

LOST GOSPELS

RE 330-01

M/W 2:30-4:20

Classroom: Library 213

Prof. G. Spinner

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office hrs: Tu 1:30-2:30,

W 1:00-2:00, *or by appt.*

Course Description

A critical survey of an occasionally controversial topic: Modern scholarship has re-discovered ancient texts left out of the New Testament, including gospels linked to Mary, Thomas, and even Judas. Through a careful historical investigation of extra-canonical sources such as these, students can explore the very origins of the Christian faith itself, seeing how the early Church came to distinguish its doctrines from those of the Ebionites, the Marcionites, and the secret teachings of the Gnostics. In the course of this history we will meet martyrs, miracle-workers and end-time prophets, and we will read intriguing stories about Jesus' childhood, Paul's preaching and Peter's showdown with Simon Magus. However interesting these and similar sources are in their own right, they will also allow us insight into key topics (the role of women in early church, attitudes towards family and sex), and to interrogate the master narrative in which "heresy" is the deliberate corruption of some pristine "orthodoxy," and ultimately to raise fundamental issues about scripture and authority.

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, *The Gospel of Mary of Magdala: Jesus and the First Woman Apostle*.

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

April D. DeConick *The Thirteenth Apostle: What the Gospel of Judas Really Says*, revised ed.

Additional required readings made available as Course Reader. 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.

A Historical Approach

While we will certainly be discussing the theologies of ancient texts, our own approach to this topic is decidedly *not* theological. Our approach will be historical, situating these theologies in time and place. This is an approach that asks one to put aside preconceptions and prejudices in a concerted attempt to understand what these texts actually say, and to think carefully about how they relate to their larger contexts.

This then is not an exercise in deciding whose beliefs are legitimate, or whose practices are correct; it is not about sorting religious perspectives into “right” or “wrong.” Rather, our stated goal is a critical engagement with our sources and the issues that they raise; we can not simply condone nor automatically condemn what any given text says, but must think carefully about what it has to say, and ask why it argues as it does. After close reading and reasoned analysis, one can agree or disagree with a position; but one does not summarily dismiss that position out of hand. This is another way of saying that one should be critical, which is not the same thing as being judgmental: the study of history should not be dictated by personal likes or dislikes.

In considering why some texts were included in the New Testament while others were excluded, we are interested in the historical process of forming a Christian canon. As will quickly become apparent, canonization was a highly contested process, in which various theological positions (with their attendant social and political implications) were in competition. The extracanonical texts were, for the most part, penned by those who lost that competition. Indeed, the term “extracanonical” is by definition anachronistic, for presumably all of these texts were, at some point, included in somebody’s canon. By reviewing this wide range of texts, we will see that the diverse ways of talking about Christ reflects the many different ways there were of being Christian, unveiling a panoply of identities and attendant narratives that has been largely obscured in conventional depictions of the Church. For there was no original, unblemished orthodoxy from which the “heretics” willfully and maliciously departed; rather any theology that can be called “orthodox,” like the canon itself, took centuries to form, and was formed contradistinctively.

In sum: the extracanonical provides us with an alternative history and critical perspective on what became canonical, which in some ways is really the story of how Christianity came to be what it is. In tracing this story, we find that traditions, perhaps by their very nature, are far more complicated than they might appear on the surface. For any tradition does not speak with a single voice, unanimously proclaiming one message, but provides a whole chorus of competing truths and conflicting opinions. While our concerns are primarily historical, focused on how things came to be the way they are, occasionally historical inquiry leads us into the hypothetical, wondering about how things might have been different. The point of any such exercise is to rethink that which is taken for granted. As the study of history explicitly challenges the lazy assumption that the way things are is the way they always have been, so too it implicitly asks whether the way things are now is the way they must remain.

Course Requirements

Your grade consists of the following components:

Participation	10 %
Preparing Questions	10 %
Leading Discussion	20 %
Midterm	30 %
Final	30 %
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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 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. Over the course of the semester we will undertake a sustained and thoughtful discussion about our subject, and this will not be achieved through dispirited or half-hearted attempts.

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 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 it 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.*

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 one. You have to make that effort, or it's 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 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 a person to formulate ideas, in that one strives to express oneself clearly and concisely. Forego fancy words and convoluted constructions and tell us what you have to say in a straightforward manner. As stated above, when the midterm approaches I will have more to say about effective writing.

Classroom Civility

Don't be late, and don't 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 eating and drinking do not interfere with our learning.

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.

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 discover a mutual desire for increased understanding and a tolerance for respectful disagreement. Whether engaging the instructor or other students, I simply 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 expectations clear to me, and let me know how we can best achieve that partnership in learning. You may always ask questions; I will not mind if you ask me to repeat something or to clarify a point. Feel free to come by my office, or to contact me by e-mail or phone, in order to discuss any matters pertaining to the course.

I look forward to an exciting semester working together.

Dr. Spinner

REL 330 / **LOST GOSPELS**

Class & Reading Schedule

Please Note: you should have the assigned readings done **before** you come to the class for which they have been assigned.

- Sept 7. Introductions: syllabus, classmates, instructor.
- Sept 12. **Canons: What's In, What's Not. But Why?** Reading 1.
Video: Banned from the Bible.
- Sept 14. **Gospels Lost, Gospels Found, Gospels Forged?** Reading 2.
- Sept 19. **Playing the Blame Game: Peter (& Pilate) Outside the Canon.** Reading 3.
Sept 21. **The Unusual 'Romance' of Paul & Thecla.** Reading 4.
- Sept 26. **Paul & Thecla, *continued*.** Reading 5.
Sept 28. **Getting in on the Acts: Thomas the Twin.** Reading 6.
- Oct 3. **Getting in on the Acts, *continued*: John the Beloved Disciple.** Reading 7.
Oct 5. **Speaking to Christians, Speaking to the Cross.** Reading 8.
- Oct 10. **Secret Sayings of Jesus: The Coptic Gospel of Thomas.** Reading 9.
Oct 12. **Secret Sayings of Jesus, *continued*.** Reading 10.
- Oct 17. **Sex, Lies & Manuscripts? Morton Smith & the Secret Gospel of Mark.**
Reading 11.
- Oct 19. **Cherchez la Femme? Mary of Magdala.** Reading 12.
- Oct 24. **Mary of Magdala, *continued*.** Reading 13.
Oct 26. **Ebionites: Christians Wanting to be Jews.** Reading 14.
- Oct 31. **Marcionites: Christians Spurning All Things Jewish.** Reading 15.
Nov 2. **Gnostics: Christians 'In the Know.'** Reading 16.

LOST GOSPELS

Schedule, *continued*

Nov 7. **Proto-Orthodoxy: On the Road to Nicaea.** Reading 17.

Nov 9. **Judas Iscariot: Hero or Villain?** Reading 18.

Nov 14. **Judas Iscariot, *continued*.** Reading 19.

Nov 16. **Constructing Tradition: Orthodoxy & Heresy.** Reading 20.

Nov 21. *No class:* Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion.

Nov 23: *No class:* Thanksgiving Break. *Enjoy your break.*

Nov 28. **Pre-quals: Proto- & Infancy Gospels.** Reading 21.

Nov 30. **Post-scripts: More Letters, Some Counter-Attacks & A Few Amendments.**
Reading 22.

Dec 5. **The Invention of Scripture.** Reading 23.

Dec 7. **Winners, Losers & the Question of Tolerance.** Reading 24.
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 of 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.: TBA.
- Reading 19.** Read as much of DeConick as much as possible, and note where she takes issue with Kasser et.al. More specific pagination: TBA.
- 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.