

RELG 210 Jesus of Nazareth

School of Religious Studies
McGill University
Fall 2020

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A note about Remote Delivery:

This course was designed as a live classroom experience. This is a lecture/seminar class being delivered remotely, not a course designed for on-line delivery: it will be what it will be.

This term it is going to be a special challenge to learn together to imagine, and discuss, and understand Jesus as a real person in his real world, when we are only together in a virtual space ourselves. It may be difficult and strange for us to connect with one another.

On the other hand, this course in particular is all about making a disciplined connection with other people and with one fiercely contested figure from a remote past and cultural context. So maybe the challenges of remote learning and of engaging with virtual material and a disembodied class can be a sort of metaphor for the challenge of learning about Jesus of Nazareth.

Please be aware of these [Student-specific Guidelines for Remote Teaching and Learning](#) and of the suggestions for learning tactics at [Remote Learning Resources](#).

Description and Goals of this Course:

“A critical study of selected ancient and modern accounts of the aims and person of Jesus. Attention will be given to the question of the historical sources and to the relationship between faith and history.”

Since the seventeenth century, studying Jesus of Nazareth has been one of the supreme touchstones for History’s claim to know and interpret the past. This has especially been so since historical, theological, and personal claims to know [about] Jesus are often perceived as in conflict. The goals of this course are therefore:

- to stimulate critical thinking and responsible dialogue about History, Memory, Theology and Faith, and, for that matter, fiction and non-fiction as competing and/or complementary ways of re-telling the storied past of Jesus;

- to inform participants about basic issues, problems and achievements in Historical-Jesus Research of the past and present;

- to equip us to read and judge scholarly essays on the subject;

- to be aware of primary sources and know strategies for using them as aids to formulating, testing and explaining our own historical understandings of Jesus.

By the end of the course (the Final Exam!!) students will be able:

- to evaluate and explain the relevance of key primary sources or understanding Jesus historically;

- to recognize and critique the main topics and arguments in Historical Jesus Research;

- to articulate responsibly the historical aspects of their own understanding of Jesus.

Prior Knowledge? Who should take this course? Any member of McGill University who is willing to ask who Jesus really was, ought to take this course.

No particular prior academic knowledge is assumed, and in fact students' backgrounds always vary widely. Sometimes the instructor forgets just how diverse students' academic and personal backgrounds are; I may need to be reminded with a question or two.

No particular religious background or identity is assumed. Jews, Christians and Muslims of various kinds have a lot at stake in understanding Jesus. Bear in mind that some people find Historical Jesus Research risky: let's take care of each other.

Little prior knowledge is assumed, but the course does make heavy demands on students' openness to think for themselves without ignoring others. Students are expected to bring some skills in critical thinking and formal writing in English or French. A sincere willingness to deal with uncomfortable issues and to grapple with hard texts is expected. In addition, the class requires a willingness to discuss one's own beliefs and those of others with honesty and respect.

INSTRUCTIONAL METHOD

The course will be taught in two parallel, but distinct streams, of **Recorded Lectures** and of **Weekly Reading Assignments**.

Lectures: I will post to **myCourses** a sequence of **Camtasia video/audio recordings** of short lectures. Once each lecture is posted, students will be free to view and review it on their own time.

Weekly Reading Assignments and Zoom discussions: Every Friday 09h35-10h25 students will be invited to join a Zoom meeting which will begin discussing a Reading Assignment. Every student is expected to have submitted a **written report** of the Reading Assignment by Friday, 09h25 (except on Friday, 4 Sept); Submitting the reports is mandatory, your written submissions will be graded, and we will try to give you regular feedback from them (there is more on this below).

The **Friday Zoom meetings** are not mandatory and will be recorded and available on **myCourses**. On the other hand, participation in Friday Zoom sessions is your best opportunity to engage interactively.

This means that students will need to have internet connections that are at least reliable enough to allow access to myCourses. Students will need to be able to submit Reading Assignments on time through myCourses. You will need to be able to access Camtasia and Zoom recordings through myCourses, in your own flexible time.

You are expected to check your McGill e-mail and myCourses every Monday, Wednesday and Friday. The TA and I will do likewise.

If you want to be able to take part in the Friday Zoom sessions in real time, you will need appropriate connection, but you do not absolutely need to take part in Friday Zoom sessions live: they will be recorded and available on myCourses. We will not police whether or not you take part in Zoom sessions (we may penalize assignments that are not submitted on time on myCourses).

If you join a Zoom session, you do not have to “speak” or even show your face. You do have to use your legal name or McGill preferred name and you do have to consent to your name being used and disclosed during the session and therefore on the recording. By remaining in classes that are being recorded, you accept that personal information of this kind may be disclosed to others, whether during the lecture or in viewing the recording. If you are not comfortable being in a class that is recorded, you may decide to not take part by logging off Zoom.

You and I are both responsible to ensure that class recordings, the Final Examination, and associated copyrighted material and personal information are not reproduced or placed in the public domain. This means that each of you can use class materials and class discussions for your educational (and research) purposes, but you cannot allow others to use it, by putting it up on the Internet or by giving it or selling it to others who may also copy it and make it available. Please refer to McGill’s [Guidelines for Instructors and Students on Remote Teaching and Learning](#) for further information. Thank you very much for your help with this.

TEXTBOOKS

Required:

- 1) E.P. Sanders, *The Historical Figure of Jesus* (Penguin, 1993).

Anthony Le Donne, *Historical Jesus: What Can We Know and How Can We Know It?* (Eerdmans, 2011)

These books are both be available now at The Word Bookstore (Prop. Adrian King-Edwards) 469 Milton. 514-845-5640 wordbook@securenet.net

For purchase in person by those living in Montreal.

For all others purchase is available online with a flat rate shipping of \$5 to anywhere in North America outside Montreal.

- 2) By the second week of classes, you will also need to have access to a modern-language translation of the whole Christian Bible (“New Testament” and “Old Testament”). Suitable translations are: ESV; RSV/NRSV; JB/NJB; NIV; NEB/REB. Many translations can be consulted online at <https://www.biblegateway.com>.

We recommend a study edition (with scholarly notes and introductions accompanying the translation) such as the following:

The New Jerusalem Bible (Doubleday, 1985) or the French *Bible de Jerusalem* (Cerf, 2nd edition, 1973) on which it is based, as long as you get an edition with the full Introductions and Notes.

The Oxford Study Bible: Revised English Bible with the Apocrypha (Oxford UP, 1992)

The HarperCollins Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version with the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books (HarperCollins, 1993)

The New Oxford Annotated Bible: New Revised Standard Version with the Apocrypha (Oxford UP, 3rd edition, 2001)

The Jewish Annotated New Testament: New Revised Standard Version (Oxford UP, 2011)

DO NOT rely on translations or paraphrases designed for more particular readerships (KJV=AV/NKJV; TEV=Good News; The Living Bible).

The McGill Library System has tons of helpful material accessible online. reference works, such as the valuable *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (Doubleday, 1992). Students are urged to use the resources of both parts of the Library.

You might like to look at the *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus* published since January 2003 available in full-text on-line through the McGill library.

There are useful scholarly helps at “Bible Odyssey,” a resource managed by the Society of Biblical literature: <https://www.bibleodyssey.org/>

REQUIREMENTS, ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADES

“In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University’s control, the content and/or evaluation scheme in this course is subject to change.”

Grading:	weekly reading assignments*	12 x 6% = 72%
	final take-home examination**	28%

Some of my general expectations as an evaluator: In a course like this one, on a controversial topic, opinions will differ greatly; the goal of the course is not that you come to the right conclusions, but that you demonstrate the knowledge and argumentative skills required for an informed historical debate about Jesus. We will therefore try to mark for carefulness of **observation (does a reading really say/imply what I think it says/implies?)**, quality of **presentation** and clarity, organization, completeness and relevance of **argument**; this course in particular is about thinking your way past what you are given, to exercise your own critical judgement and imagination. The higher grades therefore do tend to reward signs of disciplined craftsmanship and creativity without losing track of the required assignment!

***The READING ASSIGNMENTS** will be available under Assignments on myCourses and are also available in the second part of this Syllabus (**see more detailed instructions below**). Except for Friday, 4 Sept, a Reading Assignment is due every Friday. The Weekly Reading Assignments follow more or less the following pattern: Step 1: carefully read a group of assigned readings; Step 2:

identify as clearly as you can two aspects of the readings that you find hard to understand; Step 3: formulate and justify an important question about the implications of the readings for understanding Jesus historically.

**** The FINAL TAKE-HOME EXAMINATION** will be based on class lectures, discussions and reading assignments and on issues raised, explicitly or implicitly, in Sanders (1993) and/or Le Donne (2011).

You will be asked:

(1) to explain briefly a few terms from a choice of keywords used in class and/or in Sanders (e.g. eschatology, parable, memory) from the point of view of HJR;

(2) to evaluate and discuss briefly selections ("gobbets") from the gospels or some of the other texts we will read in class from the point of view of historical Jesus studies [e.g. Mark 2:15-17 might be given (the full text from one of the English translations named above)];

(3) to write a short, carefully argued essay on one of the following major questions of historical Jesus research (on the actual examination, each question will be introduced by a quotation from an important writer in HJR):

- a) 'Was Jesus aiming to transform Judaism?'
- b) 'Why was Jesus killed?'
- c) 'How were Jesus' parables and his healings/exorcisms related in his behaviour?'
- d) 'Did Jesus expect to unleash a miraculous intervention of God in the world?'

Later in Term I will post on myCourses a SAMPLE FINAL EXAMINATION FROM A PREVIOUS YEAR, to help you prepare.

The Final Take-Home Examination is scheduled by the University in the Final Examination period, 8-22 Dec 2019. The examination will be open-book. Correct citation of any copyrighted materials will be absolutely required.

The Exam will be released on myCourses, 48 hours before it **will be due on the scheduled exam end time, also on myCourses. You will be free to use that time as you see fit, though the examination will be in the same format as previous years' 3-hour exam.**

According to Senate regulations, instructors are not permitted to make special arrangements for final exams. Please consult the Calendar, section 4.7.2.1, General University Information and Regulations at www.mcgill.ca

McGILL UNIVERSITY VALUES ACADEMIC INTEGRITY. THEREFORE ALL STUDENTS MUST UNDERSTAND THE MEANING AND CONSEQUENCES OF CHEATING, PLAGIARISM AND OTHER ACADEMIC OFFENCES UNDER THE CODE OF STUDENT CONDUCT AND DISCIPLINARY PROCEDURES (see <https://www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/> for more information).

In accord with McGill University's Charter of Students' Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded.

SOME ADDITIONAL BOOKS AND AUTHORS you might want to know about:

T Havukainen, *The Quest for the Memory of Jesus* (Peeters, 2020) a study of the state of the theme of memory in recent HJ research.

Kirk, Alan, *Memory and the Jesus Tradition* (T&T Clark, 2018) very good recent studies.

Helen K. Bond, *The Historical Jesus: A guide for the perplexed* (T&T Clark, 2012) a very sensible recent book.

Theissen, Gerd and Annette Merz, *The Historical Jesus: A Comprehensive Guide* (Fortress, 1998 [German 1996]) a very valuable workbook: this is the textbook I use in my graduate seminar.

Levine, Amy-Jill, Dale C. Allison, Jr., and John Dominic Crossan, editors *The Historical Jesus in Context* Princeton readings in religions (Princeton, 2006). A collection of primary source extracts with introductions by (if I may say so) experts. I particularly recommend: "Josephus on John the Baptist and Other Jewish Prophets of Deliverance" by Craig Evans, "'Abba' and Father: Imperial Theology in the Contexts of Jesus and the Gospels" by Mary Rose D'Angelo, "Jesus and the Dead Sea Scrolls" by Peter Flint, and "Anointing Traditions" by Teresa Hornsby.

Harrington, Daniel J. *Historical Dictionary of Jesus*. (Scarecrow; 2010).

Bockmuehl, Markus, *The Cambridge Companion to Jesus* (Cambridge; 2001).

Meier, J.P., *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, Vol. I, *The Roots of the Problem and the Person* (Doubleday; 1991), Vol. II, *Mentor, Message and Miracles* (Doubleday; 1994). A relatively conservative, but very balanced and thorough study of the Historical Jesus.

Crossan, J.D., *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (HarperSanFrancisco; 1991). The best-selling scholarly study of the Hist'l Jesus: the first part is a portrait of Jesus' social and cultural world, informed by wide anthropological and sociological as well as historical reading; the second is a more controversial approach to Jesus himself. Written by a leading, but highly independent figure in the Jesus Seminar.

Evans, Craig (editor) *Encyclopedia of the Historical Jesus* (Routledge, 2008). A very fine reference by a broad-based team of scholars, probably more widely representative of the centre of the field than most, more partisan publications in HJR.

Funk, R.W., R.W. Hoover and the Jesus Seminar, *The Five Gospels: The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus* (1993). This contains an introduction to Historical Jesus Research by Bob Funk, the leader of the Jesus Seminar. The volume also includes a vivid new translation of the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, John and Thomas

with words attributed to Jesus in black, grey, pink or red type depending on the Seminar's votes about their authenticity! Each passage in each gospel is accompanied by an interesting discussion of how the Jesus Seminar argued about the authenticity or inauthenticity of Jesus' gospel sayings. This book is the manifesto of a highly specific group of scholars, so don't expect fairness or impartiality, but do expect lots of information and lively discussion.

Funk, R.W. and the Jesus Seminar, *The Acts of Jesus: What Did Jesus Really Do?: The Search for the Authentic Deeds of Jesus* (HarperSanFrancisco; 1998). The sequel to the preceding volume, it records and explains Jesus Seminar votes on what Jesus is alleged to have done. Attempts to classify as authentic or inauthentic deeds and habits of Jesus and/or alleged facts about him. Again, the specific results are quite debatable and unrepresentative of the real scholarly community, but the attempt is fascinating: how do we justify making or refusing to make the step from reading a **story** to talking about a real **event** or **fact**? What makes a story **true**?

Borg, M.J. (editor), *Jesus at 2000* (HarperSanFrancisco; 1996). A volume of essays on the historical, religious and cultural significance of Jesus. Includes an appendix "designed to teach the 'historical Jesus movement' to the newly curious."

Porter, Stanley E. and Tom Holmén (editors), *Handbook for the study of the historical Jesus* (Brill, 2011). Can 4 volumes be called a 'handbook'?

Wright, N.T., *The Contemporary Quest for Jesus* (Fortress, 2002). A very short excerpt from the much longer *Jesus and the Victory of God* (SPCK/Fortress, 1996). N.T. Wright (a former McGill professor) is the most visible "opponent" of Crossan, Borg, *et al.* Wright is very good on Jesus' Jewishness.

Gerhard Lohfink, *Jesus of Nazareth: What He Wanted, Who He Was* (Liturgical, 2012 [German 1989]) a very beautiful discussion from a liberal Catholic perspective. I love the title question, "What did he want?"

Stegemann, Ekkehard W. and Wolfgang, *The Jesus Movement: A Social History of its First Century* (Fortress, 1999 [German 1995]). This is a good example of the focus of on the social settings for Jesus and his followers.

Casey, Maurice, *Jesus of Nazareth: an independent historian's account of his life and teaching* (T&T Clark, 2010). Casey is very good in his analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of OTHER scholars.

A Very Tentative Syllabus of Topics and Readings

RELG 210 "Jesus of Nazareth"

Fall 2020

****Of course, these aren't lecture dates any more, but rather target dates for getting recordings onto myCourses! I hope they will help me and you both pace our work.****

The "Handouts" will also be placed on myCourses.

1) Introduction to the Course and its Goals: Sept 2

-what can we reasonably hope to learn or achieve through HJR?

2) The nature of the Quest for the Historical Jesus: Sept 4, (Sept 7: Labour Day), 9, 11, 14

-what is the history and significance of the "Quest" for the Historical Jesus? [Sanders xiii-9]

-what are the guiding questions of HJR?

-the nature of the sources;

-the aims of Jesus and the aims of his followers;

-the nature of Jesus' Jewishness.

-how helpful is a distinction between the "Jesus of History" and the "Christ of Faith"? [M. Kähler; Sanders 78-97]

-how does recent HJR differ from earlier phases of HJR?

-what kinds of evidence do we have OR might we reasonably expect for HJR?

Sept 11: Reading Assignment #1: <"An Outline of Jesus' Life" [Sanders 10-14; compare Le Donne 33-41 and 133-134]>

[Handout: "Matrix of different types of social memory"]

3) Criteria of (In)Authenticity: What makes a strong argument in HJR? Sept 16, 18

[Handout "Criteria of Authenticity;" Sanders 94, 167, 180, 182, 189, 198-200, 238-9, 263; Le Donne 42-52, 72-80]

-double dissimilarity/irreducibility

-multiple attestation

-development

-memory refraction [Le Donne 106-110]

Sept 18: Reading Assignment #2: <"Memory refraction" [Le Donne 106-110, 120-132] >

4) **Jesus, the Pharisees and the Sovereignty of God: Sept 21, 23, 25**

Sept 25: Reading Assignment #3: <“Theocracy’ and Empire” [Sanders, chapters 3 and 4; Le Donne 68-69, 81-92, 120-132] >

Kingship of God; parable: *Read: Luke 17:20; Q/Luke 13:28-30; Q/Matthew 11:12; Mark 3:22-27; Mark 9:1; Q/Luke 11:2-4; Mark 4:1-34; Matthew 13!; Luke 13-20! Gospel of Thomas*

-Temple, synagogue, sects, parties, class and leadership in Jewish society pre-70

-the nature of ancient society, ancient states and their laws

-Judaea as Temple State

-Galilee as client state

-gentile and/or Greek-speaking city-states (*poleis*)

the goals and limits of Roman power in Palestine

-legitimacy and established leadership (versus alternative leadership)

-Judas the Galilean & Sadok the Pharisee; R. Aqiba & Simon bar Kochba

-what’s a “Pharisee”? was Jesus one?!

-what’s a “messiah”? was Jesus one? were there others? [Sanders 240f., 89ff)

5) **Israelite Renewal Movements: Covenant & Eschatology: September 28, 30, October 2, 5, 7, 9, (Oct 12: Thanksgiving), 14**

October 2: Reading Assignment #4: <“John the Baptiser and apocalyptic eschatology” [Sanders 12f, 22, 92-4; Le Donne 81-92] >

Son of Man: *Read: I Thessalonians 4:15-17; Mark 13:24-30; Mark 14:62*

[**Handout:** “‘Son of Man’ Logia (Sayings)”]

servanthood: *Read: Mark 8:34-38, 9:33-37, 10:41-45; Luke 22:24-27; John 13:2-16*

[**Handout:** “Some Key Themes of HJR”]

discipleship; the Twelve; Israel's renewal: *Read: Q/Matthew 8:22; Q/Matthew 19:16-30; Mark 3:13-19; 6:7-13; I Corinthians 15:1-8; Galatians 1:11-2:21*

October 9: Reading Assignment #5: <“Jesus, John the Baptiser, Sadducees and Essenes”>

marriage covenant: *Read: Mark 2:18-20; 6:17-29; 10:1-12; Q/Luke 16:18; Matthew 5:31-32; I Corinthians 7:10-16; John 2:1-12*

sinners & purity, fasting/feasting, commensality: *Read: Mark 2:1-22; 14:3-9; Matthew 19:28; Q/Matthew 11:2-19; Q/Luke 13:28-30; Q/Luke 14:(1-14)15-24; I Corinthians 11:23-26; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:14-20; John 6: 51-59; 13:1-20*

October 16: Reading Assignment #6: <“Contagious Purity?” [Tom Holmén, “A contagious purity: Jesus’ inverse strategy for eschatological cleanliness,” in: *Jesus research: an International perspective*, edited by James H. Charlesworth and Petr Pokorný (2009) 199-229; Sanders 35, 129, 250-252, 303 n. 6] >

God’s Law (Torah) (including ritual [im]purity): *Read: Q/Matthew 8:22; Matthew 5!; Mark 2:17; 2:19; 2:27; 3:4; 7:15; 10:9; 12:17*

6) Jesus the Miracle-Worker: October 19, 21, 23, 26, 28

October 23: Reading Assignment #7: <“The charismatic miracle-worker and his Father (“Abba”): Jesus, Honi, Hanina” [Josephus, *Antiquities* 14.22-24; *Mishnah, Ta’anith* 3.8; *Mishnah Berakoth* 5.5; *bTalmud Pesahim* 114; Eleazar, Apollonius, and Jesus the magician” [*Antiquities* 8.46-9; Philostratus, *Vita Apollonii* 4.20, 45] >

-Satan, demons and exorcism [Sanders 149-154; Le Donne 56-64]

Q/Luke 10:13-15; Mark 3:22-27; Mark 5:1-43

7) Jesus in Jerusalem: Oct 30, Nov 2, 4, 6, 9, 11, 13, 16, 18

Oct 30: Reading Assignment #8: <“The prestige and problem of the Jerusalem Temple in Jesus’ world” [Ecclesiasticus 50:1-23; I Maccabees 4:36-47; I Enoch 89-90; 11QTemple 29; John 2:18-21; Mark 13:1-2; 14:53-61; 15:29; Acts 6:13-14] >

-continuity or discontinuity between Jesus in Galilee and Jesus last week in Jerusalem?

-how and why did Jesus die?

-Temple (destruction and recreation): *Read: Mark 14:58 (cf. II Corinthians 5:1, 17); John 2:19 cf. Mark 11:15-19; Mark 13:1-4, 14-20; Matthew 23:37-39; Acts 6:13, 14; Q/Luke 13:34-35*

Nov 6: Reading Assignment #9: <“Jesus son of Ananias and Jesus of Nazareth” [Josephus, *Jewish War* 6.300-9; Sanders 267] >

Nov 13: Reading Assignment #10: <“Militant Miracle-prophets’: The Samaritan; Theudas; the Egyptian” [*Antiquities* 18.85-87; 20.97-98; *Jewish War* 2.261-263 (cf. *Antiquities* 20.169-171; Acts 21:38)] >

8) Josephus and Paul: two early glimpses of Jesus: Nov 20, 23, 25, 27, 30, Dec 2, 3

-Flavius Josephus: a mostly (!) non-Christian Jewish-Roman source on Jesus

Nov 20: Reading assignment #11: <“Josephus on Jesus and James” [*Antiquities* 18.3.55-87 and 20.9.1.199f.; Galatians 1:11-2:21; Sanders 50, 267, 286-9]>

- Saul/Paul: a mostly (!) Christian Jewish source on Jesus
- the letters of Paul: the earliest extant source about Jesus

Nov 27: Reading assignment #12: <“Paul and the Gospels on Jesus' Last Supper and Death”> [I Corinthians 10:16-17, 11:17-32; Matthew 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:15-20, 27; John 6:1-66; 13:1-30]