has been a wide and varied discussion of how we have been saved by Jesus. Read a significant theologian who has written on this topic and write a paper in which in conversation with this theologian you develop your ideas about how Jesus has saved us. Explain how your view of salvation shapes your understanding and approach to ministry and your view of the mission of the Church.

Some suggestive questions which you **may or may not** want to address:

From what do we need to be saved?

Is the resurrection integral to the work of salvation or not?

What is the connection between the salvific work in Jesus' death (and resurrection???) and the work of his ministry?

### 3. The Natures of Jesus

Due the Monday after the last class session, March 16.

From its earliest days the Christian faith has been marked by deep debates over the divinity and humanity of Jesus and how those two natures are related to one another. Read a significant theologian who has written on this topic and write a paper in which in conversation with this theologian you develop your ideas about what it means to say that Jesus is God incarnate in human nature. Explain how your view of the natures of Jesus shapes your own ministry and the mission of the Church.

Some suggestive topics which you **may or may not** want to address:

Explain the dogmatic statements of the Councils of Nicea and Chalcedon.

What does it mean to say Jesus is human?

What does it mean to say Jesus is divine?

What is the connection between the two natures?

What is the importance of each nature in Jesus' ministry and the work of salvation?

### General norms for papers

1. Papers should be about 2000 words in length
2. All papers should be written according to the Chicago Manual of Style, including in their citing of references.
3. Papers are to be double spaced and paginated.