STMM 527: Christian Scriptures **Winter 2008**
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Course Description:
This course will draw on some of the most promising work of biblical scholarship today, especially in critical reflection on the process of interpreting the New Testament. It will seek to develop in students better habits on ways of attending, understanding, evaluating and responding creatively to God's word within the Christian scriptures and within life itself. An emphasis on method will help each student prepare an eleven-part exegetical study of a gospel passage based on the required readings, lectures and class discussions, and sample exercises in class.

Required Texts:
(1) Miguel De La Torre, Reading the Bible from the Margins. Orbis: 2002
(2) Marcus Borg, Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time HarperSanFrancisco: 1998.
(3) Brown, Raymond. An Introduction to the New Testament. Doubleday: 1997
(4) Schneiders, Sandra. The Revelatory Text. HarperSanFrancisco: 1991 (Second Ed. 1999)

A Word about each of the Textbooks:

Miguel De La Torre's book, Reading the Bible from the Margins, provides an excellent introduction to issues of biblical interpretation. Enticingly written, De La Torre's book addresses the question of how one understands in relation to one's own experience and social location. It is recommended that you read De La Torre leisurely and before the classes begins, if possible, so you have time to reflect on his many fruitful and suggestive readings of biblical texts.

Marcus Borg's Meeting Jesus Again has become a classic text on the historical Jesus. Eminently readable, the book invites personal reflection on one's own journey of faith as personal relationship to God/Mystery. It also should be read preferably before classes begin or, if not then, during the first week of class.

Raymond Brown's new introduction to the New Testament represents the best of the historical critical method that dominated biblical scholarship for the past century. Numerous footnotes and bibliographies within the book invite further study in conversation with more recent scholarship. Brown is a model of clarity and fairness in presenting others' views and arguments, especially those with which he disagrees.

The Revelatory Text by **Sandra Schneiders** offers the best discussion of the issues involved in fully interpreting the writings of the New Testament. The book has been re-published by Liturgical Press with an updated Introduction. Caution: you do not need always to fully follow her in-depth academic discussion to benefit from her book. Her specialty is relating New Testament texts to Christian faith and spirituality.

Finally, for reading biblical texts, it is good to use two or three translations. At least one of these should be a translation that has inclusive language, e.g., **The New Revised Standard Version, The New Testament and the Psalms: An Inclusive Version** (ed. Victor Gold et al.; Oxford U. Press: 1995) or **The Inclusive New Testament** (AltaMira Press)—which is most suggestive of how texts can be rendered inclusive.

Objectives *This course seeks to help students be able to:*

1) **identify** the influence and place of social location in their practices and processes of biblical interpretation
2) **articulate** their own image of Jesus in relation to current historical Jesus research, biblical texts and traditions, and religious, institutional and life experience;

3) **explore** the metaphorical character of key terms as "Word of God," "revelation," and "Son of God;"
4) **recognize and name** in their own work the steps involved in the hermeneutical process of interpreting NT texts, including one's own hidden assumptions;

5) **develop** a method for approaching biblical texts in terms of 3 worlds: the world behind the text, of the text, and before the text;
6) **distinguish and value** the various NT writings by their individual theologies, governing images and myths, literary forms, special interests, peculiar language, etc.
7) **discern** the general lines of Pauline theology, its later transformation in deutero-Pauline writings, and the trajectories of its development within history and tradition;

8) **appreciate** the four unique portraits of Jesus found within the canonical gospels;
9) **recognize and appreciate** both the strengths and shortcomings of each of the writings we consider;
10) **draw** more readily and fruitfully upon the riches of the New Testament to develop and nurture their own spirituality and sense of ministry.

List here the 3 most important objectives for you personally:

1._____

2._____

3._____

Course Requirements:

- 50% Attendance and participation. Each of the first 8 sessions is worth 5% of your grade. **The final class, worth 10%, requires a 5-minute sharing** of your paper and listening to others' presentations. Students are expected to complete all assigned readings.

- 50% Write a 12-page interpretative study of a Gospel passage **due on the last class day** that integrates good methodology, scholarly research and ministerial "ownership" of course content. Hard copy required; no email copies, please.

January 7th …….....Introductions
Class 1

- Overview of syllabus:
  1. De La Torre: biblical knowledge, self-knowledge, and world politics
  2. Borg: on "the historical Jesus" (a historical reconstruction of Jesus in his time and place)
  3. Brown: a *new* introduction to the NT (see "Forward")
  4. Schneiders: connecting biblical scholarship with spirituality
- Keeping the focus on Jesus and his meaning for today, or, "What is wrong with Mel Gibson's Jesus?"

- VIDEO: "Family Matters" (Modern Middle East)
- **Four approaches** to reading a biblical passage: historical critical, social-scientific, cross-cultural, and feminist (Van Voorst)

January 14th……Images of Jesus
Class 2 **For class**: 1) Read De La Torre if you haven't, journal your responses
2) Read Borg, journal your own responses
* 2) **Write** a one-page sharing of your responses to the books.
3) Read Schneiders, chap. 1, "The problem and project of New Testament Interpretation"
* 4) **Write** a 2-page introduction of yourself to me.

- How De La Torres presents Jesus
- The Jesus Debate: Borg and the (Historical) Jesus seminar, its contributions and its critics
- Sandra Schneiders and Elisabeth Schuessler Fiorenza on "history"
- Schneiders on the biblical hermeneutics and the New Testament
- Jesus on the world stage: post-modernism, post-colonialism, and modern films
- VIDEO: David Rhoads' Dramatic Presentation of Mark

January 21ST – Martin Luther King Day -- NO CLASS

January 28th ……..……..Mark's Story of Jesus
Class 3 **For class**: 1) Skim through Brown, Introduction to the NT, pp. xxxiii-93
to learn what is covered and tag what interests you;
2) Read Schneiders, chap. 2, "NT as Word of God"
3) Read the Gospel of Mark as a story (preferably in one sitting)
4) Read Brown, Introduction, Chapters 6 & 7
*5) **Write** a one-page response to whatever most engaged you in the assigned readings

- Discussion of the first part of Brown's Introduction
- Discussion of Schneiders on biblical language as metaphorical and why it matters
- Reading Mark as Story: geography as theology
- Mark 14:3-9 "the anointing woman" through 4 lenses:
  1. historical critical
  2. social scientific
  3. feminist
  4. cross cultural
- The image of Jesus in Mark's Gospel and his community-church
- VIDEO: Pasolini's Gospel according to Matthew and the Sermon on the Mount

February 4th ……..….Matthew's "Good News"

Class 4 **For class**: 1) Read the Gospel of Matthew (before or after Brown)
2) Read Brown, chap 8, on Matthew's Gospel
3) Read Schneiders, chap. 3, "NT as the Church's book"
*4) **Write** a one-page comparison between your image of Jesus and the images of Jesus in Matthew and Mark

- Discussion of Matthew's Gospel as Story: the narrative plotline as theology
- VIDEO: Pasolini's "The Gospel According to Saint Matthew" and Matt 1:18-25 (birth of Jesus)
  1. historical critical
  2. social scientific
  3. feminist
  4. cross cultural
- Issues in Matthean studies; contribution of Matthew to imaging of Sophia/God/Jesus
- Schneiders on the New Testament as the Church's Book
- Schneider's on the World behind the text; historical Jesus research; distinctions to be made

February 11th ……..…Luke's Gospel & Acts

Class 5 **For class**: 1) Read Brown, chapter 9, on Gospel of Luke
2) Read the Gospel of Luke
3) Read Brown, chapter 10, on Acts of Apostles
4) Read the Acts of Apostles
*5) **Write** a one-page response to Luke's Jesus as he appears in the gospel and later in Acts

Discussion of Luke as a gospel and Acts as theology and history

- Lk 4:14-30 "Rejection at Nazareth" through 4 lenses

- Special to Luke: many beloved stories and events
- Discussion of Scheiders on the World of Text: contemporary readers
- HANDOUTS on outlines of Schneiders chapters 4, 5, and 6

February 18th …….……. John: One of a Kind

Class 6 **For class**: 1) Read Brown, Introduction to the NT, chapter 11 on John
2) Read Schneiders, chap. 7, as a sample study of John 4
3) Read 1,2,3 John
4) Skim Brown, chapters 12, 13, 14 on the letters of John
5) Read Schneiders, chapter 4, on "World behind the Text"
*6) **Hand in** a short list of texts you are considering as the subject for your interpretative study and explain why you are interested in each.

- Discussion of John's gospel: the Johannine Jesus and theology
- John 4: "The Woman at the Well"
- Issues on Johannine studies
- Brown on the gospel's strengths and limitations
- Schneiders on "the world behind the text"
- LIBRARY TOUR: list of resources for doing an interpretive study of a biblical passage
- Use of the Guidesheet for Paper

February 25th …….The Gospel according to Paul

Class 7 **For class**: 1) Read 1 Thessalonians, Galatians, and Romans
2) Read/skim Brown, chaps 15, 16, 17, 18, 19 and 24
3) Read Schneiders, chap 5 (The world of the text)
4) Read Schneiders, chap 6 (The world in front of the text)

- Reading Paul as an early Christian; Paul's pastoral theology
- Assessing his contribution to Christianity
- The Law-Gospel Dialectic as a key to Pauline thought
- Recent studies of the historical Paul
- Schneiders on the truth claims of texts, and interpretation and meaning-making

March 3rd ……..……Paul's Disputed Letters & The Apocalypse

Class 8 **For class**: 1) Read 1, 2 Timothy and Titus ("The Pastoral Epistles")
2) Read/skim Brown, chaps 29, 30, 31 and chap 37 (before reading the Book of Revelation
3) Read the Book of Revelation (in one sitting)
4) **Work** on your exegetical study

- Discussion of trajectories of Paul's influence in early Christianity and beyond
- A re-patriarchization of the Jesus tradition in the Churches?
- Apocalypticism: Patterns of Thought
  - As literature
  - Intended audience
  - Not predicting our future

- Rev 5: as key to the whole book
- Critique of apocalypticism in the New Testament
- Examples in USA modern culture: the LeHaye "Left Behind" novels and its avoidance of the social justice perspectives that permeate the biblical book of Revelation

March 10th ……..Final Class Presentations

Class 9 **For class**: 1) Prepare a timed-sharing of **5 minutes** of some part of your research paper;
2) Please remember: **Everyone is required** to be at this class to make a presentation and hear others' work.