Spring 2018

**LOST GOSPELS**

**RE 330 D Prof. G.** **Spinner**

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Wed1:00-2:00, *or by appt.*

***Course Description***

A critical survey of a controversial topic: by examining ancient texts left out of the New Testament - - including gospels linked to Mary Magdalene, ‘doubting’ Thomas, and even Judas -- we explore the origins of Christianity. ‘Orthodox’ Christians came to define themselves over and against other types (Ebionite, Marcionite, Gnostic) of Christians whose sacred writings were actively excluded from the New Testament we have today. This is not only a matter of how the canon of scripture was authorized, for we must unpack interrelated topics, both theological (the nature of Jesus’ divinity) and social (the role of women in the Church). The debates that came to define Christian belief and practice invite careful inquiry into the connections between authorship, authority, and heresy. In learning this fascinating history, we encounter martyrs, miracle-workers, and end-time prophets, and read intriguing stories about Jesus’ childhood, the adventures of Paul, and Peter’s showdown with the magician, Simon Magus.

***Course Materials***

Bart Ehrman, *Lost Christianities: The Battle For Scripture And The Faiths We Never Knew.*

Bart Ehrman, *Lost Scriptures: Books that Did Not Make It Into the New Testament.*

[Karen L. King](http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/search-handle-url?%5Fencoding=UTF8&search-type=ss&index=books&field-author=Karen%20L.%20King). *The Gospel of Mary of Magdala: Jesus and the First Woman Apostle*.

Rudolphe Kasser, et al. *The Gospel of Judas*, revised edition.

[April D. DeConick](http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/search-handle-url?%5Fencoding=UTF8&search-type=ss&index=books&field-author=April%20D.%20Deconick) *The Thirteenth Apostle: What the Gospel of Judas Really Says,* revised ed.

If you would like your own copy of the canonical Bible, then the instructor recommends the *HarperCollins Study Bible*, which is also for sale through the Skidmore bookstore.

***Welcome to a Seminar***

The course will be conducted as a seminar, so that students are expected to take the lead and run the discussions. The term “seminar,” indicating a class focused on close readings and collaborative efforts, comes from the Latin *seminarium*, literally a “seed-plot,” a small area to plant ideas and watch them grow, the place where one nurtures intellectual habits of thought. Perhaps comparing academic development to gardening may seem quaint, but those familiar with gardening will recognize that the analogy demands serious commitment and critical rigor, just as gardening requires regular attention and honest labor. The seminar format means that you must engage each other, and not just the instructor. It means that it is *you* *who will be doing the talking*, by asking each other questions and working through the answers together.

#### Course Requirements

Your grade consists of the following components:

**Participation 7 %**

**Preparing Questions 7 %**

**Leading Discussion 16 %**

**Group Project 20 %**

**Midterm 25 %**

**Final 25 %**

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**Total 100 %**

A few words are in order, at the outset, about some of these components:

Attendance is mandatory: you will come to each and every class. If you are too sick to attend, or if an emergency arises, then please contact me as soon as possible.

While participation is contingent upon attendance, it involves much more than just showing up. **Participation** requires active engagement: you must have done the reading and be prepared to discuss it. You should have your own questions prepared, and you should be game for answering the questions that others pose. Our goal is sustained, focused conversation: it involves talking with and listening to others, rather than sitting quietly by (no matter how deep in thought you are). *Real education is not a spectator sport*. We are going to think through some difficult materials together, and I expect each and every one of you to have something to contribute. So you should have questions, you should have comments, and, above all, you should have curiosity.

**Preparing Questions**: for each class you should prepare a minimum of two questions, *along with your own (tentative) answers*, that you could ask the other students with the express purpose of facilitating classroom discussion. You are not trying to stump your classmates; rather you are trying to direct the conversation to some of the more salient points from the readings. Your questions should therefore be carefully chosen and thoughtfully worded. I will collect your questions at the end of each class session, and will only accept them in class on the day they were due. While I won’t be assigning grades (or returning them), I will be looking over your questions to see what you have been thinking about and to assess your level of engagement.

**Leading discussion**: While each class is a collaborative effort, as everyone comes prepared with questions and answers, you will also sign up for date to actively lead the discussion. Your task is *not* to lecture, but to facilitate discussion, calling upon your fellow students and directing the conversation. You may experiment with the format of the class (breaking up into smaller groups, giving quizzes, role playing) so long as you clear your tactic ahead of time with the instructor. For this assignment, you will be evaluated on the basis of how well the topic of the day was covered and how engaged were your fellow students.

**Exams** will be take-home essays, and must be submitted in hard-copy form. Closer to the time of the first assignment, I will spell out my expectations as to what makes for a good essay.

*Late work will be marked down*. I will deduct half a letter grade for each day any assignment is late. While due dates are firm, the instructor is not inflexible. It is, however, incumbent on you to explain to me why you deserve an extension. And here’s some good advice: *one asks for an extension* before *a deadline is missed*.

**Group projects** are creative and collaborative endeavors. Combining intellectual rigor with elements of fiction or fantasy, they split the difference between work and fun, and provide you with another way to synthesize what you have learned in this course. As they are scheduled for the end of the semester, I will assign the groups and outline the project later on.

Do note that this is a 4 credit hour class, and thus my expectations for your time and effort, both inside and outside of the classroom, are set accordingly.

So, here’s the tally: you have to come to class, you have to do *all* of the readings, you have to consistently participate in class, and even lead a class session. You should turn your work in on time, and you should ‘play well’ with others. You have to make this effort, or else it is not really worth your taking the class, even aside from getting an ugly grade. Clearly I expect you to work - - but it is also my hope that we will have quite a bit of fun doing so.

***On Reading***

Reading is a deceptively simple act, often identified with simple literacy and presumed to be entirely passive. Yet in order for you to retain what you read and to respond to it critically, you will need to cultivate the habits of an *active reader*, and play a more aggressive role when reading. I suggest that you take notes while reading, utilizing a dictionary if necessary, and even compiling key terms into your own glossary.

There are two basic components in good reading skills: comprehension and critique.

i.) *Comprehension* measures how well the reader understands the information being imparted and the opinions being expressed. To test your own comprehension of any reading, you may ask yourself the following questions: what new terms (foreign words, or new English terminology) did I encounter? Do I have a basic command of the historical data contained in the reading? What evidence is provided? (Pay attention to what types of sources are cited: are they primary or secondary?) Is there a main thesis to the reading? What is being argued for or argued against, either implicitly or explicitly, i.e., what point of view is the author articulating?

ii.) *Critique* describes how well the reader can engage a text -- not only in terms of what it says, but what it leaves unsaid or might fail to discuss. To test your own powers of critique, you may ask yourself the following questions: do I agree or disagree with what is being said? *Why?* What should we focus our class discussion on, i.e. what in the text merited the greatest attention and further comment? What was left out yet should have been included, or which we should be sure to bring up?

# *On Writing*

Writing helps us formulate ideas, in that it compels us to express ourselves as clearly and concisely as possible. Forego fancy words and convoluted constructions and tell us what you have to say in a straightforward manner. As stated above, I will have more to say about effective writing when the midterm approaches.

***Fair Grading & A Reasonable Workload***

As the above sections makes quite clear, I expect you to work. I think the workload is entirely appropriate for this level of course; and I trust that we can have some fun working through it together. But, in the interest of fairness, allow me to be more explicit about what my expectations are, and the standards to which I will hold you.

For each hour spent in class, I expect you to spend 3 hours outside of class reading and writing. This means that you should commit *approximately* ***12 hours*** *per week* in preparing and executing assignments. This is a reading intensive course, and there is no way to understand the subject and to fully participate in class if you skip, or skimp, on this most fundamental of labors.

In an era of grade inflation, let me address my understanding of what letter grades signify. I take “C” to be the baseline grade: it is *acceptable*. Thus doing all the assigned work, and doing it adequately, earns one a solid “C.” “B” then stands for doing *better than acceptable*, demonstrating some measurable improvement over “C” quality. And “A” translates to *excellent - -* a superlative I do not dispense lightly. I am not interested in employing mathematical models, such as by grading on a curve; I will happily give as many “A”s as I have students earning them. But do understand that such a high grade must be achieved through diligent effort, and can not merely be assumed.

I do not just attach a grade to your written work, but provide you with feedback on your writing. I make this effort in order to help you improve your writing skills, and so it behooves you to attend to that critique, and learn from your mistakes. While not my primary concern, errors in spellings, punctuation, and grammar detract from your writing, and thus impact your grade. The overarching goal, however, is more focused on content, so that you learn to express your ideas clearly and to build convincing arguments through a careful use of evidence. This pedagogical concern is shared across disciplines, and this course contributes to that ongoing effort.

With this goal in mind, you will have the option to rewrite certain papers. If you receive a B- or lower on a major paper, such as a midterm, then you may exercise that option. (This option does not apply to shorter, reflection papers, and, due to time constraints, to finals). If I hand you back a paper with a grade of B- or lower, then you can chose to meet with me. We will discuss the shortcomings of the paper, and set a new deadline for the rewritten version. You will turn in the older version along with the newer, and receive the average of the two grades.

***Classroom Civility***

Do not be late, and do not be rude. I hope that we will engage each other in open and honest ways, but both our speech and our demeanor should reflect common courtesy for those around us. Inappropriate or disruptive behavior will promptly result in being asked to leave the class. Feel free to bring a beverage or snack, and, if you are so inclined, enough to share. I just ask that any eating and drinking not disrupt with our learning.

Please turn off cell phones and any other small electronic devices before you come to class. Take your headphones off, and stow anything that texts or beeps well out of sight. I will start the semester out by allowing the use of laptops, as some students prefer to take their notes this way, but I will promptly rescind this permission if I feel that people are paying more attention to their computer screen than to class. In short, anything that might provide a distraction to the user, to other students, or to the instructor will not be indulged.

***Academic Integrity***

I have a zero tolerance policy for any form of intellectual dishonesty. Make sure your work is entirely your own, and that you give credit to any ideas or formulations that originate with others. Plagiarism is a serious violation of academic integrity, whether fully intentional or not. Recall that Skidmore’s Honor Code does not accept ignorance or error as adequate defense for violations; on this, see <cms.skidmore.edu/writing\_guide/honor\_code.cfm>. Suspected infractions will be reported to the Dean of Studies to investigate.

***Student Disabilities***

I am happy to make reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. If you believe you will need it, then you must formally request academic accommodation from Meg Hegener, Coordinator for Students with Disabilities, and provide documentation verifying your disability. For further information, please call 580-8150, or stop by the office of Student Academic Services in Starbuck Center.

***Title IX***

Skidmore College faculty and staff are committed to supporting our students and upholding gender equity laws as outlined by Title IX. We consider sexual and gender-based misconduct to be one of the most serious violations of the values and standards of the College. Unwelcome sexual contact of any form is a violation of students’ personal integrity and their right to a safe environment and therefore violates Skidmore’s values. Sexual and gender-based misconduct is also prohibited by federal regulations.

If you choose to confide in a member of Skidmore’s faculty or staff regarding an issue of sexual or gender-based misconduct, that person is obligated to tell Skidmore’s Title IX Coordinator or Title IX Deputy Coordinator. That administrator will assist the student in connecting with all possible resources for support and reporting both on and off campus. Identities and details will be shared only with those who need to know to support the student and to address the situation through the college’s processes. If the student wishes to confide in a confidential resource, The Counseling Center Staff, Health Services, and Victim Advocates are all options available to the student. For further information, consult ://www.skidmore.edu/sgbm/ or contact Joel Aure, Title IX Coordinator, or Sarah Green, Deputy Coordinator.

***Partners in Learning***

To my mind, this syllabus establishes a kind of social contract, in which you and I agree to create a stimulating and supportive learning environment. I hope that at the core of this agreement we find a mutual interest in critical inquiry, a shared passion for learning, and a commitment to respect those with whom we disagree. Whether engaging the instructor or other students, I ask that you be civil, even as I will push you to be honest and open in your thinking.

I trust that with this syllabus I have made clear my expectations, and that if I have not, you will call me to account. I also ask that you make your own expectations clear to me, letting me know how we can best achieve that partnership in learning. I look forward to an exciting semester working together.

Dr. Spinner

**REL 330 / Lost Gospels**

**Class** **& Reading** **Schedule**

Jan 22. Introductions: syllabus, classmates, instructor. Video: **Banned from the Bible**.

Jan 24. **Canons: What’s In, What’s Not. But Why?** Reading 1.

Jan 29. **Gospels Lost, Gospels Found, Gospels Forged.**  Reading 2.

Jan 31. **Playing the Blame Game:** **Peter (&** **Pilate) Outside the Canon**. Reading 3.

Feb 5. **The Unusual ‘Romance’ of** **Paul & Thecla**. Reading 4.

Feb 7. **Paul & Thecla,** *continued*. Reading 5.

Feb 12. **Getting in on the Acts: Thomas the Twin.** Reading 6.

Feb 14. **Getting in on the Acts,** *continued*: **John the Beloved Disciple**. Reading 7.

Feb 19. **Speaking to Christians, Speaking to the Cross.** Reading 8.

Feb 21. **Secret Sayings of Jesus: The Coptic Gospel of Thomas**. Reading 9.

Feb 26.  **Secret Sayings of Jesus,** *continued.* Reading 10.

Feb 28. **Sex, Lies & Manuscripts? Morton Smith & the Secret Gospel of Mark**.

Reading 11.

Mar 5. **Cherchez la Femme?** **Mary of Magdala.**  Reading 12.

Mar 7. **Mary of Magdala,** *continued.* Reading 13.

***Spring Break***

Mar 19. **Ebionites: Christians Yearning to be Jews**. Reading 14.

Mar 21. **Marcionites: Christians Spurning All Things Jewish**. Reading 15.

Mar 26. **Gnostics: Christians ‘In the Know.’**  Reading 16.

Mar 28. **Proto-Orthodoxy: On the Road to Nicaea**. Reading 17.

**Lost Gospels**

**Schedule**, *continued*

Apr 2. **Judas Iscariot: Hero or Villain?** Reading 18.

Apr 4. **Judas Iscariot,** *continued.* Reading 19.

Apr 9. **Constructing Tradition:** **Orthodoxy & Heresy**. Reading 20.

Apr 11. **Pre-quels: Proto- & Infancy Gospels.** Reading 21.

Apr 16. **Post-scripts: More Letters, Some Counter-Attacks,**

**& A Few Amendations.** Reading 22.

Apr 18.  **The Invention of Scripture.** Reading 23.

Apr 23. **Re-writing History:**  ***Presentation of Group Projects.***

Apr 25. **Winners, Losers & the Question of Tolerance.** Reading 24.

Apr 30. Concluding thoughts.

**REL 330 / LOST GOSPELS**

**Reading Assignments**

**LS** = *Lost Scriptures*

**H** = Handout

**Reading 1**. Ehrman, introductory sections (pp. 1-11).

**Reading 2.** Ehrman,begin ch. 1 (pp. 13 –mid 20). Gospel of Peter (LS 31-34).

**Reading 3**. Ehrman, finish ch. 1 (pp. 20 – 28). Apocalypse of Peter (LS 280-287).

**Reading 4**. Ehrman, begin ch. 2 (pp. 29-32). Acts of Paul (LS 109-112).

**Reading 5.** Ehrman, pp. 33-39. Acts of Thecla (LS 113-121).

**Reading 6.** Ehrman, pp. 39-41. Acts of Thomas (LS 122-134).

**Reading 7.** Ehrman, finish up ch. 2 (bottom p. 41-46). Acts of John (LS 93-108).

**Reading 8.** Ehrman, begin ch. 3 (pp. 47- 51). Didache (LS 211-217).

The Unknown Gospel (LS 29-30). Gospel of the Savior (LS 52 -56).

**Reading 9**. Ehrman, bottom p. 51- top 59. Coptic Gospel of Thomas (LS 19-28).

**Reading 10**. Ehrman, finish ch. 3 (pp. 59-65).

**Reading 11**. Ehrman, ch. 4 (pp. 67-89). Mk 4:11-12, 22, 33; cf. Mt 6:1-18.

Secret Gospel of Mark (LS 87-89). Carlson, The Gospel Hoax (H).

**Reading 12**. Ehrman, excerpt from Peter, Paul & Mary Magdalene (H).

King, all of Part I on text and trans (pp. 3-18).

**Reading 13.** King, *portions o*f Part II (pp. 37-38, 41-47, 49-mid 52, 69-75, and 83-90);

*and the entirety of* ch.14 (pp. 155-190).

**Reading 14**. Ehrman, pp. 91-103. Mt 5:17-20. Gospel of The Nazareans (LS 9-11).

Gospel of the Ebionites (LS 12-14). Gospel According to the Hebrews (LS 15-16).

**Reading 15.** Ehrman, pp. 103-112. On Marcion (H).

**Reading 16**. Ehrman, ch. 6 (pp. 113-134). Gospel of Truth (LS 45-51). Ptolemy’s Letter to

Flora (LS 201-206). Treatise on the Resurrection (LS 207-210).

**Reading 17.** Ehrman, ch. 7 (pp. 135 -157). 1 Clement: parts 1-11 and 42-47 (LS 167-172,

177-179). Epistle of Barnabas (LS 219-235). Shepherd of Hermas: *just the* fourth vision,

*and a* couple of parables (sections 22-24 and 52-53, LS 262-264, 271-272).

## REL 330 / LOST GOSPELS

**Reading Assignments,** *continued*

**Reading 18.** From Kasser et al.: Read *part of the* Introduction by Meyer (pp. 7-mid 16),

*the whole* English Translation (pp. 29-53), *the first part of* “Alternative Vision,” by Ehrman (pp.79-mid 89), *and all of* “Judas and the Gnostic Connection,”

by Meyer (pp. 125-154).

**Reading 19**. *Skim* pp. mid 16-23 in the National Geographic book, *and then compare with* DeConick’s Prefaces (pp. xvii-xxxii). In her The Thirteenth Apostle, *skim* ch 3 (pp. 49-66), read chs. 5 through 8 (pp. 100-171), *and finish with* ch. 10

(pp. 191-198).

**Reading 20**. Ehrman, pp. 159-202. Homilies of Clement: selections (LS 195-200).

Coptic Apocalypse of Peter (LS 78 -81). Second Treatise of Great Seth (LS 82-86).

**Reading 21**. Ehrman, begin ch. 10 (pp. 203- mid 210). Infancy Gospel of Thomas (LS 57-62).

Proto-Gospel of James (LS 63-72). Letters of Paul & Seneca (LS 160-164).

**Reading 22**. Ehrman, finish ch. 10 (pp. 210-mid 227). 3 Corinthians (LS 158 -159).

Acts of Peter (LS 135-154). Paul’s Letter to the Laodiceans (LS 165-166).

**Reading 23.**  Ehrman, pp. 229-246. Canonical Lists: Muratorian Fragment, Eusebius,

*and* Athanasius (LS 330-333, and 337-340).

**Reading 24.** Ehrman, pp. 247-257.