

RELI 250

STUDIES IN CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY: JESUS, THE GOSPELS & THE COMING OF GOD



Image: Prodigal Son, by Gwen Raverat (c. 1910-11), Broughton House Gallery, UK

RELIGIOUS STUDIES
SCHOOL OF ART HISTORY, CLASSICS & RELIGIOUS STUDIES

VICTORIA UNIVERSITY OF WELLINGTON

Trimester 3, 2012
19 November – 21 December 2012

RELI 250

Studies in Christian Theology: Jesus, the Gospels and the Coming of God

TRIMESTER 3 2012

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<i>Course Co-ordinator:</i>	Assoc. Professor Chris Marshall St John's Associate Professor of Christian Theology HU 115 Tel. 463 7421
<i>Tutor:</i>	John Dennison HU 219
<i>Where and when:</i>	Lectures: HU 323 Monday and Tuesday 5:30 – 7.20 pm (and Wednesday only on 19 December 2012)
<i>Tutorials:</i>	to be advised
<i>Trimester dates</i>	19 November to 21 December 2012
<i>Teaching dates:</i>	19 November to 19 December 2012

Withdrawal dates: Information on withdrawals and refunds may be found at www.victoria.ac.nz/home/admisenrol/payments/withdrawalsrefunds

Religious Studies is located in the Hunter Building. The programme administrator, Alik Kalliabetsos, is in HU 318 (463 5299), aliki.kalliabetsos@vuw.ac.nz. **Notices regarding the course or any information on changes will be posted on the notice board outside her office. Notices will also be communicated to students via emails sent from Blackboard. Students who do not use their assigned student.vuw.ac.nz email addresses should ensure that ITS has an up-to-date email address, and that they check this address regularly.**

Office Hours: The main office is open Monday - Friday, 9.30 – 12:00 noon and 2:30 - 3.30 pm. You can arrange to meet with Chris Marshall by appointment, and he will also answer all emails promptly.

Course Outline

1. **Course Prescription** An examination of the life, teaching and activity of Jesus of Nazareth, as presented in the New Testament gospels and viewed against the historical, religious and political backdrop of first-century Palestine.

It also probes how the life, teaching, death and resurrection of Jesus shaped and changed the early Christian theological understanding of God and of God's involvement in the world.

2. **Course Content:** The course consists of five units, which will be covered in lectures, tutorials, assignments, and in your own reading.

The five units are as follows:

1. *Setting the Scene of the Jesus Story*

- The first-century historical, political and religious setting
- The emergence and final forms of the gospel tradition
- Methods for studying Jesus in history
- Introduction to the Markan narrative

2. *Jesus and the Coming of God's Kingdom* (cf. Mark 1-8, 13)

- The concept of the Kingdom of God
- Kingdom come in power (miracles and exorcisms)
- Kingdom come in word (parables)
- Kingdom come in praxis (ethics)
- Kingdom come in hope (eschatology)

3. *Jesus and the Origins of Christology* (cf. Mark 8-10)

- Jesus and available eschatological categories
- Jesus and Messiahship
- Jesus and divine sonship
- Subsequent christological developments

4. *Jesus, Politics and Power* (cf. Mark 11-15)

- Jesus as a prophet of God's justice
- Jesus' confrontation with the Temple authorities
- What killed Jesus?
- The meaning of Jesus' death in subsequent theological reflection

3. *Jesus and the Resurrection* (cf. Mark 16)

- The meaning of “resurrection” in Jewish and pagan thought
- The resurrection accounts in the New Testament
- Resurrection as a historical problem
- The theological significance of Jesus' resurrection for Christian theology

4. **Course learning objectives:** At the end of the course, students should be able to:

- locate the ministry of Jesus in its proper historical context, and to explain those features of first-century Palestinian Judaism that emerge in the text of the gospels;
- explain the distinctive character and structure of Mark's narrative, and the historical and theological significance of the fourfold gospel witness;
- summarise and critically evaluate the fruits of modern gospel scholarship, with reference to a range of contemporary publications;
- appreciate the significance of the “Christ-event” for shaping the Christian concept of God.

5. **Assessment requirements:** The course is internally assessed by two essays, three tutorials quizzes, and a class test.

- A 1500 word essay (20%): due Friday, November 30
- A 2500 word essay (30%): due Monday, December 17
- Three tutorial quizzes (10%): on tutorial topics and readings
- A class test (40%): sat on **Wednesday, December 19**

6. **Rationale for assessment:** The assessment of this course relates directly to these objectives.

The essays allow students to apply their analytical skills to information retrieved through library research on a set topic. Essays demonstrate the students' level of proficiency in finding, understanding, and using sources. They develop the skills of critical reading, analysis and organizing material necessary for continued study. The process also gives the opportunity to develop more in-depth knowledge of an area covered in the lectures and weekly readings.

The quizzes test comprehension of the major ideas covered in weekly lectures and in class reader and Stanton's book.

The test allows students to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of the material presented in the course and provides the opportunity to reflect on their learning process throughout the term.

Students who do not understand the grades they have been assigned or are concerned about their progress are encouraged to meet with their tutors for a discussion.

7. **Teaching/learning summary** This course is delivered through a combination of lectures and tutorials.

The **lecture programme** follows. Lectures may be varied from time to time. As much notice as possible will be given when changes occur and, if necessary, a revised programme will be issued at lectures.

Lectures are an essential part of the course, and your attendance is encouraged in the strongest possible terms. **Lectures do not merely repeat the content of the readings**; rather, the course is designed as an integrated combination of lectures, readings and tutorials, and *all* components are necessary for students to do well.

8. Tutorials: Attendance at 80% of tutorials is mandatory. Tutorials deal with material complementary to the lecture programme, and provide an opportunity to discuss critical issues with others in the class.

9. Mandatory course requirements: To gain a pass in this course, students must

a) Submit the written work specified for this course, on or by the specified dates (subject to such provisions as are stated for late submission of work);

b) Attend 80% of tutorials.

10. Set texts: Course Reader available to be purchased from **Vicbooks**.

The recommended text is:

Graham Stanton, *The Gospels and Jesus* Second edition (Oxford University Press, rev ed. 2002).

For a more “theological” perspective, see William C. Placher, *Jesus the Savior: The Meaning of Jesus Christ for Christian Faith* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001).

Students are also expected to read through the Gospel of Mark (preferably the NRSV translation), as well as the Gospel of Matthew chapters 5-7, the Gospel of Luke chapters 22-23, and the Gospel of John chapter 1.

All textbooks and student notes for the third trimester will be available from Vicbooks on Level 4 of the Student Union Building. Customers can order textbooks and student notes online at www.vicbooks.co.nz or can email an order or enquiry to enquiris@vicbooks.co.nz.

Books can be couriered to customers or they can be picked up from nominated collection points at each campus. Customers will be contacted when they are available.

Opening hours are 8:00 am – 6:00 pm, Monday –Friday during term time (closing 5:00 pm in the holidays). Phone: 463 5515

New Testaments can be purchased cheaply at the Bible Society, 144 Tory Street. The NRSV is also available online at [www.http//bible.oremus.org/](http://bible.oremus.org/)

11. Additional Bibliography: Additional references for assignments and background reading are attached at the end of this course guide. One especially useful reference work is:

Joel B.Green *et al.* (eds) *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Leicester: IVP, 1992).

Two massive recent studies on the historical Jesus provide a useful orientation to current scholarship:

James Dunn, *Jesus Remembered* Christianity in the Making Volume 1
(Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003)

John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus* 4 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1994, 2000, 2001, 2008).

For an excellent survey of Christian theology in general, see:

Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology – An Introduction* (London: Blackwell, 2007)

For extra resources, students should check out the Trinity Newman Collection in the Religious Studies library, HU 320, and the library in Ramsey House, 8 Kelburn Parade.

12. Workload (recommendation of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences): For a 20 point course an average student should spend 200 hours across the trimester, cf. Assessment Handbook 2009, s.1.2 (a), for preparation, reading and writing in addition to attendance at lectures and tutorials.

13. Academic Integrity and Plagiarism

Academic integrity means that university staff and students, in their teaching and learning are expected to treat others honestly, fairly and with respect at all times. It is not acceptable to mistreat academic, intellectual or creative work that has been done by other people by representing it as your own original work.

Academic integrity is important because it is the core value on which the University's learning, teaching and research activities are based. Victoria University's reputation for academic integrity adds value to your qualification.

The University defines plagiarism as presenting someone else's work as if it were your own, whether you mean to or not. 'Someone else's work' means anything that is not your own idea. Even if it is presented in your own style, you must acknowledge your sources fully and appropriately. This includes:

- Material from books, journals or any other printed source
- The work of other students or staff
- Information from the internet
- Software programs and other electronic material
- Designs and ideas
- The organisation or structuring of any such material

Find out more about plagiarism, how to avoid it and penalties, on the University's website: <http://www.victoria.ac.nz/home/study/plagiarism>

14. Use of Turnitin

Student work provided for assessment in this course may be checked for academic integrity by the electronic search engine <http://www.turnitin.com>. Turnitin is an online plagiarism prevention tool which compares submitted work with a very large database of existing material. At the discretion of the Head of School, handwritten work may be copy-typed by the School and subject to checking by Turnitin. Turnitin will retain a copy of submitted material on behalf of the University for detection of future plagiarism, but access to the full text of submissions is not made available to any other party.

- 15. Where to find more detailed information**
Find key dates, explanations of grades and other useful information at www.victoria.ac.nz/home/study. Find out how academic progress is monitored and how enrolment can be restricted at www.victoria.ac.nz/home/study/academic-progress. Most statutes and policies are available at www.victoria.ac.nz/home/about/policy, except qualification statutes, which are available via the *Calendar* webpage at www.victoria.ac.nz/home/study/calendar (See Section C).
- Other useful information for students may be found at the Academic Office website, at www.victoria.ac.nz/home/about/avcacademic.
- 16. Taping of Lectures:** All students in the School of Art History, Classics and Religious Studies are welcome to use audio-tapes to record lectures. If you want to do this, please see your lecturer, tutor or the relevant programme administrator and complete a disclaimer form which advises of copy right and other relevant issues.
- 17. Class representatives:** Class representatives are elected in the first week or two of the term. They are supported by the VUW Students' Association, and have a variety of roles, including assistance with grievances and student feedback to staff and VUWSA. Contact details for your class rep will be listed on the Religious Studies notice board.
- 18. Supplementary Materials:** A website of materials related to RELI 250 is being maintained in Blackboard. You can find it by visiting <http://blackboard@vuw.ac.nz>. Your user name is the one issued to you by Student Computing Services. Your password is your Student ID Number. If in doubt, please contact the Student Computing Services Help Desk, 463-6666 (extension 6666 from VUW phones) or by email scs-help@vuw.ac.nz
- 19. Evaluation:** This course will be evaluated by **UTDC**.

Lecture and Tutorial Programme

Week 1

19 Nov “In the Reign of Emperor Tiberius”: The Social and Political Setting of the Jesus story

20 Nov “The Beginning of the Gospel”: The emergence and final shape of the Jesus tradition

Tutorial 1 *Reading the Gospels*

Week 2

26 Nov “The Kingdom of God is Among You”: the Kingdom of God in Jesus' proclamation

27 Nov “By the Finger of God”: Miracles and their meaning

Tutorial 2 *The Kingdom of God in Word and Deed*

Week 3

3 Dec “Hear Then the Parable”: Jesus the poet

4 Dec “Take Up Your Cross”: Discipleship and ethics

Tutorial 3 *Jesus' ethical teaching*

Week 4

10 Dec “Who do You Say that I Am?": The Origins of Christology

11 Dec “A Den of Thieves”: Jesus, Justice and the Temple incident

Tutorial 4 *Jesus' last days*

Week 5

17 Dec “And They Crucified Him”: Jesus' death and the doctrine of atonement

18 Dec “He is Not Here”: Jesus' resurrection and its meaning

19 Dec *Two hour in-class test*

Tutorial Topics and Readings

Tutorial 1: Reading the Gospels

Reading: *The Gospel According to Mark* (16 chaps); Stanton, Chapters 2 & 3 (44 pages); R.T. France, “Reading the Gospels”, in *Class Reader*, pp.3-10 (7 pages)

Issues: Read the Gospel of Mark through in one sitting (perhaps out loud). What features impress you? How would you summarise the “feel” and message of the Gospel? What puzzles you? What explanation does Stanton give for Mark’s reasons for writing such a document?

Tutorial 2: The Kingdom of God in Word and Deed

Reading: Stanton, Chapters 12 & 14 (26 pages); Marshall, “The Kingdom of God”, in *Class Reader* pp.11-14. (4 pages); J. Moltmann, “Jesus and the Kingdom of God”, in *Class Reader* pp.15-29 (22 pages).

Issues: How the concept of the “kingdom of God” can help explain the purpose of Jesus' parables and miracles. Did Jesus' extraordinary deeds serve as “proof” of his claims?

Tutorial 3: Jesus’ Ethical teaching

Reading: *Gospel according to Matthew* chapters 5-7; Stanton, Chapters 4, 11 & 16 (25 pages); C. D. Marshall “The Moral Vision of the Beatitudes”, in *Class Reader* pp.40-51 (11 pages) ; D. Neville, “Jesus’ Vision of God’s Fair Reign”, in *Class Reader* pp.27-39 (12 pages);

Issues: Read through the Sermon the Mount (Matthew 5-7). What makes some of this teaching so radical or extreme? How is this radicalism to be explained? Why did Jesus come into conflict with religious leaders of his day?

Tutorial 4: Jesus’ Last Days

Reading: *The Gospel according to Luke* chapters 22-23; Stanton, Chapter 17 (21 pages); Marshall “A Prophet of God’s Justice”, *Class Reader* pp. 40-53 (13 pages); Mark Taylor, “The Executed God” in *Class Reader* pp.151-62 (11 pages); C.D. Marshall “Atonement, Violence and the Will of God”, in *Class Reader* pp. 156-68 (12 pages).

Questions: Read through Luke chapters 22-23. What role do the disciples, the Jewish leaders and the military and political rulers have in the account? Why was Jesus killed? What does it mean to speak of Jesus' death as “atonement”?

Essays and Assessments

1. **Essays** must be placed in the locked essay box located near the programme administrator's office (HU 318) and students must date and sign the essay register when submitting an essay. **No responsibility will be taken for work pushed under doors, or for which there is no record.** Students should keep a copy of all their work until it is returned.
2. **Penalties for late essays / assignments:**
 - 2 percent per 24 hours will be deducted for late essays.
 - essays submitted more than two weeks late will not be accepted for assessmentEssays submitted late due to medical reasons must be given to the programme administrator accompanied by a doctor's certificate.
3. **For guidance in essay writing** and presentation of bibliographies, please refer to Religious Studies "How to Cite" guidelines for essays.
4. **ESSAY TOPICS:** (*Learning objectives 1-4*)

Essay 1: (1500 words max.). **Due November 30**

Choose one story in Mark's Gospel about an event in the life of Jesus (excluding stories told *by* Jesus), and explain how that story serves Mark's purpose of illuminating the significance of Jesus and his mission to his readers (cf. Mark 1:1, 14-15).

You should consult recent commentaries on Mark and books about Jesus, but you are not required to do a detailed exegesis of the text. Instead you should briefly outline the story, then explain how the figure of Jesus functions in the account, why the gospel writer thought the incident was worth reporting, and what we learn from it of how the gospel writer understood Jesus and his significance. Avoid reading your own pre-conceptions into the text. Try to view the story through the eyes of a first-century reader or hearer. Your treatment of the episode will show how much effort you have made to understand the original setting and theological intention of the text.

Essay 2: (2500 words max.). **Due December 17**

Choose one of the following topics (or an alternative approved by the instructor):

1. *Why do some scholars claim that the gospels are anti-Jewish? Is this criticism justified?*
2. *Write an essay on Jesus the exorcist. Why does exorcism loom so large in the gospel traditions, and what does this material tell us about how the early Christians understood the role and significance of Jesus?*

3. *What do the Gospel narratives reveal about the place of women in the activity and teaching of Jesus? What implications does this material have for Christian practice today?*
4. *Why is John's Gospel so different from the other gospels? How are these differences best explained?*
5. *Was Jesus a pacifist? How has Jesus' teaching on non-violence been assessed in Christian interpretation?*
6. *Thousands of young men were crucified by the Romans. Why does Christian theology see the death of Jesus as so special? Why is it viewed as a saving event?*
7. *"If Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain and your faith has been in vain" (1 Cor 15:14). What is meant by "resurrection" and why is the resurrection of Jesus considered to be so important to Christian faith?*

Criteria for Assessment of Essay Work: Your essays will be evaluated on the following criteria (in descending order of importance):

i. Coverage of Relevant Content: your essay should cover the essential content thoroughly, and reflect awareness of the range of key issues relevant to the subject being discussed. The issues most pertinent to answering the essay question must receive adequate depth of treatment.

ii. Integration of Ideas and Development of Main Line of Argument: an essay should have a beginning, a middle and an end, and sustain a main line of argument throughout. This will require you to assimilate your reading, synthesise the key points, and develop an overall argument that addresses the question asked in a logical and persuasive manner. The essay structure should reflect the particular questions asked in the essay topic.

iii. Critical Reflection: an essay is essentially an exercise in independent, critical thinking. The essence of critical reflection is the ability to evaluate, in a reasoned and thoughtful manner, the assumptions, perspectives and arguments of others. It entails moving beyond an immediate subjective reaction to something (e.g., "I really like what Stanton said" or "Jones is too liberal") to giving objective reasons for why a particular line of argument is to be accepted, rejected or qualified at certain points (e.g., "Stanton's perspective is helpful and illuminating because...", or "Stanton's argument is open to criticism at the following points...", or "Jones's approach is stimulating and helpful, but his underlying assumptions are questionable, for the following reasons"). In short, critical reflection is a matter of having sound reasons for the position you adopt or the evaluation you offer.

iv. Extent and Quality of Reading and Research: a 200 level essay should be based on thorough research; the sources used should, where possible, reflect a variety of perspectives on the topic under discussion. The bibliography should include at least 7-10 items.

v. Style and Presentation: your essay should be clearly written, grammatically sound, and well presented. Clarity and accuracy enhance the appeal of any essay. IT IS ESSENTIAL THAT YOU FOLLOW CONSISTENT FOOTNOTING AND BIBLIOGRAPHICAL CONVENTIONS.

vi. Effective Footnoting: in essays, subsidiary material should be printed in footnotes (or endnotes). Footnotes should be used (i) to cite the sources from which you have derived key facts, opinions or quotations; (ii) to add comments, explanations, examples, or references that are relevant to your argument but which would interrupt its flow if included in the main text; and (iii) to document the differing views of other authors on the point being made and the sources where these can be followed up.

6. Final Class Test (*Learning objectives 1-4*)

The final test will be held on the last session of the lecture programme. It will consist of both short answer questions and essay questions. The short answer questions will cover the “facts” and terminology covered in the course, and the essay questions will allow the opportunity for in-depth reflection on selected themes and topics.

Select Bibliography

- Allison, D.C. *Resurrecting Jesus: The Earliest Christian Tradition and its Interpreters* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2005)
_____ *Studies in Matthew: Interpretation Past and Present* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006)
_____ *Jesus of Nazareth: Millenarian Prophet* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998)
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_____ *The Truth About Jesus. The Challenge of the Evidence* (Sydney: Aquila Press 1994).
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_____ (ed.) *The Gospels for all Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences* (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans, 1998).
_____ *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2006).
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_____ *Jesus: Uncovering the Life, Teachings and Relevance of a Religious Revolutionary* (San Francisco, Harpers: 2006)
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_____ *The Death of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Passion Narratives in the Four Gospels* 2 Volumes (New York: Doubleday, 1994).
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