The new semester started today. Here I am, 58 years old, and still organizing my life around semesters....

In any event, I’m teaching my regular two-course load this semester. My undergraduate class is the Introduction to the New Testament that I teach every Spring, with 240 students; my graduate seminar is a graduate level course basically about the same thing, covering (at a graduate level) the major issues in New Testament studies and the history of the discipline, all with an eye toward pedagogy (i.e., how to teach this material to undergraduates). It will have about ten students.

I’ll have more to say about each course anon. For now, here is my syllabus for the undergraduate class, for your amusement and reading pleasure.

INTRODUCTION TO THE NEW TESTAMENT

Reli 104

Spring, 2014

Instructor: Dr. Bart D. Ehrman

Teaching Assistants: Candace Buckner, Brian Coussens, Shaily Patel, Nathan Schradle

Course Description

This course is designed to help you (a) learn about the New Testament writings and the history of earliest Christianity and (b) develop certain analytical skills that are crucial for any liberal arts education (e.g., in making and evaluating persuasive arguments).

By the end of the course, you should be able to:

(1) Speak intelligently about the contents and message of each book of the New Testament;

(2) Recognize the broad similarities and wide-ranging differences among these books;

(3) Understand why interpreters differ so broadly in their interpretations of them;

(4) See how these books can be used to reconstruct what happened during the life of Jesus and the history of Christianity after his death;

(5) Evaluate other people’s interpretations of these books and their reconstructions of the historical events that they narrate;

(6) Know how to advance your own views (about history, religion, politics, or life as we know it) with greater precision and persuasiveness.

As you may have already inferred, it is not one of the goals of the class either to convert you to a particular religious point of view or to provide ammunition for your assault on the religious views of others (e.g., a pestiferous roommate). It will not, therefore, be taught from a confessional perspective.
All students will be required to understand the points of view advanced in the readings and in the lectures, along with the evidence and/or logic that makes them compelling to others. You will not be required, though, to accept these points of view for yourself. A major part of the class will be devoted to helping you think on your own and to understand why you find particular perspectives persuasive or unpersuasive — even the perspectives of your professor. In particular, all students are urged to approach the issues we address with honesty, openness, and a healthy dose of good humor.

**Texts**

The following texts are required. (Available in the student stores and also found on Reserve in the Undergraduate Library.)


On-line guides to reading and instructions for position papers - essential elements for the course - are available online on Sakai.

**Course Requirements**

**Attendance:** Yes, indeed, you must grace us with your presence at all class meetings. We will occasionally pass around an attendance sheet or pop a quiz to see if you are alive and well among us; roll will regularly be taken during recitations. If you have a legitimate excuse for missing a recitation, please contact your teaching assistant.

**Position Papers:** Recitation sections will meet each week (as indicated in the class schedule, below) in order to discuss various aspects of the literature, history, or religion of the New Testament. To facilitate these discussions, you will be expected to prepare a two page (no more!) position paper on each assigned topic. Written instructions for each paper are included on Sakai (under Course Documents). The papers need not be a “finished and polished product.” They are designed simply to compel you to consider the issues and reflect on the problems raised by the topic before we discuss it in class. For this reason, they will not be graded per se, but simply marked “S” (= Satisfactory) if you have done the assignment adequately and “U” (= Unsatisfactory) if you have not. Please note: papers not turned in on time will automatically be marked U, no questions asked. If you cannot attend the class discussion, arrange to have someone bring your paper for you.

**Debates:** Three of your recitations will take the form of class debates on a controversial topic in the field (March 28; April 4; April 11). Each student will be required to participate in one of these debates, on a team arguing either the affirmative or negative side of the resolution. You will be able to indicate your preference of topic early in the semester (see the schedule below). We cannot guarantee your first choice, but will do our best. Each team will consist of 3-4 members, who will be expected to work together well in advance to prepare their case. The instructor will be happy to give some pointers and suggestions.
You will serve as a judge for the two debates in which you are not personally involved (along with all the other non-debaters) and, to heighten your competence, will be responsible for a regular position paper on the topic. For the debate you are participating in, you are to write a paper arguing for the side you are arguing against in the class debate itself (see instructions on Sakai, under Course Documents [Instructions for Position Papers]).

Exams. There will be a midterm exam based on lectures, readings, and class discussions. The exam will consist of a number of short 100-200 word identifications (terms defined in the glossary and/or taken from the reading). The final exam will consist of shorter identifications and essay questions, and will be cumulative.

Grading

Your grade will be calculated as follows: Attendance, participation, class debates, and position papers 30%, midterm exam 30%, final exam 40%.

Office Hours

The instructor’s office hour is Wed. 2:00-3:00 p.m. If this time is not convenient, please set up an appointment for another time. Office: Saunders Hall 117; Office Phone: 962-3940; Email: behrman@email.unc.edu The teaching assistants will indicate their office hours during your first recitation.

As to which person is best to see concerning the class…. If you want to talk about the content of the lectures, the structure of the class, or the inequities of the universe, any of us will do. If you want advice on studying for exams or writing papers, or if you want to express concerns about a grade, you should first approach your teaching assistant (since s/he will be doing the grading). If for some reason you want to go to the top, however, the boss will be happy to see you.

I will also be holding “informal” office hours every Wednesday 5:30-6:30 p.m., at the Armadillo Grill in Carrboro. This is a chance to come see me outside of the office, to talk about the class, politics, religion, social justice, ACC basketball, or reality as we know it.

CLASS SCHEDULE AND READING ASSIGNMENTS

10 Recitation One: Getting Started (See assignment on Sakai, for this and all recitations)
15 The World of Early Christian Traditions. Reading assignment: NTHI, chs. 3-4 (note: we are skipping ch. 2 for now)
17 Recitation Two: Jesus and the Other “Divine Men”
20 NO CLASS. Martin Luther King Jr.’s Birthday
The Traditions of Jesus in Their Greco-Roman Context. Reading assignment: NTHI, ch. 5

Recitation Three: Jesus According to Mark

The Christian Gospels: A Literary and Historical Introduction. Reading assignment: NTHI, ch. 6; The NT and Other Early Christian Writings: A Reader, Introduction (pp. 1-6)

Jesus the Suffering Son of God: The Gospel According To Mark. Reading assignment: Mark 1-16 (Note: All NT passages are found in The New Testament and Other Early Christian Writings: A Reader; be sure to read the “Introduction” to each book as well); NTHI, ch. 7

Recitation Four: Jesus’ Resurrection in Matthew, Mark, and Luke

The Synoptic Problem and Its Significance for Interpretation. Reading assignment: NTHI, ch. 8

Jesus the Jewish Messiah: The Gospel according to Matthew. Reading assignment: Matthew 1-16; 23-28; NTHI, ch. 9


Recitation Six: Jesus, Nicodemus, and the Samaritan Woman.

Jesus, the Man Sent from Heaven: The Gospel according to John; Reading assignment: John 1-21; NTHI, ch. 12

The History of the Johannine Community; 1, 2, and 3 John; NTHI, ch. 13a (pp. 198-207)

Recitation Seven: The Gospel of Peter and the Synoptics

The Rise of Christian Gnosticism. Reading assignment: The New Testament and Other Early Christian Writings: A Reader, pp. 116-30 (i.e., The Gospels of Thomas, Peter, and Infancy Thomas); NTHI, ch. 11b (pp. 207-16)

The Historical Jesus: Sources, Problems, and Methods. Reading assignment: NTHI, chs. 15-16

Recitation Eight: The Bizarre Sayings of the Gospel of Thomas; NTHI, ch. 14

The Apocalyptic Prophet. Reading assignment: Matt 5-7; 13; Mark 12-16; NTHI, chs. 17-18

The Deeds of the Apocalyptic Jesus. Reading assignment: NTHI, ch. 18

Recitation Nine: MIDTERM EXAMS
8-16    SPRING BREAK; Hit the Beaches and Take a Book.

17    From Apocalyptic Prophet to Divine Redeemer. Reading assignment: NTHI, ch. 19-20

19    Paul: the Man, the Mission, and the Modus Operandi; Reading assignment: 1 Thessalonians 1-5; NTHI, ch. 21

21    Recitation Ten: Paul’s View of THE END

24    Pauline Ethics: the Love Commandment. Reading assignment: 1 Corinthians 1-16; NTHI, ch. 22a (pp. 339-54)

26    Pauline Ethics: Other Criteria of Behavior. Reading assignment: 2 Corinthians 1-13; Philippians 1-5; Philemon; NTHI, ch. 21b (pp. 354-71)

28    Recitation Eleven: DEBATE ONE. Resolved: The Apostle Paul’s Views of Women Were Oppressive (Reading assignment: NTHI, ch. 26)

31    The Gospel according to Paul. Reading assignment: Romans 1-16; NTHI, ch. 23

Apr 2    In the Wake of the Apostle: The Deutero-Pauline Epistles. Reading assignment: 2 Thessalonians, Ephesians; 1 Timothy; NTHI, Ch. 25a (pp. 397-410)

4    Recitation Twelve: DEBATE TWO. Resolved: Paul and Jesus Advocated Fundamentally Different Religions (Reading Assignment: NTHI, ch. 24; George Bernard Shaw essay in Sakai).

7    The Rise of Christian Anti-Semitism; Reading assignment: Hebrews 1-13; Barnabas 1-10 (in The New Testament and Other Early Christian Writings: A Reader); NTHI, ch. 27

9    Christians and Empire; Reading assignment: 1 Peter 1-5; Ignatius to the Ephesians, to the Trallians, and to the Romans; Martyrdom of Polycarp (The New Testament and Other Early Christian Writings: A Reader); NTHI, ch. 28


14    In the Wake of the Apostle: The Pastoral Epistles. Reading assignment: 1 and 2 Timothy; NTHI, ch. 23b (pp. 410-20)

16    Early Christian Heretics. Reading Assignment: 2 Peter; 1 Clement; Ignatius to the Magnesians, to the Smyrneans; and to the Philadelphians (The New Testament and Other Early Christian Writings: A Reader); NTHI, ch. 29

18    NO CLASS. School Holiday.


23    The Text of the New Testament. Reading assignment; NTHI, ch. 2 (finally, we come to ch. 2!).
Recitation Fourteen: Who Cares?

My New Testament Pop Quiz
Looking Ahead to 2014 on the Blog